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DIVIDED COUNSELLORS. 29th September, 1937: Eden and Neville Chamberlain in anxious conversation after attending a Cabinet meeting

Anthony Eden, Neville Chamberlain and  
the Cabinet Quest for Italy, 1937 to February 1938

Dissertation in partial fulfillment of the degree of  
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## INTRODUCTION

(i)

Historians have not yet provided a detailed authenticated account of Anthony Eden's term as Foreign Secretary in the Chamberlain Cabinet and of his resignation.

Written in the immediate aftermath of Eden's resignation, the Chatham House account reflects the mixture of confusion and speculation manifested by contemporary spectators caught largely unaware, despite rumours, by an event supposedly significant but the precise nature of that significance elusive.<sup>1</sup> By the time Churchill's version appears, with the aid of hindsight after the holocaust, a rift based on clear-cut policy alternatives is discerned. On one side there is Chamberlain and his ageing sycophants bedazzled by a quest for 'peace in their time', conceived as a mission, therefore unthwartable and increasingly representing a position of weakness; on the other Eden, with harsher principles for dealing with truculent dictators, a martyr to a more resolute cause. The rift is therefore inevitable, and significant in the chronicling of the 'disastrous' policy of appeasement, because it centres on

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1. A. Toynbee (ed.) [with V.M. Boulter] for The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs 1937 Vol. 1, London 1938, p.337 (hereafter I.R.R.A. Survey).

I.R.R.A. Survey 1938, pp. 128-137.

different principles for the execution of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

Variations on what might be called the 'principles' line' appear in the later work of Rowse, Kenney, Mowat, George and Rock,<sup>3</sup> who also concur, with varying degrees of moral condemnation, in recognising a conspiracy element in the 'removal' of Eden. They make much of Chamberlain's use of informal 'backdoor' diplomacy.

At the extreme side of this group is the Kenney article, in which Chamberlain, the child of stupidity, is metamorphosed into the prince of darkness who 'as early as the Spring of 1936 [seems] to have reached a decision to secure for himself a dominant position in the formulation of British policy. Through a combination of chance and fanatical determination, his goal was achieved and was dramatically signalized two years later by the resignation of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden.'<sup>4</sup>

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2. Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm, London 1948, pp.187-201. Churchill wrote: '[when I got the news of Eden's resignation] I lay on my bed consumed by emotions of sorrow and fear. There seemed one strong, young figure standing up against long, dismal, drawling tides of drift and surrender, of wrong measurements and feeble impulses...now he was gone...I watched the daylight slowly creep in through the windows and saw before me in mental gaze the vision of Death.' p.201.
3. A.L. Rowse, All Souls and Appeasement, London 1961, pp. 37-75. Introduction to M. George, The Hollow Men, London 1967, pp.7-12.  
M.L. Kenney, 'The Role of the House of Commons in British Foreign Policy During the 1937-38 Session' in Norton Downs (ed.) Essays in Honour of Conyers Read Chicago 1955. p.138 ff. (Hereafter Kenney).  
C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, London 1955, pp.589-598.  
William Rock, Appeasement on Trial, Hamden, Conn. 1966, p.20-31. (Hereafter Rock).
4. Kenney, p.138.

Contrasting with this damning account is the view of the Chamberlain apologist, Mcleod. Reworking the Chamberlain diaries already fielded by Feiling, he shifts the perspective to highlight personality factors and to minimise policy differences. He presents an Eden reluctant to make his resentments known, a Chamberlain with an understandable tendency to take advantage of such a failing, a consequent build-up of pressure and belated assertion from the Foreign Secretary. He sees basic agreement over foreign policy in general and a softer stand on de jure recognition of Abyssinia on Eden's part than he is usually attributed.<sup>5</sup>

The revisions of Medlicott and Northedge<sup>6</sup>, while only skirting over the rift, follow a similar line, Medlicott maintaining that 'it is difficult to see in the breach...anything more than a difference of timing on the part of two very self-willed men who liked to play the game of politics by ear.'<sup>7</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor belongs to the 'principles' line' but is not sympathetic to Eden, seeing him as a man of big words and little action - in dealing with his cabinet colleagues as much

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5. Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, London 1946, pp. 320-342.

W. Mcleod, Neville Chamberlain, London p. 217.

6. W. Medlicott, Contemporary England, London 1967, p.372. (hereafter Medlicott, Contemporary).

British Foreign Policy since Versailles, London 1968, p.173. (Hereafter Medlicott, British).

7. Medlicott, British p.173.

as in 'making faces' at the dictators.<sup>8</sup> D.C. Watt follows a 'principles' line' as well but changes the emphases - what Medlicott would describe as problems of method and timing, in terms of consequence, can only be regarded as a direct conflict of policy - whether 'the price to be paid [for securing a cessation of Italy's anti-British policy] would be a once and for all payment or merely a first instalment of a purchase on the 'never never' system.'<sup>9</sup>

Factors of personality are also an ingredient in Watt's picture, particularly in a later account written after the publication of the Avon Memoirs.<sup>10</sup> A fair measure of stupidity is thrown in as well.<sup>11</sup>

Neville Thompson's recent account might be described as a synthesis of both the 'principles' and 'method and timing' lines, exacerbated by personality differences. This sensible mixture in, however, a much simplified account, makes the resignation neither inevitable nor manipulated, but 'pushed on both sides'.<sup>12</sup>

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8. A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945, Oxford 1965, p.420.
9. D.C. Watt, Personalities and Policies, London 1964, p.180.
10. Anthony Eden (Earl of Avon), Memoirs, II, Facing the Dictators, London 1962 (Hereafter Avon).
11. D.C. Watt, 'The Rise of a Revisionist School' in Wm. Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Appeasement of the Dictators; Crisis Diplomacy, New York 1970, p.133.
12. Neville Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers. Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930's, Oxford 1971 pp. 138-145.

The historiography of the Eden and Chamberlain rift is not vast. In many accounts it figures only as a second or third line contributing factor, or prologue, to a larger canvas overshadowed by Munich, and therefore is plotted in little detail. Problems of principles, timing, method and personality in different context and combination can lead to substantially the same conclusions which, however, are expressed in ways which make them appear significantly different.

The release of the Cabinet Papers and Conclusions may help to solve such problems if attention is focussed primarily on the statements of the principals and their perceptions of issues at stake. The confusion of contemporary and retrospective accounts can be expected to be reflected in confusion within the Cabinet itself. But no doubt the reliance on largely circumstantial evidence has been a contributing factor to the confusion of the Eden and Chamberlain historiography.

Accounts before Mowat rely entirely on circumstantial evidence. Mowat could only rely on the insubstantial contributions of Sir John Simon<sup>13</sup> and Sir Samuel Hoare,<sup>14</sup> the former having restricted himself to material already made public, the latter stating perversely that Eden's belated critical posture was based on an ideological preference in the Spanish War -

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13. Viscount Simon, Retrospect, London 1952.

14. Lord Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, London 1954 (Hereafter Hoare).

which perhaps reveals more about Hoare's ideological preferences. Some later contributions had the advantage of using the Avon Memoirs but only Gilbert's appeared after the release of official documentation. Gilbert, however, makes only one reference to the cabinet conclusions. It can be assumed that they did not form a major source for his chapter of synthesis. A new source available since 1970, the diaries of Oliver Harvey, Private Secretary to Anthony Eden, has not yet been fielded.<sup>15</sup>

Scholarly work based on the Cabinet Papers and Conclusions to date has centred on the lines of enquiry already in train with the conservative revisionist general accounts of British inter-war foreign policy - the relationship between rearmament, economic policy and the appeasement of Germany. The occasion for Eden's resignation, consideration of attitudes towards Italy, has always been, appropriately, a second stream event in the inter-war histories. This relative slighting of Italy 'in view of the ultimately more important and consequential appeasement of Germany'<sup>16</sup> seems likely to continue.

This dissertation, which uses official documentation and the Harvey diaries in addition to earlier sources, traces the attitudes of Anthony Eden to Italy throughout 1937, until his

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15. John Harvey (ed.), The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940, London 1970. (Hereafter Harvey).

16. Rock, p.37.

resignation in February 1938, and his position in this area relative to Chamberlain and, more generally, the Cabinet. It examines the Eden and Chamberlain rift within this context.

## (ii)

In 1935, lack of leadership in foreign policy under Sir John Simon<sup>17</sup> and a split in Cabinet opinion in the months prior to the Ethiopian War resulted in the Ethiopian problem being turned over to Anthony Eden, created Junior Minister without Portfolio in the mid-year Baldwin reshuffle. The resultant unwitting change of emphasis in policy was immediately recognised by Italy in her resort to bellicose 'open diplomacy'<sup>18</sup> aimed principally at Eden. The nick-named 'Minister for League of Nations Affairs' reputation rose proportionately to the prominence given to Ethiopia in response to the miscalculated Italian press attacks. Eden's popular identification with all the brightest hopes for a new international order bound the Baldwin Cabinet to his conception of the role of the League in foreign policy. The link between his growing political capital and Ethiopia led Eden, with the new Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare<sup>19</sup> to extra-diplomatic exertions to forestall the

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17. Till mid-1935 Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. From May 1937 Chancellor of the Exchequer.

18. This refers to speeches and articles with wide circulation intended for not only public consumption but also statesmen of the nations who are the subject of 'secret diplomacy' and 'closed diplomacy' - the normal diplomatic correspondence carried out by career-diplomats and principals. Diplomatic bargaining by open harassment or conviviality is a feature of diplomatic history in the 1930's, particularly favoured by fascist states.

19. Sir Samuel Hoare M.P. (later Lord Templewood) Foreign

impending Italian attack on Ethiopia. The dismissal of Hoare because of the unmasking of just such an exercise narrowed the possibilities for an efficacious middle way between a whole-hearted opposition to Mussolini and abandonment of Ethiopia. As Foreign Secretary in 1936 Eden's knight-errantry was discredited by the limited resistance of sanctions to Italy, the easy Italian victory, the unchallenged German occupation of the Rhineland,<sup>20</sup> the strategic withdrawal from sanctions

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Secretary for the second half of 1935. First Lord of the Admiralty in Baldwin's Cabinet 1936.

20. In the Rhineland Crisis Hitler repeated the tactic he had used in the reintroduction of conscription in March 1935, that of stealing a march on a British offer of a package deal. On February 14, 1936 Eden had recommended acceptance of reoccupation as part of a comprehensive settlement. To the Cabinet on March 9, 1936, he said that 'by re-occupying the Rhineland Hitler has deprived us of the possibility of making to him a concession which might otherwise have been a useful bargaining counter in our hands in the general negotiations with Germany which we had in contemplation to imitate.' Eden told the Cabinet that this was 'a heavy blow to the sanctity of treaties' but added that 'fortunately there are grounds for hope that they will not lead to war.' Cabinet objections, therefore, were only to the means of revision - change must be by peaceful means.

See W. Medlicott, Britain and Germany: The Search for a Settlement 1930-37. Creighton Lecture 1969. (Hereafter Medlicott Settlement).  
 J.B. Duroselle, 'The Spirit of Locarno: Illusions of Pactomania', Foreign Affairs July 1972, p.757.

following the 'midsummer madness' speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain,<sup>21</sup> the onset of the Spanish War and the appearance of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Late 1936 saw Eden trying to clarify foreign policy to restore British and Conservative prestige, championing League reform and offering strong words to the dictators.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Chamberlain told the 1900 Club: 'It is the very midsummer of madness...is it not apparent that the policy of sanctions involves, I do not say war, but the risk of war?' Baldwin disassociated the Government from Chamberlain's speech. Chamberlain apologised to Eden. In his diary Chamberlain recorded: 'I did it deliberately because I felt the party and the country needed a lead...I did not consult Anthony Eden because he would have been bound to beg me not to say what I proposed.'

Keith Middlemass and John Barnes, Baldwin: a biography London 1969, p.939. (Hereafter Baldwin).

22. Eden's major policy speech of late 1936 is worth examining because it was to quote it often in the Commons throughout 1937 as the basis of British foreign policy. He said 'the country must have strength if its ideals were to prevail in a rearming world; after rearmament its strength would never be used in a war of aggression or for any purpose inconsistent with the Covenant [of the League of Nations] or the Pact of Paris. They could, and if the occasion arose they would, be used in the defence of France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression, in accordance with our existing obligations and in the defence of Iraq and Egypt...there was no dispute about that, nor that Germany will be included in that guarantee if Germany were included in a treaty of that character. In addition, our armaments may be used in bringing help to a victim of aggression in any case where, in our judgement, it would be proper under the Provisions of the Covenant to do so. I use the word "may" deliberately since in such an instance there is no automatic obligation to take military action.' Royal Institute of International Affairs, Documents 1937 London 1938, p.34. (Hereafter Docs).  
 Medlicott, Contemporary, pp. 350-51 comments 1) this is a reminder that Chamberlain alone was not voicing hopes for a bargain with Hitler. 2) British obligations were great. 3) but 'the main significance lies...in Eden's insistence that the country had no automatic obligation under the Covenant to help a victim of aggression.'  
Avon, p.478 comments: 'this doctrine admittedly had its

(iii)

The attitudes of the British cabinet subsequent to being presented with the fait accompli of a conquered Abyssinia contain the same apparently contradictory impulses as in the response to the unfolding of that crisis. There was a tendency on the one hand not to regard Italy as a major power, with the corollary of not presenting a major threat to Britain, on the other a tendency to respond sensitively and conciliatorily to any discernible increase in the intensity of Italian anti-British 'open diplomacy'. The intermeshing of two likely irreconcilables is explained by cabinet perceptions of the circumstances under which an Italian assault was likely to take place and their understanding of the wider significance of such an attack for Britain's cautious defence planning.

The very confidence with which the cabinet concurred in seeing a measure of Italian economic and political instability, which in their eyes kept her out of the realms of major power status, encouraged a hangover of the 1935 fear of a 'mad dog' act. National self-immolation, in itself, contemplated in the context of single-handed war, could be confidentially dealt with but only at the expense of diverting defences from the perceived greater German menace. A 'mad dog' act might also activate German expansionism, either directed into the Italian

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limitations. There was no universal commitment but the possibility of action was not excluded anywhere.'

offensive or using an Italian distraction to make inroads into British interests elsewhere, either conceived narrowly or as altering the wider European power equation.

Neither Anthony Eden nor Neville Chamberlain <sup>was</sup> were free from these impulses. Both could, however, produce plans for dealing with the threat which tended to minimise its significance. Eden contemplated the unlikely possibility of independent action as an eventuality which could be guarded against by a show of strength and a dignified stand. Displays should be deterrant but not provocative, ostensibly leaving the way open for conciliation without humiliation, a stand coloured however by a certain distaste for Mussolini and scepticism of his assurances. That Eden could not contemplate effective counter offensive to clear Italian provocation severely compromised a personal stand which, though based on anti-Italian sentiment, could not translate such prejudice into policy.

Chamberlain's plan was to chip away conciliatorily at one end or the other of the Rome-Berlin Axis, imperative in view of cautious defence planning, with concentration on the greater menace, Germany, if and when possible. Collectively the cabinet majority zealously pursued Anglo-Italian reconciliation. The need rose and fell in direct relation to perceptions of the imminence of an Italian onslaught, and therefore in response to the varying tone of the Italian public and diplomatic stand, and the likelihood or otherwise of improved relations with Germany. Cabinet perceptions of which was the more desirable mate varied. Italy was regarded as the less important

but she was the more controversial because of the extremes of feeling towards her found in the cabinet.

1. THE PROBLEM OF DE JURE RECOGNITION AND 'THE PROBABILITY OF WAR WITH ITALY'

(i)

Did Britain have to face the possibility of war with Italy? Or was genuine Anglo-Italian reconciliation possible?

Following the Ethiopian affair Britain had to look to challenged assumptions of invulnerable Mediterranean naval and aerial strength.<sup>1</sup> Anglo-Italian estrangement continued and was complicated by Italian intervention in the Spanish War.<sup>2</sup> The Cabinet saw two alternatives: these were either 'Friendship with Italy or establishing ourselves in such military strength in the Mediterranean as would permanently deter Italy from embarking on war with us.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. British interests in the Mediterranean were both strategic and commercial. British naval forces and bases were a means of exerting diplomatic pressure; their effectiveness depended on the weakness and neutrality of surrounding countries.

See Wm. Laird Kleine-Alhbrandt, The Policy of Simmering A Study of British Foreign Policy during the Spanish Civil War, The Hague 1962, pp. 37-50 passim. (Hereafter Simmering).

2. Mussolini's Spanish adventure gave Britain additional reason to be pessimistic about her Mediterranean capabilities. From the beginning of the Spanish War Italy had virtually occupied Majorca and air bases were being constructed from Libya to the Dacedeconese, while Italian intervention for Franco amounted to active occupation of some Spanish areas. See I.R.R.A. Survey 1936, p.653, and below, Chapter Two.
3. Public Record Office (hereafter P.R.O.), Cabinet Reference 24/271 (hereafter Cab.) Committee of Imperial Defence Paper 1305-B (hereafter C.I.D.), in Cabinet Paper 248(37) (hereafter C.P.).

The Gentleman's Agreement of January 1937 was a still-born preliminary to effecting the first alternative. It was no more than an exchange of Anglo-Italian goodwill in the Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup> Beyond this a ~~defence~~ seemed to depend on Mussolini's sine qua non of a British lead on de jure recognition of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. The Cabinet wished to grant de jure recognition, but moral strictures prevented them from acting at the League of Nations at least without French support. Eden was personally opposed to de jure recognition.

The second alternative was inhibited by an informal assumption that Britain could not afford to risk war with Italy. The Cabinet was confident that Anglo-Italian relations would be eventually restored to their pre-1935 footing. However, there was some attempt to define a middle way between the alternatives. The Cabinet wanted a middle way in the short term while they awaited a settlement. Eden wanted it until Britain was in a position to challenge Italy. The resulting periodic 'displays of progress in rearmament' were limited to 'doing nothing which could arouse Italian suspicions or be construed as provocative.'<sup>5</sup>

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4. The Gentleman's Agreement included vague mutual assurances to respect relative interests and an undefined status quo in the Mediterranean; consideration of Spain was limited to an appended Italian assurance of no territorial ambitions in the Mediterranean.

See Simmering, as above 1.

5. P.R.O. Cab. 24/271, C.I.D. 1305-B in C.P. 248(37).

In these efforts to work out an effective Mediterranean diplomatic strategy, Eden initially welcomed Chamberlain's leadership. Eden did not define a position independent of the Prime Minister's general European strategy. Their similar, clearly hostile and sceptical, attitudes to Italy are evident beside a Cabinet exhibiting far less certitude. Chamberlain's attitude to Italy changed as new possibilities emerged for Anglo-Italian negotiation, some of which stemmed from his own personal initiative. Eden's attitude to Italy was unwavering.

But since the possibility of war with Italy could not be faced, the pursuit of reconciliation was the only course open to the Cabinet - in the absence of an effective middle way.

(ii)

What was at the root of Italy's hostility? Was she not interested in fuller co-operation?

Mussolini wanted to dominate the Mediterranean. He also liked 'to capitalize on the British passion for bargaining; by keeping his prices high he robbed without discouraging the customer.'<sup>6</sup> He promoted better relations with Britain while concurrently planning bolder action.

Mussolini demanded full public recognition for his Abyssinian conquest, de jure recognition with its implications of

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6. Simmering, p. 38.

Moral sanction for Italian action. The exclusion of Abyssinia from the League would in effect imply such recognition. Britain was the major League power and the former champion of sanctions. A British lead on de jure recognition was therefore necessary. Mussolini could keep the carrot of reconciliation dangling on the stick indefinitely by making de jure recognition the sine qua non for an Anglo-Italian settlement.

Eden was the virtually unfettered Foreign Secretary in the Baldwin Cabinet. Italy realised his importance. This was reflected in Italian press attacks on him personally.<sup>7</sup>

Britain already had granted de facto recognition for diplomatic purposes in November 1936 by reducing the status of the Embassy at Addis Ababa to a Consulate.<sup>8</sup>

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7. The intensity of Italian anti-British propaganda in late 1936, the defusion of which was the occasion for the Gentleman's Agreement, may not be unrelated to the thwarting of Mussolini's apparently genuine hopes for de jure recognition from the September 1936 League Assembly, hopes raised imprudently by the pro-Italian League Secretary-General, Avenol, following the July volte on sanctions.

See James Barros, Betrayal From Within, Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General of the League of Nations 1933-40. London 1969, p.140. (Hereafter Barros).

8. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.P. 210(37).

Pressure on Eden to give the British lead on de jure recognition had been mounting in late 1936 and early 1937.<sup>9</sup> Eden did not believe this would end Italian provocation. He rightly saw the key to estrangement in Italian Mediterranean power aspirations which were 'virtually irreconcilable' with British interests.<sup>10</sup> His personal antipathy for Italy had been deepened by the Ethiopian War and was reinforced by continuing Italian propaganda attacks on Britain. He 'regretted the lost opportunity to pull him [Mussolini] up over sanctions.'<sup>11</sup> He was 'convinced of the fundamental weakness of Italy.' Britain 'must not run after her.'<sup>12</sup> Italy was economically unsound, Britain should 'keep her lean by refusing credit facilities.'<sup>13</sup> The anticipated further British League and personal discrediting were important factors in his opposition. The final stab in the back of Abyssinia made the prospect additionally distasteful. This unpalatability was highlighted by the Addis Ababa Massacre, the coronation fracas and

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9. From Avenol, and Vansittart in the Foreign Office. Harvey, p.16.

10. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.I.D. 1332-B.

11. Harvey, p.28.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Harvey, p.26.

the consequent boycott of British news in Italy.<sup>14</sup> However, by at least March 1937, though he 'hated the business',<sup>15</sup> Eden had admitted that Abyssinian exclusion would be an expression of the realities of the situation; but that Britain could not afford to take the lead.<sup>16</sup> The condition in effect indefinitely cancelled out the possibility of getting the objective. A British lead was essential and therefore inevitable. Cabinet hopes for a plan to sweeten the bitter pill enough to tempt French support were attractive but elusive.

Eden waited upon a possible decision at the May League Assembly by the Credentials Committee.<sup>17</sup> In the absence of Abyssinian representation in May the Committee could do nothing. Eden found the French and Dominions representatives predictably opposed to the matter being raised by member initiative in the Assembly. Poland did raise it but did not get a response even

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14. I.R.R.A. Survey 1937 (1) p.325.  
P.R.O. Cab. 23/88 13(37)4.

15. Harvey, p.25.

16. Ibid.

17. If Abyssinian representatives presented their credentials to the League and were refused readmittance by the Credentials Committee, then the problem would be conveniently solved.

from the States which had not taken part in sanctions. Reporting back to the Cabinet Eden rightly maintained that 'only a strong British lead could have obtained the desired result and he had not had authority to take such a lead.' Chamberlain, presiding over one of his first Cabinet meetings 'regretted that proceedings had taken that turn, but agreed that in the circumstances the Foreign Secretary had had no alternative but to take the course he did.'<sup>18</sup>

The May League Assembly had slipped by without bringing de jure recognition any closer. Mussolini gathered his diplomatic wiles for a fresh onslaught for the September Assembly.

(iii)

Chamberlain replaced Baldwin as Prime Minister in May. Eden welcomed the change. Retrospectively he wrote that 'before Chamberlain became Prime Minister I think it would be true to say that he and I were closer to each other than any other member of government, exchanging opinions on many Cabinet matters without disagreement.'<sup>19</sup> He claimed that he expressed delight at Chamberlain's 'I know you won't mind if I take more interest in foreign affairs than S.B.'<sup>20</sup> The retrospect/account does not give the full measure of his initial enthusiasm.

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18. P.R.O. Cab. 23/88 23(37)2; Barros, p.143.

19. Avon, p.501.

20. Ibid.

Harvey recorded that 'A.E. thought Chamberlain had the makings of a really great Prime Minister if only his health held out.'<sup>21</sup>  
 'Neville Chamberlain would be much more aggressive to the Opposition on home affairs...but on foreign policy there was nothing to divide them.'<sup>22</sup>

Close collaboration in a difficult personnel matter sealed the bond at the time of the leadership transfer. Chamberlain agreed that Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs,<sup>23</sup> should be removed after a decent interval.<sup>24</sup>

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21. Harvey, p.34.

22. Harvey, p.27. Ironically, Chamberlain's periodic gout seemed only to add to his zeal in pursuit of his foreign policy objectives whereas Eden's periodic flu and 'dog-tiredness' may have undermined his effectiveness at times.

23. Sir Robert Vansittart (later Lord Vansittart),

24. Eden wanted him removed to heighten his control over the Foreign Office and thereby strengthen his position with a Cabinet inclined to detect both dual control and Vansittart dominance in Foreign Office memoranda.  
Harvey, p.44 cf. Ian Colvin, Vansittart, London 1962, p.148, and The Chamberlain Cabinet, London 1971, p.29.

Vansittart's case illustrates the myth of Foreign Office unanimity against the Cabinet. Vansittart's retrospective claims that he was consistently opposed to the British policy of satisfying German grievances within a general European settlement have been recently questioned. Research has revealed a Vansittart supporting the abrogation of the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty and Germany's right to introduce conscription. Certainly in 1935 and 1936 he favoured colonial concessions to Hitler.

See Medlicott, Settlement.

cf. Robert Rhodes James (ed.), Chips, The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, London 1967, p.115  
 (Hereafter Chips).

On Italy, Vansittart was generally, but not consistently, conciliatory.

A minor altercation over Chamberlain's suggestion for the appointment of a non-diplomat to a diplomatic post was smoothed over by his acquiescence in Eden's insistence on a career-diplomat.<sup>25</sup> Chamberlain's candidate reflected his wish to penetrate the diplomats of the Foreign Office to increase 'efficiency'; this was at the behest of his close advisors, Warren Fisher of the Treasury and Horace Wilson, Chief Industrial Officer.<sup>26</sup> To this end intrigue was already working not only with Eden but against him in Fisher's and Wilson's attempt to use Thomas, Eden's new Parliamentary Under-Secretary, as a Foreign Office watch-dog.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Harvey, p.44.

26. Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Under-Secretary at Treasury and Head of Civil Service.  
 Sir Horace Wilson, Chief Industrial Adviser to H.M. Government 1930-1939, seconded to Treasury for Service with the Prime Minister 1935.  
 Leopold Amery, My Political Life, Vol.III, London 1955, p.225: 'Baldwin, as Prime Minister, was content to assume that his colleagues were competently discharging their duties. Chamberlain soon showed them that he was not merely a chairman in Cabinet, but a general manager who wished to know what his departmental managers were doing, to discuss their problems with them and to keep them up to work.'  
 See below, Chapter 3.

27. Avon, pp. 504-05. Thomas refused the role and reported the plot to his superior. However, though not watchdog, Thomas proved to be an efficient go-between for Horace Wilson to and from the Foreign Office.

Policy appraisals followed the change of leadership and a minor Cabinet reshuffle. These centred on ways of dealing with the dictators. As Eden had expected, he found the Prime Minister's views closer to his own than were those of other prominent Cabinet members.

## (iv)

In the course of these appraisals, Eden was directed to present a memorandum on the probability of war with Italy. In February 1937 a new formula for defensive planning against Italy had been approved. It stated that 'Italy cannot be regarded as a reliable friend but in present circumstances need not be regarded as a probable enemy.' Therefore 'no very large expenditure should be incurred on increasing the defences of the Mediterranean and Red Sea ports but at the same time some steps should be taken to bring them up to date and increase efficiency.'<sup>28</sup>

Eden wanted this formula revised. In his memorandum he concluded from a survey of specific Italian hostile activities<sup>29</sup> that there was 'clear evidence of a definite ill-will in the whole trend of Italian foreign policy, in view of which it is necessary to consider in what circumstances it might impel the

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28. P.R.O. Cab. 23/88 C.I.D. 1332-B.

29. Ibid. Eden provided an assessment of possible mitigating circumstances, a commentary on his perceptions of the vacuity of Italian propaganda.

Italian government along a line of action leading to war with the United Kingdom.' Since he believed that the explanation for this ill-will was a Mediterranean power struggle, 'a position where policy control' in the Mediterranean lay in British hands was irreconcilable with 'present Italian aspirations towards expansionism.' There was therefore 'a powerful argument for resistance to illegitimate Italian pressure' in view of 'the discomforts and risks inevitable in such a state of affairs.' Accordingly he suggested that the formula 'Italy cannot be regarded as a reliable friend and must for an indefinite period be regarded as a probable enemy, especially if she can count on the goodwill and potential support of Germany, and if the United Kingdom were involved in difficulties elsewhere' should replace the January provisions.<sup>30</sup>

Eden's formula was rejected by the Committee of Imperial Defence<sup>31</sup>. Chamberlain provided a personal appraisal of the international situation which minimised the possibility of Italy initiating a war. He stated that ideally preparations should be made for simultaneously fighting Germany, Italy and Japan. This was impossible because of agreed cautious defence expenditure and French weakness. Therefore, he suggested, any fears over Italy, especially the more likely joint fascist action, could only be realistically allayed by concentrating

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30. P.R.O. Cab. 23/88 C.I.D. 1332-B.

31. This had replaced the Foreign Affairs Committee as the Cabinet sub-committee concerned with defence and foreign policy.

on the greater German menace. Germany should be simultaneously cultivated as friend and safeguarded against as enemy by centring defence expenditure on her.

Eden's wish to specifically place Italy on record as a probable enemy was opposed on the grounds of lack of precedent. His insistence that Italy be at least placed in the same category as Germany - in any case, he was informed, only informally by a process of exclusion recognised as a 'principle possible enemy' - prevailed to the extent of agreement that Italy be excluded from a 1933 list of completely friendly powers against which defensive measures need not be contemplated. A theoretical ban on defence expenditure aimed specifically at Italy was therefore lifted. But any immediate significance of this step, initiated by Chamberlain, was offset by endorsement of Chamberlain's plan for concentration on Germany and by retention of the February expenditure corollary.<sup>32</sup>

Eden's and Chamberlain's readings of the Italian situation were similar. Both thought single-handed war unlikely. Eden played up the cases for independent Italian action, either 'from despair' or from calculating on Germany to follow, a little more in the discussion of his memorandum than in the document itself; but this was no doubt in response to the

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32. P.R.O. Cab. 23/88 29(37)3.

minimisation of Italian menace per se by Chamberlain in relation to his estimation of the likely efficacy of his own German plan. But basically the two were in agreement. At the back of discussion lay Eden's occasional pleas for more haste in rearmament; but Eden failed to define the independent position implicit in the document itself. At least by default he was a party to Chamberlain's general strategy.

When the full Cabinet met to approve Chamberlain's plan, a letter from Drummond, the British ambassador in Rome, to Vansittart was tabled for discussion. Drummond thought that an Italian conviction that Britain was harbouring thoughts of revenge over the Abyssinian humiliation was being used by an increasingly unbalanced Mussolini to work up anti-British feeling to war pitch. He believed that the granting of de jure recognition was the only way out. Proposed Libyan reinforcements gave some substance to Drummond's hysterical note.<sup>33</sup>

Chamberlain's plan that 'the real counter to Italy's disquietening attitude was to get on better terms with Germany' was accepted without dissension, but further reports<sup>34</sup> reinforcing Drummond's case had produced enough unease in the Cabinet by early July to raise a question about advisability of a complete German orientation.

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33. Avon, pp. 448-449.  
P.R.O. Cab. 23/88 29(37)3.

34. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 30(37)3.  
Reports from Lampson, British Ambassador to Egypt,  
Graham, former Ambassador and Pound, Commander-in-Chief,  
in the Mediterranean.

Though both Eden and Chamberlain were predictably sceptical the majority of ministers took the Italian threat seriously. Fears of a 'mad dog' act were evoked. On the one hand the possibility of all three services mobilising to meet the threat was suggested, but Eden maintained that 'it would be advantageous' to relations if merely 'some sign' of 'our progress in rearmament' in the Mediterranean 'without being provocative' were displayed. On the other hand the sincerity of Italian fears was seriously entertained with the corollary of dissipating such fears with assurances of peaceful intent. Chamberlain testily reminded the Cabinet of the formula accepted at the last meeting. 'Very little could be done to improve relations with Italy.' 'He thought it had been generally understood that special steps in the Mediterranean were unnecessary' but as it was thought 'desirable to make some further display of strength' reconsideration by the Committee of Imperial Defence was in order. This was accepted.<sup>35</sup>

The response of the Cabinet to Drummond's letter hard on the acceptance of Chamberlain's plan and reinforcement of February Mediterranean formulae suggests a lack of clear attitudes to Italy and the Mediterranean in the body of ministers in the months of June and early July. Certainly the commonsense appraisals of the Prime Minister were comforting in conditions

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35. Cab. 23/89 31(37)6.

of tranquility where crisis was merely contemplated. They at least appeared more incisive than lengthy memoranda from the Foreign Office. Also formulae were only general planning operatives allowing for a certain flexibility of action. But either a confused or an automatic Cabinet participation in the construction of foreign policy formulae is evident; for Chamberlain had to remind the Cabinet of a relevant formula which had been accepted only at the last Cabinet meeting.

The emergence of apparently aggressive intentions from Italy at this point might seem to be ammunition for the case Eden had presented in his memorandum. But Eden's sceptical response to the supposed crisis is not inconsistent with his memorandum's plea for 'adequate preparations for resistance' since he also believed that Italy was fundamentally weak and that a 'mad dog' act was unlikely. A situation of earlier sceptical colleagues outplaying him on 'the probability of war with Italy', but with a significant shift of emphasis implicit in the serious response to the revenge 'paranoia' contained more elements for Eden's annoyance than amusement. The reference of the defence question back to the Committee of Imperial Defence in a situation he himself was not inclined to take seriously and the reappearance of de jure recognition in a form where the Cabinet might be inclined to ditch its scruples was disturbing.

(v)

The two simultaneously contemplated lines of action, conciliation by peaceful assurances and consideration of possible

retaliatory action at least kept options open; but with a hopeful emphasis on the first. This short term variation on the long term formula for Germany was reflected in the instructions given to Eden at the conclusion of the meeting. He was to make a statement in the Commons aimed at overcoming Italian fears of British vengefulness. Nevertheless his plans were endorsed for countering Italian anti-British 'propaganda' by the establishment of a British radio station at Cyprus to give retaliatory 'news' in the Near East, pending investigation of feasibility.<sup>36</sup>

On July 19th Eden made his friendly excursion into 'open diplomacy' in the Commons. Grandi, the Italian ambassador,<sup>37</sup> quickly responded in two ways. From Eden he requested an interview with Chamberlain to hand him a friendly message from Mussolini which had been awaiting just such a 'propitious' moment.<sup>38</sup>

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36. Ibid.

C.P. 185 (37) Eden: 'More positive steps should be taken than that of asking the Italians to desist. Without attempting to imitate the tone and method of Bari... essential...to ensure full and forcible presentation of the British view of events in a region of vital importance.' The Cabinet approved the appointment of a special officer to the News Department of the Foreign Office to deal with the matter and a Cabinet committee was set up to inquire into details for the Cyprus station. The plan eventually came to nothing. Yet Eden also tried to get B.B.C. coverage of Italian atrocities in Abyssinia watered down on the grounds that this was playing into Mussolini's hands, 'strengthening him at home, as over sanctions earlier'. Harvey, p.34.

37. Count Grandi, Italian ambassador, 1932-1939.

38. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.P. 210(37).

The picture should now be fitted to the frame of the Gentleman's Agreement. To Hore-Belisha, the new Minister of War,<sup>39</sup> he suggested joint disclosure of the nature of Mediterranean defences to overcome Italian fears of British war preparations. The Minister welcomed the initiative, expressing the Cabinet view that Italy was 'not so much directing her measures against us aggressively, but in genuine apprehension.' The Chiefs of Staff agreed.<sup>40</sup>

The two initiatives disturbed Eden. They might be calculated to limit British Mediterranean defences to their post-July 1936 low, to gain time to shore up Italian defences. For once Eden had the backing of Vansittart in his apprehensions. The two minuted Chamberlain at length on the proposed meeting, to some extent in response to Cabinet counter-pressure,<sup>41</sup> warning that 'while reciprocating advances we should be watchful in the extreme.'<sup>42</sup> Chamberlain was also sceptical. He thought Mussolini

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39. Formerly Minister of Transport in the Baldwin Cabinet.

40. R.J. Minney (ed.), The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha, London 1960, pp. 102-03.

The translation of this enthusiasm into action was dilatory. By September, the position was still that an exchange of military information 'had been examined by the Chiefs of Staff who are ready to entertain it within certain limits.' P.R.O. Cab. 24/271 C.I.D. 1305-B.

41. Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet, had accused Vansittart of a 'suspicious mind in the matter.'  
Avon, pp. 452-7.

42. Avon, p.451.

was simply going to once more protest his empty good intentions, 'no designs in the Mediterranean', 'nor on Spanish territory'; but he agreed to see Grandi anyway 'to find out whether there is any nigger in the woodpile.'<sup>43</sup>

The private meeting between the Prime Minister and the Italian ambassador took place on July 27th. Grandi did not submit a copy of Mussolini's letter but interspersed a translation with his own comments and explanations, lending colour to a hunch of Eden's that Grandi was being allowed to play the reconciliation game by ear.<sup>44</sup> In his report to the Foreign Office Chamberlain claimed to have 'dealt suitably' with Grandi's fears of British revenge and to have posed the necessary questions, especially about Libyan reinforcements, along the lines of diplomatic advice. Mussolini's desire for de jure recognition was central to the discussion, as anticipated by Drummond but strategically omitted from Grandi's preliminary hearing with Eden.<sup>45</sup> Chamberlain reported that he had replied that this would produce strong criticism in the country and 'could only be justified if H.M.G. could describe it as part of a great scheme of reconciliation which would remove suspicions and anxiety and lead to a restoration of confidence;<sup>46</sup> but he expressed readiness for

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43. Feiling, p.330.

44. Avon, pp. 452-3.

45. Ibid.

46. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.P. 210(37).

conversations and had written Mussolini a 'friendly note'.<sup>47</sup>

The reciprocating note was not a surprise.<sup>48</sup> However, Grandi's curious delivery and Chamberlain's precipitate reply without Foreign Office vetting were unusual and at least looked devious. Eden did not ask for an explanation, claiming retrospectively that he thought 'there was no deliberate intention to by-pass me as Foreign Secretary, but that it was merely a slip by a Prime Minister new to international affairs.'<sup>49</sup> This appears ingenuous.<sup>50</sup> Later, proportionately to Chamberlain's

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47. Ibid.

48. All standard accounts give the impression that it came out of the blue. But Harvey wrote on 25th July, two days before the meeting, that a personal letter 'if sent by the Prime Minister (which would be more normal as Mussolini is Prime Minister) would, I fear, revive the legend that you alone are intransigent.' Harvey, p.414. Therefore the idea had been tossed around, though of course Eden would expect to be consulted on the content.

49. Avon, p. 457.

50. Especially if set beside Chamberlain's strict observance of protocol on earlier occasions, for example, the Morgenthau letter. A message from Morgenthau, United States Secretary of Treasury, to Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, enquired what the United States could do in conjunction with Britain to avoid the danger of war. Eden and Chamberlain discussed the message, agreed on the importance of responding, the Foreign Office drafted a reply and Chamberlain signed it. See Harvey, p.17. Of course, Chamberlain's position as Prime Minister was different. But the incident reveals that he was not new to Foreign Office protocol.

shift of emphasis on Italy, the note became a source of resentment, pivotal to the opening of Anglo-Italian conversations, to which Eden would have appended conditions.<sup>51</sup>

It was a preliminary excursion into Prime Ministerial initiative, a first specific slight of Eden and the Foreign Office by Chamberlain. Chamberlain privately recorded that he 'did not show my note to the Foreign Secretary, for I had a feeling he would object to it.'<sup>52</sup>

At the end of July Eden went on holiday. Halifax was in temporary charge of the Foreign Office, a role habitually assigned to him in Eden's absence.<sup>53</sup> That there was no apparent tension over the Prime Minister's letter is shown by the unruffled contribution Eden made to the reconciliation preliminaries before his departure. At Chamberlain's request he emphasised the desirability of Italian 'open diplomacy' to reciprocate the July 19th assurances.<sup>54</sup> At the last discussion of foreign affairs before Eden's departure Chamberlain reminded the Cabinet 'of the exceptional pressure of work to which the Foreign Secretary had been subjected more or less continuously', paying 'tribute to the skill, patience and ability with which he had dealt with the situation',

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51. Harvey, p.48.

52. Feiling, p.320.

53. I.R.R.A. Survey 1937 (1), p.337.  
Halifax was performing the sort of function Eden theoretically had under Simon and Hoare in 1935.

54. Avon, p.454.

sentiments unanimously endorsed by the Cabinet.<sup>55</sup>

(vi)

On holiday Eden read in the newspapers of the friendly Italian reception to the personal note. Ciano<sup>56</sup> termed the correspondence a 'great stride forward'.<sup>57</sup> Reports of diplomatic progress, which was being personally supervised by Chamberlain, were forwarded to Eden. De jure recognition, as anticipated, was Italy's central desideratum. Italy was prepared to enter into negotiation in August but only if the Abyssinian problem was dealt with at Geneva in September.<sup>58</sup> The alternative she offered was at least another year of strained relations. Chamberlain hedged before the imperious demand, replying that this was a matter for the Foreign Secretary who unfortunately was absent.<sup>59</sup>

Eden's apprehensions over conversations were recorded in replies to letters from Vansittart and Halifax. Chamberlain, Halifax reported, felt that dictators were subject to moods and therefore it was imperative to catch Mussolini in his present pliant state of mind.<sup>60</sup> The instant superficial

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55. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 32(37)6.

56. Count Ciano, Italian Foreign Minister and Mussolini's son-in-law.

57. The Times, August 7, 1937.

58. Eden, p.454.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

efficacy of his devious initiative had whetted Chamberlain's diplomatic appetite. He had found enough substance in Mussolini's friendly overtures to hope for an 'Italian change of heart and attitude.'<sup>61</sup> Vansittart reported that the jubilant press reception<sup>62</sup> to the proposed conversations was due to hints dropped from the Cabinet.<sup>63</sup> Eden reflected that 'the Italian government had skilfully committed us to conversations before we had decided what was to be their content or how much we wanted them.'<sup>64</sup> The 'we' no doubt illustrates Eden's identification with a small group of sympathetic immediate colleagues in the Foreign Office; it was clear that his Cabinet colleagues did want conversations. Eden reported to Halifax that he could not approve de jure recognition, emphasising cooperation with France and suggesting a Mediterranean Pact as an alternative to pursuing a bilateral detente.<sup>65</sup>

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61. Cab. 23/89 34(37)8.

62. The Times had termed it 'a turning point'. The Times, August 3rd, 1937.

63. Vansittart was not above such tactics himself. By March 1937 Eden had discovered that it was Vansittart and not the then Foreign Secretary Simon, who had issued a statement to newspapers that Eden had no authority to negotiate on his February 1934 state visit to Berlin.  
Harvey, p.32.

64. Avon, p.454.

65. Avon, p.457.

So, by mid-August Anglo-Italian conversations seemed imminent, largely due to Chamberlain's personal exertion, as he retracted from scepticism for Italian assurances, and despite Eden's clear opposition. For the Cabinet and Chamberlain the problem of granting de jure recognition was apparently the only obstacle to be removed before reconciliation was possible.

(vii)

The problem of Mediterranean defence formulae had been settled immediately prior to Chamberlain's note to Mussolini. On July 23rd in the course of the Committee of Imperial Defence reconsideration of the Prime Minister's European plan, Chamberlain transformed Eden's non-provocative proviso into the formula 'doing nothing that could arouse Italian suspicions or be construed as provocative.' On July 28th the Chiefs of Staff presented their plans for dealing with the contemplated unilateral war that did not eventuate.<sup>66</sup>

However, bold action immediately followed Mussolini's steps towards reconciliation in an August upstep of submarine and aerial attacks on Mediterranean shipping. Eden and Chamberlain prevailed over some reluctant ministers in a

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66. P.R.O. Cab. 24/271 C.P. 208(37) 213(37).

decision to reinforce Mediterranean destroyer strength.<sup>67</sup>  
 But the immediate reinforcements were only temporary urgent stop-gap measures to protect British interests.

Throughout the rest of 1937 Cabinet focus periodically reverted to 'establishing...such military strength in the Mediterranean as would permanently deter Italy' but the occasional reinforcements remained within the limits of Chamberlain's conditions of late July. The middle-way formula became a Cabinet commonplace.<sup>68</sup>

Since the Cabinet could not face the cost of Mediterranean strength both in terms of defence expenditure and Italian animosity, the alternative of 'establishing friendly relations with Italy', conditioned by the granting of de jure recognition, became imperative.

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67. P.R.O. Cab. 24/271 C.I.D. 1305-B.

68. c.f. E.M. Robertson, 'Introduction, World War II, the Historians and their Materials' in Origins of World War Two, Macmillan 1971, and I.S.O. Playfair et al The Mediterranean and the Middle East, Vol. 1, London, 1954.

The assumption here that every attempt to detach Italy from the Axis after July 1937 was consciously accompanied by Mediterranean reinforcements is not founded on official documentation. If this is the case, then it is coincidental.

## 2. SPAIN AND FRENCH INITIATIVES

(i)

Was it necessary for Britain to challenge Italian intervention in the Spanish War?

There was no alternative - if the Cabinet were to realise their desire for an Anglo-Italian settlement which would genuinely contribute to the pacification of Europe. But since the Cabinet were confident that Anglo-Italian reconciliation was possible, the challenge was seen as undesirable, and unnecessary, provocation. A challenge to Italian intervention in Spain at the least would lead to unwanted further Anglo-Italian estrangement - and it might lead to the war that could not be contemplated. Even Eden, who ideally longed for some offensive and who did not share the Cabinet's hopes for Anglo-Italian reconciliation, shrank from the direct challenge - because he feared war.

The Cabinet, therefore, were prepared to tolerate Mussolini's Spanish adventure. While they did not escape the ideological furore that the war provoked,<sup>1</sup> they were generally comfortable

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1. In early 1937 Eden had suggested the use of the navy to supervise and control the approaches to every port in Spain. Hoare disliked the plan because he thought Britain was getting to the point where she was 'trying to stop General Franco from winning'. Some other Cabinet members were also 'very anxious that the Soviets should not win.' The idea was ditched on technical grounds. Middlemass and Barnes, p.1023 c.f. Avon, pp.435-6. Harvey, p.40, in his entry for April 1, 1937, at the time of the Commons Debate over Bilbao, writes that 'Hoare put

in non-intervention. By March 1937, Eden was 'still convinced that non-intervention was the right policy and that the alternatives of intervention or warning off the Italians last summer [1936] would have created grave risks of war where no British interests were involved.'<sup>2</sup>

Non-intervention, however, did not mean indifference to British interests.<sup>3</sup> The response of the Cabinet to the August attacks in the Mediterranean had revealed that they would not tolerate any problems arising from the Spanish War that directly threatened British property.<sup>4</sup> The Nyon Conference demonstrated this even more effectively, although in the planning stages there were also hopes that it would be the occasion for the exhibition of Italian 'good faith' necessary to smooth the way to de jure recognition.

The Cabinet tried to separate Mediterranean and Spanish problems in their attempts at bi-lateral negotiation with Italy. Where possible Spain was banished to the London Non-Intervention

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his case badly in the...Commons last night and quite failed to disarm Opposition of their suspicions of his pro-Franco sentiments.' Eden publicly claimed to be indifferent to the nature of the victor but Harvey says that Eden personally favoured the Republicans. c.f. Hoare's view in Templewood, p.257.

2. Harvey, p.24.
3. R.I.I.A. Docs. 1937, p.49.
4. See 2 (iv).

Committee.<sup>5</sup> They had no ingenuous hope that the wranglings of the Committee<sup>6</sup> would be effective in ending Italian intervention. Rather they saw the role of the Committee as containing the war and maintaining an equilibrium of forces. To this end it was relatively successful; but any real querying of Mussolini's aid to Franco had to be by direct consultation - or confrontation.

The prospects for maintaining the separation of Mediterranean and Spanish problems, however, became increasingly slim. Whereas in early 1937 the Foreign Office 'doubted whether on a long view it made much difference which side won because we did not believe Spain would ever depart from traditional aloofness and neutrality, although, on the short view, Franco's victory would be a fillup to the dictators',<sup>7</sup> by September 'the hope

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5. In August 1936, on French initiative, a non-intervention agreement for the Spanish War had been signed by Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, France and other powers. The first meeting of the London Non-Intervention Committee followed in early September. By October violations by Germany, Italy and Russia, in contrast to strict enforcement by Britain and France, were obvious. On the origins of Non-Intervention, see D. Carlton, 'Eden, Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 3, pp. 40-55.
  6. The Committee spent its first three months in fruitless attempts to establish the responsibility for violations. They then turned to the subject which was to occupy its sessions for the duration of the war, the question of volunteers.
  7. Harvey, p.28.

that the victory of one side or the other would be purely Spanish' had wilted. 'With the duration of the civil war Franco's dependence on Italy had increased', Eden reported to the Cabinet, and therefore it 'was felt that after the civil war ended Franco would not be able to control the situation without Italian assistance.'<sup>8</sup>

The French government had similar fears. The Cabinet needed French support on de jure recognition at the League if they were to meet Mussolini's sine qua non for an Italian settlement. The French view was that 'in principle we understand all the advantages there are in not prolonging the current Ethiopian position at the League but on the other hand we find that the attitude taken by Italy on other questions does not permit the French government to take, or join, any initiative'.<sup>9</sup> The 'other questions' were predominantly Spain and intermittently propaganda.

Violent anti-French propaganda had consolidated since France's swing to the Left in 1936 and her consequent retraction from friendly overtures towards Italy. The propaganda was

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8. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.C. 35(37) 8, September 8.

9. P.R.O. Cab. 24/271 C.P. 208(37) App. I, early September.

'En principe nous comprenons tout l'interet qu'il ya a ne pas laisser se prolonger la position actuelle de l'Ethiopie a la Societe des Nations, mais d'un autre cote nous trouvons que l'attitude prise par l'Italie a propos d'autres questions ne permet au gouvernement francais de prendre, on de se joindre, a aucune imitation.'

linked with the ideological facade of Mussolini's Spanish intervention, a struggle against Bolshevism. However, although the sympathies of the heterogeneous coalition of the Popular Front were automatically directed to the Spanish Republicans, the dominant pacifism, absorption in domestic social change, fears of Germany and divisions in government ranks had kept these sympathies largely inactive. Further, the Socialist influence in the French government had considerably diminished by mid-1937.

Nevertheless, the deteriorating military situation of the Spanish Republicans by the late summer of 1937 was a spur to French action. But because of her weakness, France was dependent on British support. The French government acquiesced in the British desire to include Italy in the Nyon consultation and in Italy's absence cooperated in working for her inclusion in the Nyon patrols. However, the success of Nyon, continuing Italian hostility and the obvious dangers to the French border from Franco's successes<sup>10</sup> tempted the French government to either enforce non-intervention or, in the event of failure, suspend it - in collaboration with Britain.

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10. June 19, the capture of Bilbao; June 24, the recapture of Brunete; August 26, the surrender of Santander.

(ii)

In early September the French government suggested to the Cabinet conversations between the Mediterranean League countries at the coming Assembly on steps to protect Mediterranean shipping and air services, outside the Non-Intervention Committee. As Italy and Germany would not be able to participate because of their estrangement from the League, Eden suggested a meeting of signatories to a 1936 submarine protocol as an alternative.<sup>11</sup> A plan for a meeting of Mediterranean powers at Nyon<sup>12</sup> evolved from this initiative.<sup>13</sup>

Nyon's success in halting Mediterranean 'piracy'<sup>14</sup> tends to obscure the hopes invested in it by the Cabinet in the planning stages. Cabinet hopes for immediate Anglo-Italian reconciliation died hard but were less well founded than in July. Mussolini had made it clear that if de jure recognition were not given at the League in September, conversations must lapse for another year; but it would be impossible for Britain to take the initiative at the League because of subsequent Italian provocation in the Mediterranean - unless Italy gave some sign of good faith.

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11. P.R.O. Cab. 24/271 C.P. 208(37) September 8.

12. A town close to Geneva, chosen not to antagonise Italy and Germany in their estrangement from the League.

13. After an 'acrimonious dispute' with France. France wanted the Spanish Republican Government but not Italy. Britain wanted neither Spanish government and all Mediterranean powers including Italy. France agreed but insisted on Russia as well. Britain agreed, providing Germany was also asked. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 34(37) 3.

14. Attacks fell by about seventy percent and almost totally at first.

The possibility of making the Nyon Conference a showcase for Italian goodwill, from which de jure recognition with French cooperation would easily follow, was therefore attractive.<sup>15</sup>

Cabinet consideration of the preparations for Nyon coincided with diplomatic reports from Rome of renewed Italian hostility and the presentation by Eden of a memorandum, The Present Phase in Anglo-Italian Relations and the Question of the Final Recognition of Italian Sovereignty in Abyssinia.<sup>16</sup> Eden made his case that 'if formal recognition were to be accorded', it must be 'presented as a contribution to the general pacification and appeasement of Europe and not as a nefarious bargain by which Italy gained our assent to her wrong doing in return for material advantages to ourselves.'<sup>17</sup>

Chamberlain had new faith in Italy after the apparent success of his July letter. He was 'anxious that the good effect of the exchange of messages' should not be allowed to fade. He agreed with the Cabinet majority that 'a good deal of the Italian animus against this country was really inspired by fear'. 'A change of heart and attitude' from Italy was 'not too much to hope for.' He therefore suggested that the

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15. P.R.O. Cab. 13/89 C.C. 34(37) 8.

16. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.P. 210(37) September 2nd.

17. Ibid.

proposed Anglo-Italian settlement would genuinely contribute to 'the pacification and appeasement of Europe.' He thought that it would weaken the Rome-Berlin Axis and perhaps change Italy's attitude in the event of an Anglo-German dispute. In the long term he hoped that it might allow for a gradual reduction in defence expenditure.<sup>18</sup>

He supported a suggestion<sup>19</sup> that the British difficulties at Geneva and the possibilities of the Nyon Conference for breaking the Abyssinian deadlock should be explained to Mussolini by Perth.<sup>20</sup> The hope should be dangled before him that if Nyon were successful Britain 'would do our best to clear up the position' over Abyssinia. Chamberlain acknowledged that Eden 'found difficulty in going quite so far as he...would like to go but hoped that we should be able to do everything we possibly could to recover the better atmosphere of the early summer.'<sup>21</sup>

Eden expressed disapproval of such direct explanations to Italy. He claimed that they would be published and distorted into guarantees which the Cabinet was not in a position to make. In response to an exasperated comment<sup>22</sup> that surely 'it would not

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18. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.C. 34(37)8.

19. From Halifax.

20. Sir Eric Drummond, Ambassador to Italy, had become Lord Perth.

21. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.C. 34(37)8.

22. From Oliver Stanley.

be necessary to break off our relations with Italy on what was little more than a matter of procedure', he clearly spelt out his belief that Italy was 'unstable and untrustworthy' and therefore even if relations improved it could make little difference to defence planning. He directly confronted the Cabinet with the question: 'Assuming Signor Mussolini continued his present policy in the Mediterranean was it still suggested that our policy should be to turn Abyssinia out of the League?'<sup>23</sup> The reply<sup>24</sup> summed up the Cabinet's consistent position. 'The answer must be in the affirmative but...the implementation of that policy had become impossible.'<sup>25</sup>

However, Eden made no attempt to translate his different attitude towards Italy into obstruction of Chamberlain's and the Cabinet's plans, indeed he actively contributed to plans for Italy's absorption into the Nyon patrols even if she failed to attend the Conference. He suggested that she be kept informed of developments to allow for her acceptance of the conclusions without presenting her with a fait accompli.<sup>26</sup>

When Italy announced that she would not attend the Nyon Conference and that Mediterranean 'piracy' should be referred

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23. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.C. 34(37)8.

24. From Inskip.

25. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89. C.C. 34(37)8.

26. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.C. 34(37)8.

to the Non-Intervention Committee instead, Chamberlain had the alternative investigated.<sup>27</sup> But it came too late to alter conference plans.

Nyon was a success. Mediterranean attacks fell by seventy percent and almost totally at first. After a month Italy took her assigned role in the scheme of naval patrols that had been quickly drawn up in her absence. But the success of Nyon and Britain's failure to act on de jure recognition at the September League Assembly led Mussolini to withdraw from his friendly overtures of July and August. Chamberlain reverted to his earlier sceptical attitude towards an immediate Anglo-Italian settlement. On Eden's return from Nyon, Chamberlain warmly congratulated him on his success and confessed to being 'fed up' with the Italians and not at all disposed to run after them.<sup>28</sup>

If Eden's anti-Italian outbursts in Cabinet are set beside not only his failure to take an obstructionist position but also his active contributions to plans for Anglo-Italian reconciliation, the tensions are apparent in his quest for a middle-way between deadlock over Abyssinia and acquiescence in Italian demands. The translation of his anti-Italian sentiments into action was generally reduced to his taking a 'serious view' of Italy's

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27. Avon, p.464.

28. Harvey, p.47, Cab. 23/89 36(37)2.

particular transgression of the moment, in hostile open diplomacy. His impotence was the more evident after his momentary personal triumph at Nyon with its apparently efficacious, middle-way, resolute line. He therefore found tempting France's desire to transfer the momentum gained at Nyon to tackling the problem of preventing further Italian troop movements in Spain. The imminence of a rebel onslaught in Spain pushed by Italy and the Prime Minister's reversion to scepticism were additional spurs to temptation.

(iii)

In her post-Nyon meekness, Italy had given assurances that no more Italian troops would be sent to Spain.<sup>29</sup> But at Geneva in September both the French and British delegations received reports that Italy was about to dispatch large reinforcements. France suggested to Britain a joint representation to Italy to ask for an explanation. After consultation with Chamberlain, Eden was about to suggest that Britain act alone when Italy squashed the rumours. France then suggested a joint note to Italy proposing tripartite talks on non-intervention in general.

Reporting back to the Cabinet, Eden explained how he had 'felt bound to agree to the joint approach' in order 'to avert

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29. Avon, p.474.

the risk that they [France] might open the Spanish frontier.' However, 'he himself' felt tripartite talks 'the best plan'. He believed that 'if tripartite talks failed the opening of the...frontier' was 'inevitable'. Chamberlain confessed that he 'would have preferred...to conduct the negotiations alone'; but Britain 'could not afford to put too much strain on the French government'. He thought 'a favourable reply unlikely.'<sup>30</sup>

The Cabinet objected on two grounds. They agreed with Chamberlain that bi-lateral negotiation was preferable and suggested that tripartite talks moreover might be dangerous. Anglo-French cooperation at Nyon might have already strengthened the Rome-Berlin Axis. They predicted that further cooperation was bound to have that effect. Further, they disliked the new focus on Spain. They pointed out that the central question in the bi-lateral context was de jure recognition of Abyssinia. Spanish desiderata could only lead to further estrangement.<sup>31</sup>

Faced with Cabinet hostility, Chamberlain suggested that any possible damaging effects that a joint note might have on Anglo-Italian relations could be minimised by expressing it 'in such a way as to extend the talks that had been going on, on a basis of perfect equality.' In addition he thought that

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30. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 35(37)2.

31. Ibid.

Perth should be instructed to simultaneously present the tripartite talks to Ciano as a preliminary to bi-lateral negotiations. Perth should also secretly outline to him the 'accidental' circumstances of the joint commitment.<sup>32</sup>

In effect these suggestions would kill any possible success from an Anglo-French approach to Italy. Since both Chamberlain and the Cabinet saw such an approach as foredoomed, their suggestions were consistent with their stands. Eden, however, 'did not share all the views expressed as to the effect of Anglo-French joint action.' But despite the obvious implications of Perth's instructions, he made no objections to Chamberlain's plan.

Cabinet doubts over bringing Spain into the direct negotiation arena led Chamberlain to emphasise the importance of getting 'a start'. His post-Nyon cooling over an immediate detente with Italy and his closer cooperation with Eden were reflected in his guarantee that 'the Cabinet could feel assured that he and the Foreign Secretary would not let any opportunity slip for improving relations with Italy. He thought they realised, however, that it was impossible to separate the questions involved<sup>33</sup> from Signor Mussolini's attitude to Spain and the Mediterranean. He thought that the Foreign Secretary fully realised and shared the feelings of his colleagues and that

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32. Ibid.

33. Abyssinia.

the latter could endorse the Foreign Secretary's policy.<sup>34</sup>

Cabinet wishes for a friendly joint note prevailed over French hopes for a stronger line. When Italy delayed her reply Chamberlain became increasingly worried about Anglo-French cooperation. At the Foreign Office, however, Eden was anticipating the next line of action after the predicted negative Italian response. He believed that French intervention in Spain was inevitable; he toyed with the idea that Britain should herself sell arms. He decided that even if Mussolini accepted talks, provided they were within the Non-Intervention Committee, Britain and France should agree, but nevertheless open the frontier.<sup>35</sup>

Italy's tardy reply stiffly refused tripartite talks, demanded containment of Spanish questions within the Non-Intervention Committee, and stated that Germany must be included in any talks. Ciano made no response to Perth's secret suggestions.

Cabinet fears for a division of Europe into blocs were further coloured. Eden played vaguely with the idea of intervention. Chamberlain's fears over Anglo-French solidarity, already aroused by the Cabinet, were deepened.

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34. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 35(37)2.

35. Harvey, pp. 48-49.

France had expected characteristic Italian evasion, not clearcut refusal. Stung into action, she now secretly proposed to the Cabinet a joint statement on withdrawals from Spain and, if that failed, 'temporarily authorising the transit of arms through our own countries and from our own countries.'<sup>36</sup>

Eden found the idea of intervention increasingly daunting as it became imminent. Harvey observed his hand-wringing: 'He feels all the difficulties of allowing ourselves to be hoodwinked by Mussolini without any counteraction, and yet there is no effective counteraction...short of a direct challenge.' 'Any sort of ultimatum to Mussolini to withdraw his volunteers would amount to...anything approaching war.'<sup>37</sup>

The Cabinet unreservedly opposed the possibility of suspending non-intervention. The cries of the Italian apologists became shriller. The ideological preferences of some ministers

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36. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 C.P. 234(37), C.C. 37(37)3.

37. Harvey, p. 52-53.

were unmasked.<sup>38</sup> Eden backed up French data on Italian troop movements with his own 'particularly reliable source', castigated Italian intervention<sup>39</sup> and defended French motives. Some of the Cabinet were 'rather horrified' at the working for a breach implicit in presuppositions 'casting aspersions on Italian good faith.' Chamberlain took a middle position. While agreeing with Eden on the validity of withdrawal proposals in themselves,<sup>40</sup> he shared the Cabinet's views that the French approach 'was deplorable if the objective was to get the volunteers out.' He suggested that France should be encouraged to announce her withdrawal scheme but if Italy refused Britain should 'reserve her position.' However, 'the French government could not be expected to keep the frontier closed indefinitely.' Eden agreed that Britain should not commit herself and suggested an alternative to avert the opening of the frontier, 'a temporary occupation of Minorea

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38. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 37(37)3.

Ormsby-Gore claimed that France 'had indicated that [their] object was to get Great Britain and Russia together.'

Oliver Stanley claimed that the Cabinet was 'drifting near to a position of [saying] that General Franco must not be allowed to win.'

39. Italian intervention was of a 'different character' from others. There were 'Italian generals whose photographs could be seen in any cinema in Europe.'

40. P.R.O. Cab. 23/89 37(37)3.

with the French coupled with an offer of international neutralisation.'<sup>41</sup>

The Cabinet hearkened back to Anglo-Italian conversations. Chamberlain again pointed out that 'the question of Spain was so linked with Abyssinia that at the League we could not secure the preliminary move that was essential to the opening of conversations.' He again reassured his ministers that they 'could rely on the Foreign Secretary and himself to do everything possible.'<sup>42</sup>

Faced with British reserved action, France delayed opening the frontier. Eden 'agreed to be careful about Minorea so as not to give Mussolini any bad example.'<sup>43</sup> The problem of volunteers once again reverted to the Non-Intervention Committee. Italy accepted a new French plan and then retracted - dilatory tactics successful in deadlocking proceedings.<sup>44</sup>

Franco's anticipated onslaught was continually delayed. The French government in turn calmed down. By the end of 1937 the Spanish situation was stalemate, to the extent that each side had consolidated its defensive position. The Cabinet once again settled back into non-intervention.

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41. Harvey, p.51. Cab. 23/89 37(37)3.

42. Cab. 23/89 37(37)3.

43. Harvey, p.52-53.

44. 'The negotiations which continued in the Non-Intervention Committee until its end are long and drawn out, impossibly boring, and add nothing to what had been said already.' Kleine-Alhbrandt, p.84.

In late October Eden invited Ciano to Brussels for 'general discussions.' Mussolini refused. Vansittart 'begged' Eden to send a 'personal note' to Ciano. The apparent efficacy of personal notes had been demonstrated. Eden refused.<sup>45</sup> In November Italy announced that she had joined the Anti-Comintern Pact. Anglo-Italian conversations seemed remoter than ever.

(iv)

The Cabinet tended to disregard France's difficulties and to haughtily expect her cooperation on any British initiative. In the event of a reluctant partnership on a French plan, they might either demand such conditions as would transform it practically into a British plan or limit its effectiveness by compromising explanations.<sup>46</sup> The prep-

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45. On December 7, 1937 Italy officially withdrew from the League. Mussolini's sine qua non still held. The confirmation of the Abyssinian deadlock and Anglo-French estrangement could still only be averted by full British recognition of the Italian conquest in a bi-lateral context.

46. More widely, the Cabinet's attitudes to France were bound up with France's attitudes to Germany and Russia.

1) French unwillingness to accept that 'adjustments' in Eastern Europe should be allowed to take their 'natural' course.

2) France's fears of Germany and her diplomatic engagements in Eastern Europe to encircle Germany - a threat of dragging Britain into a war to maintain a status quo on which Britain was prepared to accept peaceful revision.

3) The very fact that France would have to be rescued if she got into trouble made the Cabinet suspicious of every French move.

arations for the Nyon Conference and the tone of the tripartite note are examples of the first tactic, Perth's private explanations to Ciano of the second. Eden hoped that the success of Nyon might represent a watershed in Anglo-Italian relations - a subsequent firmer stand by Britain, closer cooperation with France and ideally a challenge to Mussolini's Spanish adventure. However, whatever he may have personally contemplated in association with his closer colleagues at the Foreign Office, in Cabinet he was deferential as well as diffident. He cannot, therefore, be disassociated from any implications of the Cabinet's attitude to France because, 'whatever his personal feelings', he failed to define a position in decision making independent of his ministerial colleagues. After personally flirting with the French suggestion of intervention in Spain he had to revert to 'making faces' at Mussolini. Chamberlain after Nyon was in a middle position in Cabinet, showing some sympathy for France's problems, less interest in an immediate rapprochement with Italy, unease at the joint approach with France to Italy and apparent

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- 4) Prejudice engendered by the innumerable Cabinet crises of the Third Republic had resulted in the downgrading of French advice, though during the Spanish Civil War the French Foreign Office was quite stable. Delbos was almost continuously Foreign Secretary and the Quai d'Orsay was continuously headed by Alexis Leger.
  - 5) France's alliance with Russia and British fears of getting involved in an Anglo-French-Russian bloc against the generally more palatable Germany and Italy.

confidence in Eden's abilities. Both the unease over France and the assurances about Eden rose proportionately to the upstep in intensity of Cabinet anti-French feeling when they were further frustrated in their quest for a friendly Italy by Nyon's success, Spanish 'diversions' from their central worry, de jure recognition of Abyssinia, and displays of apparent Axis solidarity - and consequently, anti-Eden feeling.

## 3. INTRIGUE AND THE 'SOFTER LINE'

(i)

After reading the Avon Memoirs, D.C. Watt speculated that Eden's resignation might have been 'the product of a personal quarrel rather than one over policy.'<sup>1</sup> While no account of the Eden and Chamberlain rift makes quite such a case, it is customary to emphasise the differences of age,<sup>2</sup> personal<sup>3</sup> and professional<sup>4</sup> background, temperament<sup>5</sup> and interests.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Watt, Revisionist, p.133.

2. Eden was 41, Chamberlain 60.

3. Eden descended from the 'ruling houses' of Grey and Eden, Whig dynasties. Chamberlain was the younger son of Joseph, and half-brother of Austen.

4. Eden attended Sandroyd, Christ Church Oxford, gaining first-class honours in the Oriental Languages School. Eden had never served in any ministry except the Foreign Office. Campbell-Johnson, p.266.

Chamberlain was the Birmingham businessman 'sought by company after company to strengthen their boards by his long headed counsel.' George, p.189.

5. Chamberlain was dogmatic, partisan and 'grim'. Thompson, p.137-8.

Eden was sensitive, irritable, diffident, witty and urbane. "Eden lived on his nerves and was highly strung", K. Young, Sir Alec Douglas-Hume, p.49 (Hume was Chamberlain's secretary).

6. Eden was an Oriental and Proustian scholar, journalist, writer, traveller; indeed the dilettante and intellectual, when he got the time.

Chamberlain's interests were Beethoven, solitary walking, fishing, bird watching and 'civil duties'.

Cartoons can often sum up these divergences better than lengthy description. Chamberlain was a caricaturist's dream - a small, sour man with a big umbrella. Eden's only physical attribute which cartoonists could play up was his slightly bucked teeth. He had the regular good looks popular at the time - the 'Noel Coward of

Distinct Cabinet animosity towards Eden had dated from the preparations for Nyon. But intrigue of ministers and pressure on Eden by Chamberlain outside Cabinet meetings stepped up markedly after the Nyon success. All the essential elements for intrigue were operating from the time of the leadership transfer,<sup>7</sup> but there was an immediate reason for the post-Nyon upswing.

Although Eden cannot be disassociated from the conciliatory preparations for Nyon despite his strong anti-Italian bias, he was happy to bathe in the glory of his renewed popularity after the conference. The laurels went to the man who had apparently taught 'Muss' a lesson.<sup>8</sup> The upswing in Eden's personal political capital disturbed Chamberlain and some ministers. It was perhaps feared that a repetition

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Politics' (Charles Graves, quoted in Swinton [Coll. J.P. Margach], Sixty Years of Power (!)). In 1936 one newspaper did its best to send Eden to Hollywood, circulating rumours of a lucrative film contract. A big director had apparently discovered him and had sensed a great future for him as Clive Brook's double! Campbell-Johnson, p.129.

7. See 2 (3).
8. One prominent newspaper remarked: 'We seem to be back in the days of Baldwin when Eden was supreme minister of foreign affairs', adding darkly: 'As long as Eden is head of the Foreign Office we must be on our guard.' Campbell-Johnson, p.140.

of the 1935 situation was imminent, where Eden's importance as a rostrum asset coupled with his muted hints of resignation had committed the Cabinet publicly to his divergent 'idealist' viewpoint. Their fears were not unjustified.

## (ii)

Immediately after Nyon Chamberlain tried to stop Eden from addressing the Llandudno party rally. He argued that Eden was overworked and should not have to shoulder the additional burden of 'party hack'. This argument was not inconsistent with Eden's private complaints but Chamberlain's persistence in efforts as disuasion after the Foreign Secretary had made clear his delight at the opportunity and Chamberlain's intention to address a meeting on foreign policy three days before made his motives obviously suspect.<sup>9</sup>

Chamberlain was worried not only about the attention that Eden was getting but also by his recourse to hostile 'open

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9. Avon, p. 472, Harvey, p.47.

At Llandudno Eden said: 'I am as anxious as anybody to remove disagreements with Germany and Italy, or any other country, but we must make sure that in trying to improve the situation in one direction it does not deteriorate in another. In such an event our last state might be no better or even worse than our former....We are in a period of storm and challenge when the hope is openly avowed that the variety of international anxieties will prevent effective resistance to unlawful courses in one sphere. This is a dangerous doctrine. No nation will profit by its practice in the end. There will be a Nemesis.' Lloyd-George commented: 'First, what does he mean, and second, what do we do about it?'

diplomacy' not in line with majority Cabinet opinion. Eden had refined the tactic of pointed discrepancy in his public statements as Lord Privy Seal under Simon's Foreign Secretaryship in 1935. When denied Cabinet acceptance of his policies Eden had taken advantage of Simon's unpopularity in both Cabinet and country. Chamberlain feared the revival of Eden's defiant playing to the gallery. At the opening of Parliament in November, Chamberlain was unable to participate in the main foreign policy statement because of gout. Eden decided to take advantage of his absence to speak with 'a freedom I seldom used.' It is not clear if Chamberlain was aware of his resolution but in any case he sent a message to J.L.P. Thomas to request Eden 'not to say anything to upset the dictators.' Thomas did not deliver the message until after the speech.<sup>10</sup>

There were occasional tensions in the formulation of diplomatic correspondence. A more complex variation on the July letter occurred in late September. Eden and Vansittart had drafted a telegram to Washington on economic action in the Pacific. Chamberlain rewrote the last paragraph less enthusiastically. Eden did not see Chamberlain's final draft until after it had been sent. He promptly dispatched another telegram to impress his attitude.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Harvey, p.56; Avon, p.506.

11. Avon, p.534. Harvey, pp.48-49: 'Here again is a divergence between A.E. and P.M. as latter is strongly opposed to any sort of economic boycott in the Far East. A.E. on other hand would welcome joint initiative.' See below 5 (1).

A more openly aired divergence can be seen in Eden's occasional pleas for 'rearmament'. Eden wanted to be 'foreign secretary when the country was rearmed'. He dated this at 1940;<sup>12</sup> but his dispute with the Cabinet related to the place of rearmament rather than the degree. He emphasised the tardy execution of existing defence plans. On one occasion Chamberlain attributed Eden's pressure to his recurring flu. Harvey's account gives a consolitary epilogue and interprets Chamberlain's response as sincere.<sup>13</sup> Avon does not mention the incident.<sup>14</sup> Discussion was not always so fruitless. In an interview following the opening of Parliament Chamberlain, ignoring Eden's speech completely, complained that the Foreign Office never made a genuine effort 'to get on with the dictators.' Eden retorted that this was 'both useless and impossible without strong armament.' Chamberlain called a 'small meeting of ministers' to hear Eden's complaints. The result shows that Eden's viewpoint was not always totally ineffectual. A decision was made to purchase anti-aircraft guns abroad.<sup>15</sup>

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12. Harvey, p.32; Thomas Jones, p.371.

13. Harvey, p.63.

14. Avon, pp.489-501.

15. Harvey, p.58.

Eden, however, having gained an advantage, did not transform the occasional plea into an all-out assault on cautious defence planning. In Cabinet after the Halifax visit to Germany Eden casually remarked that 'progress with Germany might well depend on rearmament.' Chamberlain took him up, reminding him of the recent anti-aircraft guns decision: 'When the Foreign Secretary spoke of success depending on our rearmament programme, did he mean merely the completion of these programmes, or their intensification? The latter could not take place except by revoking the decision not to interfere with civil industry, which he assumed at the present time was out of the question.' Eden replied that he 'referred to the programmes rather generally, and had not mentioned the pace or degree of rearmament.'<sup>16</sup>

The muted tenor and the lack of candour in the expression of divergences suggest that Eden and Chamberlain were acutely conscious of their differences but that neither wished to work for an open breach while there were alternatives, however complicated and underhand.

(iii)

There were rumours of a rift after Nyon.<sup>17</sup> Thomas Jones

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16. P.R.O. Cab. 23/90 C.C. 45(37)5.

For the latest information on British rearmament in the thirties, see F. Loughlan 'Armament, Economic Policy and Appeasement. Background to British Foreign Policy, 1931-37' in *History, Autumn*, 1972.

17. Especially in the continental and American press. One

recorded some of these, but queried them because Chamberlain had been paying Eden compliments.<sup>18</sup> We have already noted Chamberlain's backing of Eden in increasingly acrimonious Cabinet disputes. There is, however, something of the tone of apologist and supervisor in Chamberlain's 'the Foreign Secretary and himself', 'he thought that the Foreign Secretary would agree' statements. Often Eden was ominously silent and then belatedly critical in Cabinet debates. Chamberlain's tone might be patronising but Eden could hardly afford to be seen openly disputing with Chamberlain in Cabinet meetings in view of majority Cabinet hostility. Eden preferred to write letters stating his cases, both before and after 'unsatisfactory' private interviews. On Chamberlain's part there may have been the hope that compliments and solidarity might lead to concessions.

Eden certainly thought that his concessions might 'put him in a stronger position for later.'<sup>19</sup> But in the case of the Halifax visit to Berlin this was largely a rationalisation after the event. Eden opposed the visit on the grounds that the proposed discussion basis was 'weak' and the nature of

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London correspondent cabled the New York Times that before leaving for the Brussels Conference Eden offered resignation.

18. Thomas Jones, p.369.

19. Harvey, p.60.

the invitation meant 'going to Canossa.'<sup>20</sup> The precipitancy of Chamberlain's and Halifax's preparations in Eden's absence at Brussels was calculated to stall his known opposition. Presented with the newspaper leakage,<sup>21</sup> the possibility of a fresh German grievance and guarantees on the informal nature

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20. Harvey, p. 59.

21. For the fascinating details of the press leakage, see Franklin Reid Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936-39, for example p. 130, this from the Manchester Guardian Archives: Voigt to Crozier, 17 November, 1937: 'It is generally assumed that Poliakoff (the journalist who got the news scoop) got his information from the Italians. But that is not so. He got it from a high ranking officer in the Foreign Office.'

Claud Cochburn in the scurrilous The Week used it as an occasion to invent the Chieden Set. Of Eden's part, he wrote: 'Mr Eden thereupon (i.e. on Monday, November 8th) resigned. Since nobody except the members of the Cabinet heard about it, it remained, like so many of Mr Eden's nervous gestures, "a political event without consequences." Nevertheless, he did resign, and the newspapers published the fact that he was reported to be "simply furious." Then he withdrew his resignation, and satisfied himself with the "conclusion" that Lord Halifax when he returns is to report to Mr Eden as Foreign Secretary first, instead of reporting to the Cabinet.'

Patricia Cochburn, The Years of the Week, London 1968, pp. 242-43.

of the proposed discussions, Eden retracted his opposition.<sup>22</sup>

Cabinet intrigue fed rumours of a breach. Hoare and Simon, the two discredited former Foreign Secretaries were the main intriguers, aided by Swinton.<sup>23</sup> In early November Hoare and Simon visited a prominent newspaper columnist separately to intimate that Eden's minor ill-health revealed the strain he was under and, unable to cope, he would soon have to go.<sup>24</sup> Intrigues like this were responsible for the rumours that Eden's flu after the Brussels Conference was an 'indisposition diplomatic in origin.'<sup>25</sup>

Smear campaigns usually contain an element of truth. It can be suggested that Eden's physical state limited his effectiveness. In 1935 Eden had had a heart attack.<sup>26</sup> In

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22. The Memoirs of Halifax and Eden give different impressions of the background to the visit. Halifax's view assigns to Eden an active role in its promotion. Eden's account rejects this. Harvey's account fills in the details, as above.
23. Harvey, p.61. 'Hoare had added that as time had shown that Hoare-Laval proposals had not been so wrong, he was now prepared to take F.O. again.'
24. Ibid.
25. Campbell-Johnson, p.142.
26. An aeroplane carrying Eden from Leipzig to Cologne had run into a tropical storm. Eden, already exhausted by the rush from capital to capital, the endless dispatches and receptions of his "international statesman" status broke down, had a heart attack, and was ordered to bed, thus missing the Stresa Conference.

April 1937 he had expressed his hankering for the life contemplative but 'resignation would be letting Chamberlain down with a bump.'<sup>27</sup> The administrative framework of the Foreign Office placed great pressure on the physical capacities of the men at the top<sup>28</sup> while by 1937 the additional burden of a Commons latterly more harassing to the knight-errant manque denied the Foreign Secretary his inclination to devote himself solely to diplomatic correspondence.<sup>29</sup> He was not aided in the House after May by the abrasive Chamberlain.<sup>30</sup> Public championship of personally distasteful policies, private bankruptcy of acceptable alternatives and harassment for apparent intransigence, despite ostensible deference, heightened the tension. The apparent moment of triumph at Nyon, however false, was important. The diplomatic failures of late 1937 were felt hard, especially the Brussels Conference, since Eden was heavily committed to selling the advantages of Anglo-American cooperation.<sup>31</sup> Both Harvey and Thomas Jones used the phrase 'dog-tired' to describe Eden at the beginning of the late 1937 parliamentary session. Photos taken at the time show an Eden thin and dejected.<sup>32</sup>

Chamberlain was aware of the intrigues. There is no

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27. Harvey, p.82.

28. See Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession, London, 1938 passim.

29. Harvey, p.32.

30. Thompson, p.139.

31. See below 5 (1).

32. Thomas Jones, p.371; Harvey, p.48.

evidence that he either tried to stop them or was a party to them. Horace Wilson assured J.L.P. Thomas that there was no question of personal jealousy or hostility on Chamberlain's part. Chamberlain, he claimed, was personally devoted to Eden, but genuinely thought him wrong and hoped to save him from error, eventually.<sup>33</sup> Harvey's assessment is similar. If this is an accurate view of Chamberlain's sentiments, then Eden privately was less generous, complaining of Chamberlain's age and fascination with dictators.<sup>34</sup> Any prospects for Chamberlain's retirement, however, were the less welcome because of the lack of a palatable alternative.<sup>35</sup>

## (iv)

McLeod, working from the Chamberlain diaries, has attributed to Eden a 'softer line' on de jure recognition of Abyssinia by late 1937. After the failure of Halifax's visit to Berlin the atmosphere between Eden and Chamberlain cleared up. Disappointments over Germany saw Chamberlain back on the Italian track again - and Eden concurred.

In late November the question of Anglo-Italian relations

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33. Harvey, p.61; Thompson, p.145.

34. Harvey, p.48. "Eden said 'au fond' Prime Minister had a certain sympathy with dictators whose efficiency appealed to him.' 'Sixty was too old for a Prime Minister.'

35. Except, of course, himself, see Harvey, p.32.

was again raised in the course of Anglo-French consultations. Eden and Chamberlain prevailed over French qualms. They agreed to add propaganda to the list of British desiderata. They placated France's wish to participate by undertaking to inform Italy that the proposals for conversations came as a result of Anglo-French consultations and that France must be brought in at 'an appropriate stage.' All agreed that de jure recognition could only be granted by a League decision. Chamberlain confessed that this was now impossible.<sup>36</sup>

Eden, although apparently pursuing Anglo-Italian conversations, at the same time persisted with his hostile 'open diplomacy'<sup>37</sup> and continued to hope for a further reversal of Mussolini's fortunes<sup>38</sup> which would bring the Cabinet to its senses. In the last Cabinet reference to Italy for 1937 he 'reported that the Foreign Office had received a number of reports from different sources giving an account of the internal difficulties in Germany and Italy. The Germans appeared to be very much aware of the Italian difficulties. The difficulties referred to were mainly of an economic and financial character. This was a factor to be borne in mind.'<sup>39</sup>

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36. P.R.O. Cab. 23/90 C.C. 45(37)5.

37. I.R.R.A. Docs. p.247 ff. November 1, 1937: December 20,

38. Harvey, p.67. 1937.

39. P.R.O. Cab. 23/90 C.C. 46(37)2.

This, however, largely acted as a spur to Cabinet fears of a 'mad dog' act, the Chiefs of Staff reporting that 'such a situation may contain elements of danger, since if the economic situation deteriorates much further Mussolini may prefer to gamble on the results of external adventure rather than face economic collapse.'<sup>40</sup> The need for the 'renewal' of conversations was seen as the more urgent for this. Mussolini's official withdrawal from the League was even more effective in activating the Italian apologists in the Cabinet.

On December 2nd, Eden reported the results of the Anglo-French consultations to Grandi. Grandi insisted on, and Eden acknowledged, the importance of de jure recognition.<sup>41</sup> After Christmas the tardy Italian reply to Eden's talks with Grandi impressed that if conversations were to start de jure recognition could not be left out.<sup>42</sup>

For Eden, it was a time for reappraisals. Chamberlain and Eden were now closer, the reconciliation marked by a number of wooing gestures. Eden persuaded Chamberlain to speak first in the Commons on Foreign Policy on December 22nd and expressed satisfaction at his efforts.<sup>43</sup> Ironically, the

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40. P.R.O. Cab. 23/90. C.P. 296(37).

41. Avon, p.474-5.

42. Harvey, p.67.

43. Harvey, p.66.

Italian press, with a new official policy of less unfriendliness towards Britain, used this occasion as an initial sally into the tactic of making a pointed discrimination between Eden's and Chamberlain's statements, contrasting the December 22nd speech with Eden's recent hostility.<sup>44</sup> On his part Chamberlain again broached the matter of Vansittart's removal, accepting Eden's proposed alternative, Cadogan.<sup>45</sup>

In an atmosphere of 'closer' agreement about foreign policy<sup>46</sup> and consequently a closer relationship as colleagues, Eden and Chamberlain were able to discuss the problem of de jure recognition less heatedly.

Eden attempted to see the Cabinet's point of view on Italy. Faced with Italian withdrawal from the League and renewed friendly intimations from Mussolini but an implacable stand on de jure recognition, Eden confessed to Harvey that he had to be careful not to let his personal prejudices colour his attitude. 'He regarded Muss as anti-Christ!' but 'we might be in danger of cutting off our nose to spite our face by too negative an attitude.'<sup>47</sup> He directed the Foreign Office to

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44. I.R.R.A. Survey 1937 (1), p.329.

45. Harvey, p.64.

46. Avon, p.547.

47. Macleod, pp. 211-212.

draw up lists of desiderata which could be demanded in return for de jure recognition in the event of a decision to go ahead independently of the League but in conjunction with the French. On December 31st two proposals were presented - either to give recognition in return for a 'hard bargain' or as a gesture, coupled with a joint Anglo-French declaration of solidarity in the Mediterranean and an invitation to Italy to negotiate.<sup>48</sup> Eden sent the proposals to Chamberlain - with his doubts about the expediency of both and his dislike of the first in 'setting high moral principles against material advantages.'<sup>49</sup> Chamberlain replied in a friendly letter. He explained that he thought that the first contained possibilities of general appeasement which would provide the justification for de jure recognition whereas the second would mean 'giving away our best trump card and we should draw on ourselves a condemnation more scathing than that aroused by the Hoare-Laval Pact.'<sup>50</sup>

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48. Harvey, p.65.

'We could never expect to get Mussolini to cooperate sincerely with us or in the League of Nations, whatever we gave him, as his whole system was hostile to ours...in such a situation it became a question of expediency, whether we really must buy Mussolini off or whether we could afford to let matters drift.'

49. Harvey, p.67; Macleod, pp. 211-212.

50. Macleod, p. 211-212.

Such an exchange was possible because of genuine attempts on both sides to work out a personal deadlock clearly rooted in different emphases in foreign policy towards Italy. Eden's concessions, however, had been the greater - he had attempted to come some way to meet the Prime Minister. But the divergence still stood in the friendly correspondence. Eden's case of September had not altered: 'if formal recognition was to be accorded' it must be 'presented as a contribution to the general pacification and appeasement of Europe.' Chamberlain, as in the earlier discussion, emphasised that Eden's 'nefarious bargain' would contribute to 'the general pacification and appeasement of Europe.' For Eden, de jure recognition was so distasteful that when he finally contemplated it outside the 'impossible' League context, the giving-way, if at all, had to be complete, a gesture hopefully dignified enough to be above moral criticism and hopefully strong enough to be above interpretations of British weakness - but in any case he thought both alternatives 'inexpedient.'<sup>51</sup>

Macleod's 'softer line', therefore, is less soft than it looks. Rather it was a temporary attempt by Eden after a time

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50. Ibid. c.f. Eden's other plan for 'idealist' concessions - to Germany. If Hitler was to get colonies, there should be no deal - he should be given all ex-German colonies for a general settlement.  
Harvey, p.63.

of estrangement not only from prominent Cabinet members but also from Chamberlain to come to terms with their policies, since he himself had no alternative to offer, except drift.

## 4: AMERICAN INITIATIVES, ITALIAN CONVERSIONS AND RESIGNATION.

Eden was heavily committed to the idea of American action in Europe in his search for a middle way to 'face the dictators'. Chamberlain was sceptical of United States' initiative. 'The power that had the greatest strength was the United States of America' but 'it would be a rash man who based his calculations on help from that quarter.'<sup>1</sup> In January 1938 an American plan for solving the 'world crisis' was posed as an alternative to an Anglo-Italian settlement. Both Chamberlain's championship and Eden's objections to the latter consequently hardened.<sup>2</sup>

On January 3rd, 1938, Eden left for a short holiday in the south of France. He intended to go on to a League Assembly where he would consult France on the two late December proposals for de jure recognition. Chamberlain was in charge of the Foreign Office in his absence. On holiday, Eden wrote to Chamberlain: 'I do hope that you will never for an instant feel that any interest you take in foreign affairs, however close, could ever be resented by me. I know, of course, that

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1. P.R.O. Cab. 23/90 C.C. 46(37)10, late 1937. When Roosevelt had made his famous declaration of October 5th, 1937 that "when an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of disease." Chamberlain publicly responded favourably, was privately facetious, and wrote that 'it is always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans but words.' Feiling, p. 325.
  2. Watt, Personalities, on Eden's attitude to the United States: 'One could not find a stronger illustration of the basic

there will always be some who will seek to pretend that the Foreign Secretary has had his nose put out of joint, but that is

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doctrines and assumptions of English pan-Anglo-Saxonism - the unquestioning identification of British and American leadership, the naive assumption that British leadership would be welcome and acceptable, the identification of Anglo-American hegemony with the achievements of universal peace, and the optimistic idealism about the influence of a united Anglo-American opinion as a deterrent against the use of force to upset the world status quo.'

c.f. Lawrence Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', International Affairs, October 1971 (hereafter Pratt), p. 755.

'Eden believed, like so many pro-American British, in an Anglo-American hegemony, based on a monopoly of sea power, raw materials and commerce, and thought that, after England had composed its differences with Hitler, peace based on the imperial status quo could be imposed in the Far East and the Mediterranean, if necessary by force.'

American and British cooperation had predominantly focused on the problems of Japanese action in the Far East. Britain had prepared her defensive planning since 1933 on the assumption of war with Japan, but had the Japanese merely consolidated their position in Manchuria, they might, in the British view, have eventually placated by the Chinese by the benefits of economic development and the establishment of law and order. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7th and 8th 1937 ended that possibility. The Cabinet did not doubt Japan's guilt; but they took a lesson from the Manchurian crisis and resolved not to put Japan in the dock. Eden upheld the idea that a conference backed by the United States might bring about an armistice in the Far East and further, by establishing a close consultative bond, isolationist America might be then invigled to turn her attention to Europe. In general Eden had Chamberlain's backing on joint initiative in the Far East, but both doubted the value of sanctions unless backed by force - which they would not contemplate. The cabinet was wary but hopeful. Since Eden was heavily committed to Anglo-American cooperation, publicly as much as privately, the failure of the Brussels Conference represented his worst diplomatic failure of 1937. Brussels accomplished nothing save antagonising Japan and, if anything, worsening the Chinese situation. Anglo-American naval conversations were then planned for January 1938. Eden was intending to

of no account beside the very real gain of close collaboration between Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister which, I am sure, is the only way that Foreign affairs can be run in this country.'<sup>3</sup>

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holiday lengthily over Christmas and the new year in Madeira but changed his plans 'in view of forthcoming negotiations with U.S...it was essential that he should be in London when U.S. Naval representatives arrived... as he said, this development of Anglo-American relations was the most important thing that had happened and what he had been working for for years.' (Harvey, p. 65). The conversations transpired immediately prior to the emergence of the Roosevelt proposal. Pratt comments: 'In view of the usual historical assumption that it was America who finally retreated from cooperation in these weeks, the exchanges of January 10-11 are of some interest. In truth, it had been Britain which had been unable to accept Roosevelt's timetable of escalatory steps. Its position in Europe and the Mediterranean was so dangerous that it was incapable of serious intervention elsewhere.' Pratt, p. 757. Roosevelt's enthusiasm for action in the Far East was ammunition for Eden's case on Anglo-American cooperation Europe. In fact, however, the dominant scepticism of Chamberlain and the Cabinet towards the January Roosevelt plan was the more accurate reading of the situation. 'The value of Roosevelt's initiative [to the American government] lay in the anticipated after-effects on American opinion of its expected inevitable failure.' Watt, Personalities, p. 45.

3. Macleod, p. 213.

On January 12th and 13th the Foreign Office received 'A Most Secret Message' from President Roosevelt, a plan for a world discussion on the underlying causes of the 'international crisis.'<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt asked for a British opinion of the plan by the 17th. Cadogan<sup>5</sup> discussed the proposal with Chamberlain and drafted a reply. This revealed that Britain was about to discuss de jure recognition with France, with a view to a general Italian settlement. It suggested that the American plan would cut across this and therefore the United States might wish to postpone its plan pending European developments on British initiative, but it added that if the United States nevertheless wished to go ahead with its plan, it would have full

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4. Roosevelt proposed 1) a general appeal and invitation to all governments which, if accepted, would be followed by 2) the appointment of a drafting committee of U.S.A. and some minor powers (Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Turkey, Hungary, Yugoslavia) to draw up an agenda, followed by 3) submission of the proposals to all powers.
  5. Owing to a press leakage that Vansittart was about to get a 'high honour' and an Embassy, it was decided to bring out the announcement of his new appointment as 'Chief Diplomatic Advisor' with the New Years Honours List in which he got a G.C.B. With Vansittart 'kicked upstairs' to an honorary advisory post, the job of chief permanent official in the foreign office, Permanent Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, went to Cadogan, as Eden and Chamberlain had arranged. (It was a foreign office joke that Vansittart, well pleased with his post and misunderstanding its 'pensioning off' status, had been himself responsible for the laudatory press coverage of his transfer). Harvey, p.66.

British backing. Chamberlain cut the addition and dispatched the amended version. A copy was simultaneously sent to Eden, giving him time to telephone his views before the final deadline of the 17th. Cadogan privately telephoned Eden to come home, explaining that there were secret new developments which could not be divulged over an open line but that there was a summary of them coming.<sup>6</sup>

At leisure, in consultation with Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, Eden's 'instincts' against de jure recognition had been 'fortified'.<sup>7</sup> Eden hurried back. However, at Marsailles he missed his letter, air services were out of action and the boat and train journey held him up. Increasingly agitated, he finally reached London on the evening of January 15th. He immediately decided that Britain must accept Roosevelt's plan, subject to some amendments.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Harvey, pp. 67-68. Colvin, Vansittart, p. 181  
'Sir Alexander (Cadogan) tells me that he did his best to alert Eden before Chamberlain's reply was sent.'
7. Harvey, p. 70, Avon, p. 547-8.
8. Harvey, p. 70, Avon, pp. 548-557.  
Avon, p. 533: 'I felt that I should have been summoned to London or consulted by telegram, before any reply was sent. Roosevelt had asked for an answer by January 17th. It was now only the 15th.'

Early on the 16th,<sup>9</sup> Roosevelt telegraphed that he was disappointed with the British reply but would hold up his plan 'for a while' and write to Chamberlain. Eden immediately telegraphed Washington. Chamberlain, he claimed, had brought him back for consultations. He expressed his hopes that Roosevelt did not regard Chamberlain's reply as negative, as this was not the intention.

In the morning he saw Chamberlain. Chamberlain was friendly but objected to Eden's telegram and refused to send a further one until after he had received Roosevelt's letter. He emphasised that he believed that a real settlement with Italy was imminent and again expressed his view that the foreign office had not been sincere in its efforts with the dictators. Eden avoided confrontation but on his return to the foreign office he wrote Chamberlain a letter stating that despite their consultation he was more than ever convinced of the necessity for accepting Roosevelt's proposal. He then received Horace Wilson who reported that Chamberlain was disturbed at their differences, especially over de jure recognition. Wilson said that Chamberlain was adamant that an Italian settlement was more important than the American plan. Eden immediately rang the British Embassy in Washington to say that if they would do everything at their end to encourage Roosevelt he would do everything he could in London to get acceptance.<sup>10</sup>

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9. At one a.m.

10. Harvey, pp. 71-73.

On the 18th Roosevelt's letter arrived. It stated that he was willing to deter his appeal but objected to de jure recognition.<sup>11</sup> Eden decided that Roosevelt's plan must be backed fully and consequently de jure recognition must be dropped completely. He explained his views to Chamberlain. Chamberlain refused to accept them. He showed Eden a letter from his sister-in-law in Italy claiming that this was a 'psychological moment' which made Italy ready for a settlement.<sup>12</sup> He therefore wished to write to Roosevelt giving full reasons for de jure recognition and entreating him to hold back at least until Anglo-Italian negotiations were under way.

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11. Roosevelt to Chamberlain, January 17, 1938, in U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States 1938 (1), pp. 120-22.

'The recognition of the conquest of Ethiopia which at some appropriate time may have to be regarded as an accomplished fact would seem to me to be a matter which affects all nations which are committed to the principles of non-recognition and which should consequently be dealt with as an integral part of measures for world appeasement in which all nations of the world have previously demonstrated their common interest and their willingness to bear individual responsibility.'

12. Lady Chamberlain, the wife of Neville's late half-brother Austen, was in Rome. Ciano used her to advance his maneuvering with Britain; she was treated politely but regarded as a tool. On her wearing of the Fascist Party Badge, Ciano commented that he was too patriotic to appreciate such a gesture from an Englishwoman. Ciano, Journal, pp. 85-89, 101.

On the morning of the 19th Hankey and Vansittart made strong pleas to Eden. Grandi wrote for an interview with Eden and Chamberlain. Eden asked Grandi to see him alone. Grandi accepted. His position was as in late December - Italy was anxious to start conversations but de jure recognition could not be left out. In the afternoon the Committee of Imperial Defence discussed Roosevelt's proposal. Chamberlain quoted his sister-in-law and showed his draft telegram to Roosevelt re-explaining his hopes for de jure recognition. The telegram made no reference to the acceptance of Roosevelt's plan. Eden asked if he might study the draft overnight.<sup>13</sup>

On the morning of the 20th Horace Wilson put further pressure on Eden. Eden immediately saw Chamberlain and hinted resignation. Chamberlain wavered, and at the meeting of the Committee in the afternoon Eden agreed to draft three telegrams - two to Roosevelt, asking him not to deter his plan any longer and explaining the cabinet views on de jure recognition, but stating an intention to defer them, and one to the British Embassy in Washington asking for modifications in the wording of the Roosevelt plan. A meeting the following day went even further towards meeting Eden's case. Four telegrams were produced, two to Roosevelt as above, and two to the British Embassy - one giving them discretion in the handling of the situation, (they were not to be enthusiastic but at the same

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13. Harvey, pp. 72-75.

not discouraging while working for points of change in the plan) and a second explaining in detail the nature of the Mediterranean 'deadlock'. Finally, the Committee agreed that the whole question of de jure recognition must be reconsidered in the light of Roosevelt's plan and that no commitment to Anglo-Italian conversations should be given to Grandi.

On the 23rd telegrams from Sumner Welles, the United States Under-Secretary of State, revealed that Roosevelt was relieved that de jure recognition was not to be granted in the immediate future and then only as part of a general settlement and that he was not intending to bring out his world appeal immediately.<sup>14</sup> The next day the full Cabinet heard of Roosevelt's plan for the first time in a meeting called to give Eden his final briefing before leaving for Geneva. Eden was instructed, with a view to ascertaining French feeling, to inform France that no progress had yet been made in Italian conversations but that the Cabinet had been considering the kind of settlement they might hope to obtain in return for de jure recognition. He was told to discourage any raising of the question of de jure recognition at the League. It was decided that as soon as Roosevelt's reactions to the latest batch of telegrams were known, the whole question of Italian conversations should be taken up again. It was considered 'desirable, if practicable, to

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14. Harvey, pp. 76-78.

discontinue the use of the term de jure recognition.' Some phrase should be substituted which 'implied recognition of an international change' - for example 'recognition for international purposes of the conquest of Abyssinia', and 'recognition of the Italian position in Ethiopia'.<sup>15</sup> Just before Eden left for Geneva, Roosevelt telegraphed briefly that he was 'deeply gratified' by the British telegrams.<sup>16</sup>

Back from Geneva on the 31st Eden reported to the Cabinet that if conversations included Spain, there would be little obstruction from the French. 'He himself had told most of the foreign ministers something of what was in the minds of our government, without committing himself to details. He thought it would be fair to say that if we could arrive at an arrangement for general appeasement with Italy, more especially if it included Spain, we should encounter no difficulties at Geneva.' He indicated that there was 'general concern' at Geneva over Spain. 'What would be the effect of General Franco's recent failures on Signor Mussolini, who would be faced with a fresh decision and would have to choose between going deeper into the mire or cutting his losses?' He presented the cabinet with foreign office reports of further Italian reinforcements in the Balaeries and Spain.<sup>17</sup> At the Foreign Office, however, he presented his case more forcefully. There must be a general settlement, or nothing - no 'shady bargain', no 'purely

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15. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 C.C. 1(38)2.

16. Harvey, p. 79.

17. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 C.C. 2(38)2.

Anglo-Italian settlement of Anglo-Italian questions.<sup>18</sup>

In the first week of February, Mussolini renewed his Mediterranean attacks for the first time since Nyon. Roosevelt requested the cabinet to 'hold back...horses' a little longer while they awaited a public communication of his plan - but he had no objections to Anglo-Italian conversations. Eden saw Grandi and Grandi agreed on the importance of Spain. Chamberlain requested Eden to summon Grandi to announce the start of conversations because of Roosevelt's new position. Eden refused on the grounds that Roosevelt's telegram was contradictory. Chamberlain then relayed a message through Horace Wilson requesting Eden to invite Grandi to a joint meeting. Eden again refused. He pointed out that the Committee of Imperial Defence had decided that conversations should be dropped completely and be reconsidered when Roosevelt's full reaction was known.

On February 9th press campaigns crying up the prospects for an early and complete Anglo-Italian settlement were mounted. The Foreign Office News Department claimed that they could only have come from Chamberlain's quarters. Eden gave instructions to his newsmen to dampen down all reports. There were fresh rumours of cabinet intrigue and further reports of Lady Chamber-

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18. Harvey, p. 81.

lain's informal diplomacy.<sup>19</sup> Eden confronted Chamberlain with these three developments. Chamberlain denied any knowledge of the press leakage, was non-committal on his sister-in-law and sceptical about intrigue.<sup>20</sup> To the Cabinet Eden indicated that he proposed to continue discussions with Grandi on not only Spain but propaganda. 'If that had the effect of damping down the broadcasts from Bari this would enable conversations to be advanced step by step in other subjects.' He proposed that he be allowed to continue informal consultation with Grandi 'in preference to inaugurating formal conversations between Drummond and Ciano in Rome, with all the publicity involved.' Chamberlain agreed but suggested that 'at a certain point Ciano might come to London to finish off the conversations.' The cabinet enquired about Eden's lukewarm press comments. Eden was silent. Chamberlain assured the cabinet that 'it was not the intention of the Foreign Secretary to lay down conditions precedent to the conversations.' Eden emphasised that Spain must be in any settlement. Chamberlain replied that Grandi would not discuss Spain unless the possibility of recognition was in the background but he 'gathered Grandi was not troubled by this

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19. In particular a report of a conversation from Vansittart in which Swinton had allegedly said that Vansittart had been 'kicked upstairs', that foreign affairs would now be run by Chamberlain and a small committee, and Eden would have to fall in or go. Harvey, p. 86.

20. Harvey, pp. 82-84.

aspect.'<sup>21</sup> However, when Eden saw Grandi about Spain and propaganda on the 10th, Grandi retracted from the inclusion of Spain. Eden gave Grandi a new scheme for Italian withdrawals from Spain for study in Rome.<sup>22</sup>

The 11th saw the receipt of a telegram from the British Embassy in Washington indicating that Roosevelt thought Britain 'lukewarm' over his proposals. Eden wrote a telegram expressing enthusiasm which Chamberlain promptly pruned.<sup>23</sup> Eden informed the cabinet that he 'proposed to press forward with the Spanish question as rapidly as possible' and that he would circulate to the Committee of Imperial Defence 'a Memorandum as to desiderata for the proposed conversations, with a suggested timetable.' He 'promised to bear in mind a suggestion by the prime minister

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21. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 C.C. 3(38)4.

22. Harvey, p. 87.

23. Harvey, p. 88.

The historians for the United States Council of Foreign Affairs have argued that the report was 'hardly plausible' and that in enthusiasm for Anglo-American unison, the British Embassy may have overstated the American account. William L. Lange and S. Everett Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, 1937-1940, New York, 1952. p. 28.

that instead of transferring conversations to Rome...it was desirable to work for continuance...with Grandi in London and for Ciano to come to London to conclude them.'<sup>24</sup>

On the 15th news of the Austrian crisis reached the Foreign Office.<sup>25</sup> On the 16th Chamberlain told Eden that he had heard that Grandi wished for an immediate opening to conversations, in view of Austrian developments. He asked Eden to arrange a joint interview with Grandi to enquire about Austria. Eden agreed but reiterated that there must be only informal consultation. He adamantly maintained that a Spanish settlement,

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24. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92. C.C. 4(38) 3, 4.

25. At a stormy meeting at Berchtesgaden on February 12th, Hitler had made demands on the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schussnigg, including making the Austrian Nazi, Arthur Seyss-Inguart, Minister of the Interior and lifting the ban on Nazi atrocities. See Gordon Brook-Shepherd, The Anschluss, New York, 1963, pp. 42-63.

Eden had apparently told Ribbentrop in December 1937 that the Austrian question 'was of much greater importance to Italy than to England', whose people 'recognised that a close connection between Germany and Austria would have to come about sometime', though they wished to avoid force. D.G.F.P. 1 (50) Ribbentrop to Neurath.

Faced with the news of February 15th 'A.E. determined not to get into the false position of giving the Austrians advice and the situation gets worse. We cannot fight for Austria and we must be careful not to raise false hopes...after all it is more Musso's funeral than ours.' Harvey, p.90.

To the cabinet Eden said that 'he did not want to put himself in a position of suggesting a resistance which we could not, in fact, furnish.'

P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 C.C. 5(38)2.

not merely Italian assurances, had to be the sine qua non for formal conversations. Later that day and on the following Eden tried to persuade Grandi to come to the Foreign Office for consultations without Chamberlain.<sup>26</sup> The Italian ambassador put him off, on the first occasion sending a message that he was expecting a favourable reply from Ciano on Italian withdrawals from Spain, on the second pleading a prior golfing engagement.<sup>27</sup>

Chamberlain sent Sir Joseph Ball, head of the Conservative Research Department,<sup>28</sup> to the Italian Embassy to persuade Grandi to accept Foreign Office invitations; Ball explained that Chamberlain would be present at an interview on the following morning, the 17th. Grandi agreed to attend.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Harvey, p. 91.

27. Grandi, 'I hate golf but pretend to play it when necessary.' Ciano, Diplomatic, p. 162.

28. It was also rumoured that Ball was responsible for the news leakage of February 9th. The retrospect, then, since he was Chamberlain's informal emissary, presumably Chamberlain had been at the back of it.

Sir Joseph Ball threatened to write his memoirs throughout the fifties and sixties, claiming they would be the most revealing documents of cabinet relations in the 1930's. Unfortunately, he burnt his papers before he died.

Avon, p. 623, comments on Ball: 'I never at any time had the remotest suspicion that Sir Joseph Ball might be an intermediary between the Italian Embassy and 10 Downing Street.'

29. Ciano, Diplomatic, pp. 165-66. According to Feiling, Chamberlain had the view that the Foreign Office was trying to prevent him seeing Grandi. Certainly Eden wanted to get in alone first, but he had agreed to a joint interview.

The pivotal joint interview with Grandi is well documented. One has a choice of the Foreign Office record<sup>30</sup> and the more histrionic account of Grandi,<sup>31</sup> but basically Eden and Chamberlain argued out their differences before the Italian ambassador. Both threatened resignation and they took their respective cases to the Cabinet.

Chamberlain and Eden may speak for themselves. Chamberlain argued in effect that it was now or never on Italy. This was 'one of those opportunities that came at rare intervals and did not recur.' 'He himself believed that Count Grandi had been telling the truth. He knew that the Italians were often unreliable and unstable, but he had watched the ambassador carefully and at very close quarters and he had felt satisfied as to his veracity.' 'If we rejected the present approach it would be taken as a final rebuff and as a confirmation of the suspicions that the Italians had long harboured that we were postponing them to impose our own conditions.' 'Not to embrace the opportunity would be not only unwise but criminal.'

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30. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 Cab. 6(38) Appendix.  
Avon, p. 616-17 Appendix C.

31. Ciano, Diplomatic, pp. 182-83.

'Chamberlain and Eden were not as a Prime Minister and a Foreign Secretary discussing with the Ambassador of a Foreign Power a delicate situation...they were two enemies confronting each other, like cocks in true fighting posture.'

One has, of course, to make allowances for a fascist diplomat who had to pep up his copy for home to safeguard his own political capital. See Craig, pp. 220-247.

Felix Gilbert, 'Ciano and his Ambassadors' in The Diplomats

Eden 'could not take the view of a change in Mussolini's attitude without further proof.' 'If Signor Mussolini was so desperately anxious to change camps it would be easy for him to give proof of good faith and good will. He had given none.'

With the exception of MacDonald,<sup>32</sup> Elliot,<sup>33</sup> Zetland<sup>34</sup> and to some extent Morrison<sup>35</sup> the cabinet was with Chamberlain. Simon laid emphasis on the fact that the cabinet 'was dealing not with a difference of principle but with a question of timing and method.' Chamberlain snubbed his suggestion that a resignation should only take place on a question of principle. Eden stated that he 'could not recommend to parliament a policy with which he was not in agreement.'<sup>36</sup> The meeting adjourned.

Between meetings Chamberlain asked Eden if Italian acceptance of the new formula for withdrawal from Spain would make any

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1919-1939 Volume II, The Thirties, New York 1963, pp. 512-536.

- 32. Secretary of State for Dominions.
- 33. Secretary of State for Scotland.
- 34. Secretary of State for India.
- 35. Financial Secretary to the Treasury.
- 36. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92. Cab. 6(38).

difference. Grandi had accepted the formula, relaying the information through one of Chamberlain's informal agents.<sup>37</sup> Eden admitted 'quite straight-forwardly and simply that it would not.'<sup>38</sup>

On Sunday 19th Eden announced his resignation to the Cabinet. He told them that the difference was 'more a matter of emphasis and handling than principle.' He 'could not disguise that there was a difference of outlook between himself and some of his colleagues, including the prime minister.' He cited the Roosevelt initiative and the conviction that 'opportunities had been missed' with the dictators. 'The Cabinet had before them a number of difficult decisions.... it might be that he and they would not see eye to eye.'

Chamberlain told the Cabinet of Grandi's new position. 'The Foreign Secretary would say that that would not remove his objections to conversations.' He charged Eden with being 'prepared to postpone them even at the risk of no further opportunity of opening.'<sup>39</sup>

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37. Presumably Ball. Ball had already conveyed Chamberlain's appreciation for cooperation in the interview of the 17th, to Grandi.

38. Hansard, 332, Col. 258.

39. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 Cab. 7(38).

A sub-committee was set up to find a compromise. It was suggested that Eden should agree to the formal opening of conversations provided Italy accepted the withdrawal formula but that there would be no de jure recognition until after a Spanish settlement. Eden refused to accept the plan and resigned.

Chamberlain 'suggested that all should stand together and face the situation.' Simon remarked that 'all had had a trying day'. He wished Chamberlain 'to accept an expression of loyalty in the certainty that he would make the case [in the Commons] with his usual skill as well as it could be made.' 'This proposal met with general assent.'<sup>40</sup> Eden went to the Foreign Office to prepare his resignation speech.

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40. P.R.O. Cab. 23/92 Cab. 8(38).

## CONCLUSION

When Chamberlain accused Eden of having missed chance after chance he was hardly being fair. The foregoing paper clearly illustrates that 'whatever his personal feelings' Eden cannot be charged with having been deliberately obstructivist to the course of Anglo-Italian negotiations throughout 1937 any more than he can be identified with the zealous pursuit of conversations by an alarmist cabinet majority. In his role of Foreign Secretary he did what was required of him by majority cabinet decision, but no more. An Anglo-Italian detente was not in Eden's hands. Essentially, anything beyond informal consultation was impossible in 1937 because of Mussolini's sine qua non of a British lead in de jure recognition of Abyssinia at the League of Nations. Although this might do no more than 'express the realities of the situation' the cabinet was not prepared to act without at least French cooperation. When in September Eden directly confronted the cabinet with the question: 'Assuming Signor Mussolini continued his present policy in the Mediterranean was it still suggested that our policy should be to turn Abyssinia out of the League?', Inskip's reply summed up the cabinet's consistent position. 'The answer must be in the affirmative, but...the implementation of that policy had become impossible.'

The accumulation and retraction of British desiderata for conversations were relevant only in so far as they expressed cabinet hopes for getting the necessary Italian assurances to

make de jure recognition possible through a 'great scheme of reconciliation'. From December, the withdrawal of Italy from the League made de jure recognition through its agency not only impossible from the point of view of British justification for the action but also impossible in fact. The attendant contemplation of British recognition independent of the League saw Chamberlain's swinging attitude to Italy narrowed down to whole-hearted acceptance of the need to pursue de jure recognition as part of a 'hard bargain' with Italy, rationalised as a 'great scheme of reconciliation.' The onset of a policy that Chamberlain was to pursue consistently beyond Eden's resignation coincided with a softer line on the issue by the Foreign Secretary as part of a pattern of personal reconciliation after relative estrangement, reconciliation the more necessary to keep Chamberlain's support against an increasingly hostile cabinet majority.

Chamberlain's complete opposition to Eden's championship of the Roosevelt initiative saw a hardening of attitudes on both sides. Because of cabinet acceptance of the need to grant de jure recognition in the possible independent setting and apparent French concurrence Anglo-Italian conversations became distinctly possible for the first time in February 1938. In this context Eden's desiderata became relevant. Proportionately to the hardening of Chamberlain's stand the nature of Eden's assurances of Italian 'good faith and goodwill' became more demanding. In effect Eden demanded a 'change of heart and attitude' from Italy. Eden's long standing antipathy to Italy had not been relevant to the execution of policy as long as the

cabinet prevaricated on de jure recognition. In a situation of imminent conversations it became central. What was specifically a matter of 'method and timing', more widely in the context of cabinet deliberation on the nature of the February conversations was an expression of Eden's personal prejudice against Italy. Throughout 1937 Italian and British estrangement, essentially because Britain would not meet Mussolini's demands, had served Eden's waiting game. When Chamberlain told the cabinet in February that the postponement of conversations would confirm 'suspicions...that we were postponing them to impose our own conditions' he was, wittingly or unwittingly, expressing Eden's attitude.

In 1937 a basic policy divergence on Italy had not emerged, despite attitudinal variations, because there was no middle way between acquiescence to Italian demands, pending the League initiative, and offensive, impossible in view of cautious defence expenditure centred on Germany. Eden's defiant 'open diplomacy' and occasional dreams of offensive, from which he had been easily warned off, were not significant enough to translate personal prejudice into an alternative policy. Once conversations which would lead to a settlement were close the waiting game was no longer irrelevant, and Eden resigned. If de jure recognition and the empty Roosevelt plan had not been posed as alternatives in January, Eden may have made more concessions but essentially the divergence would have remained intact.

Eden made no attempt to translate the occasion for the rift into a matter of general principle in foreign policy imperatives.

He could not have effectively done so because, despite his warnings to the cabinet in February, on his collective record in office with Chamberlain there was no essential difference in policy towards the perceived greater totalitarian menace, Germany. The Halifax visit was a special case. Eden actively pursued the colonial German settlement.

Beyond the Italian context of the rift lies the matter of cabinet intrigue and slighting of foreign office protocol. That personal as well as policy factors were involved is beyond dispute. But in the development of the rift in its Italian context they are most consistently seen as arising from and exacerbating precise divergences in the execution of policy - if the focus is limited to Eden and Chamberlain. Matters of prejudice and envy are obvious in the intrigues of Hoare, Simon and Swinton. They are contributing factors to Eden and Chamberlain's relations; but this centres on the struggle for control in the Foreign Office. In retrospect many of their altercations seem merely silly, abrasive Chamberlain and temperamental Eden simmering with unspoken resentments, and, if put in their cabinet context, pall into relative insignificance beside Eden's wider estrangement from the cabinet majority; in this setting Eden's claims that in January 1937 he and the prime minister 'were seriously at odds for the first time' becomes no more than gentlemanly reticence.

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