

The italian invasion of abyssinia essay sample

War



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Why did Italy invade Abyssinia? In 1896 Italian troops had tried to invade Abyssinia but had been defeated by the African tribesmen. This had hurt the Italians pride and Mussolini wanted revenge. Mussolini also had his eye on the fertile lands and mineral wealth of Abyssinia. Mussolini believed that to be a great leader he needed military victories and lots of glory and conquest. He wanted to expand his empire and he thought that Abyssinia was the perfect place.

What happened? In December 1934 there was a dispute between Italian and Ethiopian soldiers at the Wal-Wal oasis (80 km inside Abyssinia). Mussolini took his chance and he claimed that it was actually Italian territory. He demanded an apology and he began preparing the Italian army for an invasion of Abyssinia. The Abyssinian emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the league for help.

Phase 1 - January 1935 to October 1935 Mussolini was supposedly negotiating with the league to settle the dispute, while at the same time he was shipping his army to Africa- he was preparing for a full scale invasion of Abyssinia. At the beginning Britain and France refused to handle the situation seriously. They were desperate to stay on good term with Mussolini, he seemed to be their strongest ally against Hitler. They signed an agreement with him in early 1935 known as the Stresa Pact. The Stresa Pact formalised a commitment to stand united against Germany. When meeting to discuss the Stresa Pact, they failed to even mention Abyssinia. it is thought that Mussolini believed that Britain and France had promised to turn a blind eye to the situation in Abyssinia in return for him joining them in the

Stresa Pact. However, as the year wore on, there was public outcry against Italys behaviour.

The League of Nations union took a ballot in Britain 1934-35. It showed that the majority of British people supported the use of military force to defend Abyssinia if necessary. They realised it was now time to get tough. At an assembly of the league, the British foreign minister, Hoare, made a speech about the value of collective security. There was much talking and negotiating. However, the league never actually did anything to discourage Mussolini. On 4 September, after eight months of consideration, a committee reported to the league that neither side could be held responsible for the Wal-Wal incident. The league put forward a plan that would give Mussolini some of Abyssinia. Mussolini rejected it.

Phase 2 October 1935 to may 1936In October 1935 Mussolinis army was ready. He launched a full scale invasion of Abyssinia, the Abyssinians were no match for the Italian army equipped with tanks, aeroplanes and poison gas. The league was disputes like this one and unlike the Manchurian crisis it was ideally placed to act. The covenant made it clear that sanctions must be introduced against the aggressor. A committee was immediately set up to agree what sanctions to impose. However the sanctions would only work if they were imposed quickly and decisively. Each week a decision was delayed it would allow Mussolini to build up his stockpile of raw materials. The league imposed an immediate ban on arms sales to Italy while allowing them to Abyssinia. It banned all loans to Italy. It banned the export to Italy of rubber, tin and metals. However, the league delayed a decision for two months over whether to ban oil exports to Italy.

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It feared the Americans would not support the sanctions. It also feared that its members economic interests would be further damaged. In Britain, the cabinet was informed that 30, 000 British coal miners were about to lose their jobs because of the ban on coal exports to Italy. The most important thing however was the Suez Canal, (owned by Britain and France) it was the Italians main supply route to Abyssinia closing it could have ended the Abyssinian campaign very quickly. But Britain and France were afraid that closing the canal could result in a war with Italy. This failure was fatal for Abyssinia. In December 1935, while sanctions discussions were still taking place, the British and the French foreign ministers, Hoare and Laval, were hatching a plan.

They aimed to give Mussolini two-thirds of Abyssinia in return for his calling off his invasion. Laval proposed to put the plan to Mussolini before they showed it to either the league or Haile Selassie. Laval told the British that if they did not agree to the plan, then the French would no longer support the sanctions. However, the details of the plan were leaked to the French press. It proved quite disastrous for the league. Haile Selassie demanded an immediate league debate about it. In both Britain and France it was seen as a blatant act of treachery against the league. Hoare and Laval were both sacked. But the real damage was to the sanctions discussions.

The lost all momentum. The question about whether to ban oil sales was further delayed. In February 1936 the committee concluded that if they did stop oil sales to Italy, the Italians supplies would be exhausted in two months, even if Americans kept on selling oil to them. But by then it was too late. Mussolini had already taken over large parts of Abyssinia. And the <https://assignbuster.com/the-italian-invasion-of-abyssinia-essay-sample/>

Americans were even more disgusted with the ditherings of the French and the British that they had been before and so blocked a move to support the leagues sanctions. American oil producers actually stepped up their exports to Italy.

The invasion On March the 7th 1936 the fatal blow was delivered. Hitler, timing his move into the Rhineland, an act prohibited by the treaty of Versailles. If there had been any hope of getting the French to support sanctions against Italy, it was now dead. The French desperate to gain the support of Italy were now prepared to pay the price of giving Abyssinia to Italy. Italy continued to defy the leagues orders and by may 1936 had taken the capital of Abyssinia, Addis Ababa. On 2 may, Haile Selassie was forced into exile. On 9 may Mussolini formally annexed the entire country. The league watched helplessly. Collective security had been shown up as an empty promise, the league of nations had failed. If the British and French had hoped that their handling of Abyssinian crisis would help strengthen their position against Hitler, they were soon proved very wrong. In November 1936 Mussolini and Hitler signed an agreement of their own called the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Bibliography:

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