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DOI:

[10.1080/00263206.2014.933424](https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2014.933424)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

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Citation for published version (APA):

Kelly, S. (2014). Desert Conquests: Early British Planning on the Future of the Italian colonies, June 1940-September 1943. *MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES*, 50, 1006-1026. Article 6.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2014.933424>

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Desert Conquests: Early British Planning on the future of the Italian Colonies, June 1940 – September 1943.

It is surprising that there have not been more academic studies on the question of the Italian colonies from 1940 to 1952, which was only answered by an eventual United Nations Organisation decision in favour of independence for Libya, a ten year Italian trusteeship of Somalia leading to independence, and the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia.¹ For, early on, this question was recognised by a contemporary commentator as 'one of the most complex and controversial issues in the history of post-war international relations.'² Perhaps this has been due to its very complexity or the 'turgid' nature of the controversy.³ More mundanely, it may be due to the large amount of primary documentation on this subject available in British, American and French archives, which can daunt even the most intrepid of researchers. Whatever the reason for the few existing studies, the importance of this issue in the international history of the Second World War and the early Cold War merits its further scrutiny. There is a need, in particular, for a re-examination of early British planning on this question during the period of Mussolini's War, from June 1940 to September 1943, when British military, political and diplomatic authorities deliberated on the terms of the armistice and eventual peace treaty with Italy and the general future of dependent territories.

British planning on the future of the Italian colonies began following Italy's declaration of war on Great Britain and France on 10 June 1940 and the launching of attacks against British positions in North and East Africa. At this stage of the war the British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell, considered that the recapture of the Sudanese frontier posts of Kassala and Gallabat (occupied by the Italians on 4 July 1940) and the fomenting of revolt in Ethiopia, by encouraging the indigenous resistance ('Patriot') movement to Italian rule, offered the best prospect of harassing the Italians with the limited forces at his disposal. But he did not at this stage contemplate a large-scale invasion of Italian East Africa⁴. He was in fact concentrating all his resources upon his projected offensive against the Italian army which had invaded Egypt from Libya in September, halting at Sidi Barrani in the Western Desert. In order to aid British strategy, propaganda and any future military administration in these enemy territories and to prevent rash promises being made, he requested a definition of British policy by the War Cabinet on the future of the Italian colonies.

Wavell found it difficult to conceive of an independent Libya, and he held that Egyptian and French claims should be taken into account. He advised, therefore, against going further than the expression of hope by the General Officer Commanding British Troops in Egypt, Henry Maitland Wilson, to Sayyid Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi and the exiled Sanusi shaikhs in Cairo (following his agreement to participate in the formation of a British-Arab Force – later renamed the Libyan Arab Force) 'that the Arabs may regain their freedom and take back their land from the Italian oppressor and restore their independence once more'.⁵ The thrust of British propaganda to Eritreans, Somalis and Ethiopians would largely depend upon whether Great Britain intended to allow the Italians to remain in Eritrea and Somalia, on the condition that they evacuated Ethiopia and accepted an armistice.⁶

The Foreign Office was reluctant to make any definite pronouncements upon the fate of these territories since the general situation was so uncertain. The Southern Department stressed that much depended upon the circumstances in which the war ended; whether

Great Britain was alone in Europe or whether the United States was prepared to become involved, in which case the need for a friendly Italy would not be so great. There was a tendency to question why Wavell needed a definition of policy on the Italian colonies. The time for this would be after he had occupied these territories and put them under military administration.⁷

The British government was committed to helping the Ethiopians to liberate their country from Italy but they had not expressly committed themselves to reinstating Haile Selassie on his throne because of continuing uncertainty about whether he would be accepted again as Emperor by the Ethiopians, although this seemed increasingly likely. The Foreign Office preferred for the present to avoid a commitment. Great Britain had declared that it had no territorial or other ambitions in Ethiopia but it probably wanted to seek frontier rectifications and secure for the Sudan agreement on the use of the waters of Lake Tana.⁸ Great Britain intended to recover British Somaliland (which had been occupied by the Italians in August 1940) but its ultimate fate remained to be decided. The British government had made no statements about the future of Eritrea and Somalia and, from a political standpoint, it was perhaps best to contemplate their remaining in the hands of a reformed postwar Italy, but with some measure of demilitarisation and probably some frontier revision for the security of Ethiopia, British Somaliland, Kenya and the Sudan. It was thought that neither territory was capable of becoming independent and therefore Great Britain could offer little inducement to Eritrean and Somali soldiers to desert.⁹

As for Libya, where Great Britain was trying to stir up a rebellion among the desert tribes 'on the somewhat vague basis of liberation from Italy', there were three schools of thought, not two as Rossi has identified.¹⁰ The first, articulated by the eminent archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley (on secondment to the War Office) and initially supported by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Lloyd, was that the British should promise to make it a semi-autonomous province of Egypt, as the latter would probably demand if it entered the war. The second, later championed by Lord Lloyd, was that Great Britain should promise Libya to the Libyans, although the British were only in contact with the Sanusi shaikhs. But the head of the Egyptian Department in the Foreign Office, Norton, identified a third possibility: that Libya should remain Italian. However, the Foreign Office agreed with the British Ambassador to Egypt, Sir Miles Lampson, that it was impossible at present to come out with any definite policy regarding the future of Libya.

The Foreign Office thought that all the British Government could say with certainty with regard to the future of the Italian colonies was; '(1) that no reasons of policy preclude us from hitting the Italians as hard as possible in all the areas affected; (2) that eventually frontier rectifications will be necessary; and (3) that when non-British territory is occupied by our forces a military administration should at once be set up as was done in Palestine and Syria in 1918.' The Foreign Office recognised that these statements would have very little influence upon the attitude of Eritreans, Somalis and Libyans towards the war, but the British Government could not assume commitments 'which we might not be able to fulfil or to make any promises which could not perhaps be carried out.'¹¹

The accelerating pace of military events in late 1940, however, forced the British government to give further consideration to the future of the Italian colonies. Following the Italian reverses in Greece, at Taranto and in the Western Desert, which precipitated the movement

of German troops to the Mediterranean, it seemed vital to bring about as soon as possible the surrender of the Italian forces in East Africa in order to clear the Red Sea for the passage of Allied and American shipping to Egypt and to enable British forces to be transferred to Greece, if they were needed.

In order to achieve these objectives, Wavell recommended to the War Cabinet, with the backing of the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and the War Office, that in the event of the Italian Viceroy, Aosta, being prepared to accept an armistice in East Africa, Wavell should be authorised to grant him generous terms. Aosta would be asked to evacuate his forces from Ethiopia, where Haile Selassie should be restored to his throne, and to agree to their assembly and disarmament in Eritrea and Somalia. In return the British government would allow the continuance of Italian administration in these territories for the duration of the war, although retaining the right to occupy key positions in Somalia, notably Kismayu, to guard against threats (such as internal disturbances) to British lines of communication. For the duration of the war, Great Britain would also occupy British Somaliland, to which it was committed, and presumably Jubaland, to satisfy British public opinion. Moreover, at the peace conference the British government would guarantee to support the eventual return of Eritrea in full sovereignty to Italy, if the Chiefs of Staff did not object. Wavell believed the country had benefited from Italian rule, and that there was no national feeling among Eritreans which would justify independence. The question of the future of Somalia required further consideration as it would be affected by the extensive rectification and demarcation of frontiers in the Horn of Africa. Changes were deemed desirable by the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office in order to settle the problem posed for both Italian and British administration in the Somalilands by the perennial dispute over tribal grazing and watering rights.

Although the War Cabinet readily agreed to the return of Haile Selassie to the throne of Ethiopia (announced in Foreign Secretary Eden's statement of 4th February 1941), it made clear that it would only be prepared to consider granting the Italians an armistice in East Africa, and permitting the internment of Italian troops in Eritrea and Somalia under British military control for the duration of the war, if it would save the British the trouble of a long campaign and lead to the early surrender of the Italian forces. The War Cabinet was not prepared however, to give any guarantees about the political future of Eritrea and Somalia. The fate of these territories was to be decided at the peace conference.¹²

In the event the rapid advance made by British forces into Cyrenaica and Italian East Africa in early 1941 necessitated urgent decisions by Wavell and the British government on the temporary administration of these vast territories. In order to ensure that administrative policy did not conflict with military exigencies, Wavell proposed that military governments should be established in the Italian colonies similar to those set up in the Middle East during the First World War. Cyrenaica, Eritrea and Somalia were to be administered on a 'care and maintenance' basis, according to the Hague Convention of 1907, 'with the necessary modifications on account of colonial conditions'. Ethiopia would be put under British military occupation until it was formally handed over to the Emperor, on terms to be agreed. Wavell intended to delegate the actual organisation and operation of the military administrations to his Chief Political Officer, the former colonial governor Sir Philip Mitchell, in accordance with the policy that he, Wavell, laid down. Mitchell would appoint Deputy Chief Political Officers to assist the Military Governors of the Italian colonies.

There was such 'community of thought' on this matter between Cairo, London and Pretoria, that the British and South African governments duly acquiesced in Wavell's proposed arrangements. The South African government was consulted not only because of its major military contribution to the East African campaign but because of its political and strategic interest in Italian East Africa. The War Cabinet decided that the War Office should be the department with overall responsibility for the administration of the occupied territories. As the Lord Privy Seal, the leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee, explained to the War Cabinet, 'the Foreign Office is not suitably organised to direct an administration, and if the Colonial Office were put in charge of any of the enemy territories, we should be suspected of seeking to incorporate them in our Empire'. The latter object was far from the minds of Ministers in 1941. But the establishment of British military government in the Italian colonies brought with it political problems.¹³

Cyrenaica was the first of the Italian colonies to be occupied. The main problem facing the new Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Cyrenaica, General Wilson, and his Deputy Chief Political Officer, Brigadier Longrigg, who set up his headquarters in Benghazi, the capital, on 18th February, was that of reconciling the indigenous population of some 200,000 Arabic-speaking Muslims, to the continued presence of those Italians (some 20,000) who had remained behind in Benghazi and the agricultural settlements in the highlands, rather than flee to Tripolitania. In order to avert reprisals and violence it was necessary to reverse British propaganda, which since Italy's entry into the war had incited the native population against their Italian rulers.

Fortunately Cyrenaica remained generally peaceful during the first British occupation, and the native population was on the whole well-behaved and reasonable towards the Italians. Longrigg was unsure, however, how long the goodwill of Cyrenaican Arabs would last once it became clear that the British supported the continued Italian occupancy of the best agricultural land, and would punish anyone who tried to dispute it. He predicted that further problems were likely if or when the British Military Administration proclaimed that it was a temporary regime which was more interested in economic order than in setting up an Arab Amirate. The head of Egyptian Department in the Foreign Office, Bateman, thought that Great Britain might be creating a 'second Palestine' in Cyrenaica.¹⁴

In considering the political future of Cyrenaica, the British authorities in Benghazi, Cairo and London, had to take into account the desire of the indigenous population to free themselves from Italian rule. There were doubts, however, about whether the Sanusi tribesmen, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population in Cyrenaica, and their exiled leader Sayyid Idris, were capable of ruling themselves. Moreover, Sanusi aspirations to the overlordship of Libya were disputed by the Tripolitanian leaders-in-exile. Yet the alternative solutions were not free from objections.

There were practical and political difficulties to a suggestion by Churchill for the establishment of a Free Italian Colony in Cyrenaica, although the Foreign Office admitted that it would be very valuable from the propaganda point of view, as it would enable Great Britain to encourage the Italians to hope that the future of Italy, and the retention of its colonies, was not inextricably intertwined with the fate of Fascism and Germany, and thereby create, in Churchill's words 'a real split in Italy'. The loyal Italian Fascist settlers in Cyrenaica

were regarded in Cairo as unlikely recruits to a strong Free Italian Movement, which in any case lacked leadership. There proved to be insurmountable difficulties to raising a Free Italian Force from the 100,000 Italian soldiers captured in the Western Desert, and it was regarded as too dangerous to experiment with a Free Italian Movement in Cyrenaica or Egypt as long as there was a threat of an enemy counter-attack from Tripolitania. Moreover, Wavell and Lampson thought there would be unfavourable reactions from the Sanusis, Egypt and the Arab world to a Free Italian Cyrenaica.

There appeared to be stronger arguments for trying out the scheme in Eritrea, which was adjudged to be more secure and could offer a safe haven to the Italian fleet in the event of Italy's collapse, but Eden was against making an announcement to this effect before Italian resistance in East Africa had ended. He feared that it might lead Haile Selassie and the Ethiopian tribesmen fighting the Italians to believe that the British were thinking of striking a bargain with Italy over Ethiopia, which would 'cool patriotic enthusiasm'. Richard Lamb has stated that 'Eden did not oppose Churchill's wild project' and that the Foreign Office supported it, when in fact, as has been shown, both Eden and the Foreign Office, in cooperation with Lampson and Wavell, effectively opposed it.¹⁵

The Egyptians were regarded by some officials in London, such as Bateman and Woolley, as the most likely future suzerains of Cyrenaica, which they perceived in terms of the defence of Egypt. Whilst Bateman simply advocated that Great Britain should commit itself during the war to recognising the Egyptian claim to 'the lot of sand and drop of water called Jaghbug' (the strategically-located oasis on Egypt's western border, which Egypt had been forced to cede to Italy in 1925 when Great Britain was 'pursuing the mirage of Mussolini's goodwill'), Woolley went further and recommended that the British government immediately issue a declaration that Cyrenaica should become an autonomous province of Egypt after the war. According to Bateman and Woolley, such concessions would not only help 'keep Egypt "sweet"' during the war, but would also enmesh the Egyptians in administrative problems in Cyrenaica, thus diverting their attention for a time from the question of Egypt's renewed participation in the administration of the Sudan. Egypt could also grant Great Britain the defence facilities it would require in Cyrenaica to guard Egypt's 'Desert Flank'. Furthermore, they argued that such 'disinterested' acts would appeal to Arab nationalism, would deliver a grave blow to the prestige of Fascist Italy, and would reassure Vichy France that Great Britain had no annexationist designs upon French North Africa.

There were serious drawbacks, however, to these schemes. The Foreign Office agreed with Lampson and Wavell that the British government could not afford to get involved at this stage of the war in a wrangle with the Egyptians over frontier rectifications. Also, Lampson and Wavell doubted whether the Sanusis would be likely to accept the cession of Jaghbug to Egypt or nominal Egyptian rule in Cyrenaica especially if, as expected, it was exercised in a heavy-handed way, and feared alienating the Sanusis. Lampson did not want to encourage Egypt to play a greater role in Arab politics, to the detriment of Great Britain's position in the Middle East. Lampson and Wavell were opposed to Egyptian aggrandisement in Cyrenaica, not in favour of it, as Lamb has alleged.¹⁶

The only realistic alternatives to Egyptian rule of Cyrenaica were British or international control. The latter solution did not have any serious proponents at this stage of the war. Both Sayyid Idris and Sir Miles Lampson indicated, in different fashion, that they were

interested in the idea of a British presence in Cyrenaica after the war. The declaration of a British protectorate over Cyrenaica would have certain advantages. It would enable the establishment and protection of some form of native state, thus meeting Sanusi aspirations. This would be welcomed by Arab opinion. At the same time, it would allow Great Britain the strategic advantage of denying Cyrenaica to an enemy power, thus giving security to Egypt and protection from the west to the British position in the Middle East. Lampson, Wavell and the Foreign Office were against the British government making any commitments on the future of Cyrenaica, or Libya as a whole, to the Sanusis, the Egyptians or the Italians, for, quite apart from anything else, the war was not over and it was impossible to predict what was going to happen. This was the situation when in April 1941 the Axis forces, under General Erwin Rommel, made their successful counter-offensive to the Egyptian frontier, and the first British military administration of Cyrenaica came to an end.¹⁷

The loss of Cyrenaica was followed almost immediately by the British occupation of Italian East Africa. The Chief Political Officer for Occupied Enemy Territories Administration, Major-General Sir Philip Mitchell, attempted, with the backing of the War Office, to turn Ethiopia into a virtual protectorate of Great Britain, as part of his grandiose scheme for a much-enlarged East African dependency. But this was rejected by the War Cabinet, at the urging of Haile Selassie, Eden and the Foreign Office, on the grounds of cost and political expediency. After Ethiopian independence had been re-established (by the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement and Military Convention of the 31st January 1942, which terminated the temporary British military occupation), Great Britain was left with responsibility for the peripheral territories. British military administrations were set up in Eritrea¹⁸, Somalia, British Somaliland and a series of 'Reserved Areas' and cantonments. These consisted of the vital Franco-Ethiopian railway from Addis Ababa to the French Somaliland border, a belt of Ethiopian territory, twenty-five miles wide, adjacent to French Somaliland which was needed to blockade Vichy-controlled Djibouti¹⁹, and the Somali-inhabited areas of eastern Ethiopia, the Haud and the Ogaden. The Haud was ruled by a British Senior Civil Affairs Officer from the Ethiopian administrative centre of Jigjiga, whilst the Ogaden remained attached to Somalia and was administered with that territory from the British Military Administration's headquarters at Mogadishu.²⁰

The 'Reserved Areas' were retained without prejudice to Ethiopian sovereignty, under the 1942 Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement and Military Convention, primarily for military reasons, in order to counter any danger from French Somaliland and to prevent any disruption to British lines of communication which might arise from the expected resistance of the heavily-armed Somali tribes to the re-imposition of Ethiopian rule. It was felt that the latter eventually might also have serious political repercussions upon Great Britain's position in the Middle East, since the Arabs had shown that they were concerned with the fate of their co-religionists under Amhara rule. But there were also political reasons for the retention of these areas. Whilst Mitchell, who negotiated the agreement with Ethiopia, wanted to include the Ogaden in a Greater Somalia under British control, the Colonial Office sought frontier rectifications which would safeguard the water and grazing rights of the British Somali tribes in the Haud. The Emperor objected to these reservations, especially that of the Haud and the Ogaden, which he feared might be permanent, and sought ways to circumvent them pending the negotiation of a new agreement or treaty with Great Britain. It was generally held in London and Nairobi (where Political Branch headquarters had been relocated following the loss of Cyrenaica), however, that the Haud and the Ogaden would have to be retained under British

military administration until the peace settlement. Consequently, Haile Selassie had failed to secure a British commitment to return these territories to Ethiopian rule upon the expiry of the 1942 Agreement and Military Convention in 1944.²¹

In Eritrea and Somalia, the British military administrations were confronted with a host of administrative, economic and political problems. A low-key approach in Eritrea²² was successful in persuading most Italians to acquiesce in the British Administration's authority and made it possible in November 1941 to arrest and intern 3,000 Fascist 'troublemakers'. By the end of the year the real danger of the outbreak of widespread disorder and of Eritrea becoming a major military commitment to British Middle East Command had passed. The development of Allied military projects in Eritrea from the winter of 1941 (which involved some 3,000 American military and civilian personnel and led to the opening of a U.S. consulate in Asmara) provided work for the 14,000 unemployed and, by creating a home market with a high buying power, stimulated the growth of light industry. This was just as well, for, with the end of the war in Africa in 1943, most of the war projects were closed down and many of the skilled Italians and some of the unskilled Eritreans were absorbed by local industry. In order to ease the supply burden the Administration reduced the Italian population by shipping 20,000 POWs to India, Kenya and South Africa in 1941, and 10,000 civilians were repatriated to Italy in 1942-43.²³

The British occupation of Eritrea had a revolutionary effect upon the Coptic Christian Abyssinians inhabiting the Central Plateau (they comprised the overwhelming majority, 79 per cent or 351,000 of the population). The liberal British administrative methods (e.g. removing the official colour bar, setting up of Native Courts and Advisory Councils, appointing a few Eritreans to minor government posts and establishing native health and educational services) and the anti-Italian propaganda disseminated by the British both before and during the 1941 campaign, encouraged the Christian Abyssinians to think for themselves for the first time. This coincided with the growing economic distress of both townsmen and peasantry due to the effects of inflation, unemployment, pressure on the land and onerous taxation. Christian Abyssinian aspirations combined with economic distress to breed discontent, which sought an outlet in racial hatred against the Italians, Muslim Arabs, Abyssinian Muslims (Jiberti) and Sudanese, who all seemed to prosper at the expense of Christian Abyssinians. The latter began to suspect the British Administration of favouring their enemies. In this bitter climate it was not surprising that the most discontented elements of the Christian Abyssinian population should be susceptible to the pro-Ethiopian propaganda of their Coptic priests, led by the Bishop of Tigrai and Eritrea, the Abuna Marqos, who had spiritual, political and material reasons for advocating the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia.²⁴

The Emperor Haile Selassie periodically reiterated Ethiopia's claim to Eritrea and requested in April 1942, that Great Britain give an assurance that Eritrea would not be returned to Italy, or to any other foreign power (much along the lines of Eden's pledge to the Sanusis in Cyrenaica on 8th January 1942). Apart from the racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and historical reasons which were given for the incorporation of Eritrea by Ethiopia, it was regarded as just compensation for Ethiopia's recent suffering. Haile Selassie, and his supporters in Great Britain (such as Sylvia Pankhurst) also maintained that the British Government had given 'solemn pledges' both before and during the 1941 campaign (in

propaganda leaflets dropped by the R.A.F.) to the people of Eritrea and the Benadir (Somalia) that they would be 'reunited' with their 'motherland', Ethiopia, after the war.

It was felt in London that the British government could not be committed by a proclamation from the Emperor, and if the text of the British leaflet was inopportune and somewhat equivocal, it implied no more than an imprudent promise that Eritreans would have a say in their future. The Foreign Office refused to discuss the question of Ethiopian territorial claims to Eritrea and Somalia, arguing that this was a matter for the peace settlement. This did not discourage Haile Selassie from pursuing his aims. In 1942, at Ethiopian instigation, the Society for the Love of the Land of Eritrea was set up in Eritrea, and by 1944 (as the Unionist Party), it was calling for the union of that territory with Ethiopia to exploit the Christian townsman's grievances. The Unionist movement soon won over the Christian Abyssinians of Asmara and other towns on the plateau to the Ethiopian cause. It was to take longer to win converts among the peasantry, who were under the influence of their politically cautious chiefs. It was the emergence in 1943 of the anti-Ethiopian and pro-British organisation, the Separatist Movement, which polarised politics on the plateau. In contrast the Muslim population of Eritrea (numbering some 520,000), who had fared tolerably well under the British regime, remained politically apathetic. They were geographically isolated, lacked educated leaders, and were too preoccupied with their own tribal affairs, to take an interest in the colony's politics.²⁵

In Somalia and the adjacent Ogaden, inhabited by over 1,000,000 warlike Somali nomads, Italian administration had completely broken down as a result of the military campaign. The hastily created Somalia Gendarmerie had succeeded by 1943 in the general disarmament of the population and had neutralised the threat posed by the pro-Italian irregular (*banda*) groups. The British Administration succeeded in making Somalia self-sufficient in primary foodstuffs by 1943, although serious shortages were later to occur. As in Eritrea, the lack of sufficient British personnel forced the British Administration to retain the services of Italian officials, especially technical staff, in order to maintain a central government. It was not until 1942 that senior Fascist officials were interned to prevent their becoming a fifth column in the event of Japanese naval operations off the East African coast. In addition, the Administration sought to alleviate the distress of Italian civilians, many of whom were dependent upon public assistance, by repatriating about one-third of the population (2,300 women and children) to Italy in 1943.²⁶

In contrast to the Italian government, the British Administration followed a progressive policy towards the Somalis. It encouraged native education through the founding of schools, made the efficient Italian medical service available to all, and trained a small number of Somali officials and senior police officers, thus providing the basis of a Somali civil service. The Administration promoted local government in preparation for eventual autonomy and self-government, by recognising tribal jurisdiction and custom, and the authority of Muslim (*Sharia*) courts, and encouraged tribal assemblies to work with British political officers in the provinces and districts of Somalia. Most significant of all, the lifting of restrictions in 1943 on political activity led to the establishment of a number of Somali societies and clubs. The most important of these was the Somali Youth Club, which espoused a modern and progressive Somali nationalism, had considerable Somali support and was viewed with sympathy by the British Administration. The bringing of all the Somali peoples of the Horn of Africa under British administration provided an ideal opportunity for the realisation of Somali

nationalist aspirations. The British occupation of Somalia, the Ogaden and the Haud and the recovery of British Somaliland (where the authorities were also pursuing progressive policies) had also made it possible to resolve inter-territorial disputes more easily. In particular, the British Administration in Somalia allowed the British Somaliland authorities to administer their tribes when they crossed into the Haud and the Ogaden in the rainy season in search of pasturage for their herds, so averting conflict with the Ogaden tribes. The benefits of making such an arrangement permanent were plain for all to see.²⁷

The decision to restore Ethiopian independence and the British occupation of Eritrea and Somalia led the Foreign Office, in conjunction with the Colonial Office and their respective representatives in Addis Ababa and Nairobi, to try to delineate the main elements of British policy on the future of these territories in anticipation of the peace settlement after the war. There was general opposition to the return of Italy to Eritrea and Somalia since it was felt that it would continue to pose a threat to Ethiopia's independence, which Great Britain desired to see fully restored. There was no real desire to see Great Britain acquire these colonies because this would be contrary to declarations by the British government, particularly the Atlantic Charter, and they would be an economic burden. On the other hand, ethnical confusion prevented their becoming independent states. Consequently there was general support for the redrawing of colonial boundaries along more rational ethnic, economic and strategic lines in order to benefit the inhabitants of the region.

It was felt that Eritrea should be partitioned, with the northern part being ceded to the Sudan, thus uniting the Bani Amr tribes, and southern Eritrea being incorporated within Ethiopia, so uniting the Danakil tribes and allowing Ethiopia an outlet to the sea at Assab, (an alternative proposal, for the re-establishment of sultanates among the Danakil tribes, if they objected to Ethiopian rule, was not thought to be practicable given the Sultan of Aussa's close association with Ethiopia). In return for this, and also perhaps the cession of Eritrean Tigray to Ethiopia, to enable the re-creation of the old kingdom of Tigray (an idea advanced by the Foreign Office), the Governor of Kenya, Sir Henry Moore, suggested the possibility of the Ethiopian government agreeing to the cession of Ethiopian Somaliland (i.e. the Ogaden) to a united Somalia under the supervision of either an international body or a 'disinterested power', such as the United States or Sweden, which was favoured by the Colonial Office.²⁸

The Foreign Office thought that the British government would be 'on very treacherous ground' if it advocated the creation of a 'Greater Somalia', given Emperor Haile Selassie's likely opposition to the cession of the Ogaden, Great Britain's repeated pledges that it had no designs on Ethiopian territory and the difficulty of establishing a satisfactory ethnographical frontier. The Foreign Office preferred the setting up of self-governing sultanates or shaikhdoms in the Somalilands, much along the lines of the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates, in order to avoid the danger of their becoming an onerous colonial burden. The Colonial Office, and particularly the former governor of British Somaliland, Sir Vincent Glenday, pointed out the administrative and economic impracticability of re-creating shaikhdoms in the Somalilands, to which they were opposed. They emphasised that until the international frontiers of the Somalilands, which cut through the water and grazing rights of the nomadic tribes, had been rectified in order to give the Somalis more security, and until a sense of collective responsibility had been developed among the Somalis through a Council or Committee along the lines of a Soviet, then self-government in the Somalilands was impossible.

This exchange of views on 'the thorny problem' of the future of the Somalilands, and the warning from the British Minister to Ethiopia, Robert Howe, that it would be unwise to raise this question with the Emperor at that time when many other considerations, such as irredentism in Eritrea, were involved, convinced the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office that the time was not yet ripe for discussion as to what the general lines of the British government's policy should be on frontier rectifications and the Greater Somalia proposal. They realised, however, that they would have to have some concrete proposals ready for consideration by the time the war ended, and negotiations for the peace settlement began.²⁹

The events in Ethiopia and the Levant in 1941, namely the British government's recognition of Emperor Haile Selassie as the ruler of an independent Ethiopia and Anglo-Free French pledges on the independence of Syria and Lebanon, spurred Sayyid Idris, at the suggestion of his followers (particularly 'Umar Shinnib, who had taken an active part in nationalist activities in Syria in the 1930s) to demand similar treatment for Libya. Sayyid Idris refused to agree to the request of the British military authorities in Egypt to transfer two battalions of the Libyan Arab Force to Syria for occupation duties, unless he was accorded recognition as an ally of Great Britain and given assurances as to the future of his people. Sayyid Idris requested a promise from the British government that the Sanusis would be freed permanently from Italian rule and that an Arab amirate would be established in Libya, or at the very least Cyrenaica, under British protection or a mandate on the model of Transjordan, after the war. By the end of the year, and after the success of the Eighth Army's 'Crusader' offensive and the second British occupation of Cyrenaica, Sayyid Idris was under such pressure from his Sanusi followers, encouraged by the Tripolitanian leaders, to secure such a pledge from the British government that he even threatened to withdraw from active collaboration with Great Britain unless he received it.³⁰

The newly-appointed Minister of State in the Middle East, Oliver Lyttelton, impressed upon the Foreign Office the need for an early public declaration by the British government which would meet Sayyid Idris's demands, at least as far as Cyrenaica was concerned. Lyttelton argued that the Sanusis had suffered severely for supporting the British and had received nothing in return. They could not very well be returned to Italian rule and it was, therefore, reasonable to consider granting them some form of autonomy. This would make a favourable impression upon the Arabs and Muslims in general, and it could be represented as following on from Eden's Mansion House speech about Syrian independence and Arab unity. It would also solve the immediate problem concerning the use of the Libyan Arab Force. Above all, it would be in Great Britain's short and long-term strategic interests for Cyrenaica to be in friendly hands after the war, thereby acting as a natural fortified bulwark, with British bases, for the protection of Egypt.

It is known that the Foreign Office was prepared to see Great Britain guarantee that the Sanusis in Cyrenaica would never again come under Italian rule, and felt that this 'would have a good effect on the Arab world generally', and that it convinced Lyttelton and the War Cabinet that it would be premature to announce the establishment of an Arab amirate in Cyrenaica under British protection along the lines of Transjordan after the war. But the reasoning behind this decision needs to be made clear. Apart from a general reluctance to assume commitments during the war, the Foreign Office was convinced that the setting up of a Sanusi state, in any form, would be a grave setback to Italy, and more unacceptable than

Egypt or Great Britain annexing Cyrenaica. Furthermore, the British government had yet to decide whether it was prepared to recognise Sanusi nationality, to shoulder the financial burden of supporting a Sanusi amirate, and to transfer their troops from Egypt to Cyrenaica after the war. Some officials in the Foreign Office (Bateman) and the War Office (Woolley) favoured handing over Cyrenaica to Egypt at the peace settlement. The Egyptian government had already put forward a claim to frontier rectifications with Cyrenaica. There were doubts about whether the territory could become independent because of its mixed Italian and Arab population. The suggestion was made that Cyrenaica might be offered to Egypt after the war as 'lebensraum' for its expanding population in exchange for the Egyptian government agreeing to relinquish Egypt's share of the Sudan Condominium to Great Britain. This was regarded as the most likely solution in London at this time and it is incorrect, therefore, for Rossi to argue that it was being displaced by the idea of an autonomous Sanusi amirate under British protection.³¹

Consequently, after giving advanced notice to Sayyid Idris, and gaining the approval of the United States and Dominion governments, the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, made only a limited declaration in the House of Commons on 8th January, 1942, that 'His Majesty's Government is determined that at the end of the war the Sanusis in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination'. It should be pointed out that in order to prevent Axis propaganda exploiting the rather negative language in which the British declaration was couched, British Information Officers in the Middle East, in publicising the declaration, referred to the principles of the Atlantic Charter and hinted that some form of autonomy for the Sanusis in Cyrenaica would be a natural development after the war. But, at Foreign Office insistence, this was not published or conveyed in written form to Sayyid Idris and his followers since, although it promised the liberation of Cyrenaica, it contained no positive assurance as to the future of the territory. It was sharply criticised by the exiled Tripolitanian leaders as it failed to promise that Tripolitania would also be freed from Italian rule and seemed, by its reference to the Sanusis, to imply prior British recognition of Sanusi leadership in Libya. After Lyttelton's rejection of an outright demand by Sayyid Idris in February 1942 for a written guarantee from the British government of Libyan independence, the exiled Sanusi shaikhs realised that they had little choice but to accept the British government's verbal promises on the future freedom of Cyrenaica.³²

The British found themselves having to honour their promise to the Sanusis in a manner that they had not seriously anticipated. After only a month of occupation, Rommel's counter-offensive forced the British Eighth Army to withdraw east of the Jabal Akhdar at the end of January 1942. Many Sanusi tribesmen from the Jabal, fearing Italian reprisals, fled to Eastern Cyrenaica, which remained under British Military Administration, while others sought refuge in Egypt. Before the British could implement plans for evacuating the whole Arab population (who had now, ironically, become a security risk), from the area of operations, in May Rommel resumed the offensive which enabled him to capture Tobruk and to advance to within sixty miles of Alexandria. The road seemed clear for the Axis capture of Egypt and Mussolini flew from Rome to Cyrenaica in anticipation of his triumphal entry as 'Protector of Islam' into Cairo. Those Sanusis who could escape from Cyrenaica did so, and were evacuated with other Libyan civilians to the Sudan and Palestine, but many were left behind to face the wrath of the Italians. The pro-Allied Libyan leaders, including Sayyid Idris, were persuaded to go to Jerusalem after King Ibn Saud and the Wahhabi leaders refused, on theological grounds, to give them sanctuary in Saudi Arabia.³³

It was not until November 1942, after the Eighth Army's victory at al-Alamain and the third and final British occupation of Cyrenaica, that Great Britain was finally able to redeem its pledges that the Sanusis would never again be subjected to Italian domination. In June 1942 Eden had made clear to the British authorities in Cairo that this entailed the end of Italian rule in Cyrenaica, 'though no explicit statement to that effect has been made or will be made for the present' (it is wrong, therefore, for Rossi to suggest that this was the one certainty emanating from the January declaration).³⁴ This policy was duly carried out by the Military Government in the winter of 1942/43,³⁵ It was made easier by the Italian government's prior withdrawal of its remaining nationals from the territory. The War Office and the Foreign Office stressed that Sayyid Idris was not to be installed as head of a native state in Cyrenaica during the war as Great Britain would be accused of prejudicing the peace settlement. Apart from the requirements of international law there were strong doubts about the administrative capability of Sayyid Idris. The decision to maintain Cyrenaica 'as a purely Arab country like Transjordan' until the end of the war at least allowed the Sanusis to re-establish their life without fear of Italian retribution. The British administrators encouraged the Sanusis to farm the arable land of the Jabal Akhdar on a communal basis. They also started to develop rural and municipal government along native lines in Cyrenaica with the co-operation of Sayyid Idris, who agreed to use his influence with the Cyrenaican Arabs on behalf of the Military Government (Sayyid Idris remained in Cairo until his position had been more clearly defined by a decision on his country's future; he paid a brief and successful visit to Cyrenaica in July 1944). It was a natural progression from this policy for the Foreign Office in London and the British authorities in Cairo to consider some form of Egyptian protection (as part of a barter deal over the Sudan) for an autonomous Sanusis amirate in Cyrenaica after the war, which would meet both the local economic and political needs of a new native state and at the same time satisfy British strategic requirements.³⁶

Tripolitania was *terra incognita* for Great Britain as the Eighth Army never advanced beyond the Sirte Desert until late December 1942. Little attention had been devoted to the problem of military administration, let alone to the question of the future of Tripolitania. It was agreed that Tripolitania should fall under British, rather than American, military jurisdiction in order to preserve internal security and economic stability in Libya.³⁷ The divided state of Tripolitanian politics, combined with the presence of a large Italian minority, discouraged the British from making any commitments on the future of the territory. In contrast to Cyrenaica it was decided to maintain the Italian administrative structure in Tripolitania intact. The country was to be administered in accordance with a strict interpretation of international law on the occupation of enemy territories, on a 'care and maintenance basis'.³⁸ This meant that the British administrators maintained a strict impartiality between the often competing interests of the native majority and the Italian minority.³⁹ Tripolitanian Arab, Jew and Italian alike were represented on the advisory bodies set up by the British military administration. It was not until the late summer of 1943 that Tripolitanian-Arab politicians began to demand that all Italian officials, especially judges, be removed from the B.M.A., that Italian lands, which continued to be farmed by Italian colonists, be returned to the Arabs and that Arab schools be established to educate the Tripolitanians in order that they might govern themselves. When in 1944 many of the Arabs who had formerly resisted the Italians returned from exile, full independence was demanded by a newly-formed Nationalist Party which was allowed free expression of its views, 'but the Arabs showed little success in stabilising their own political organisations'.⁴⁰

Sayyid Idris and the leading Tripolitanian exiles in Cairo had more ambitious plans. They desired nothing less than the creation of an independent amirate in Libya, with Idris as Amir. The Tripolitanians remained opposed to the Sanusis but they hoped, by renewing the idea of a Sanusi amirate, to secure the support of Sayyid Idris in their campaign to extract the same concessions for Tripolitania as the British had made in Cyrenaica. For his part, Sayyid Idris was quite content to draw any political benefits he could from the Tripolitanian initiative but was less anxious to help his rivals escape from their predicament. The British military administrators in Libya and the Chief Political Officer and the Minister of State in Cairo were too absorbed by their task of establishing law and order and reviving the devastated economies of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania to give more than passing attention to the political demands of Sayyid Idris or the exiled Tripolitanian leaders. They were simply told that the future of Libya could only be decided at the peace settlement and until then Italian North Africa would remain under British military administration in accordance with international law. The same curt reply was given by Churchill to King Farouk when the latter, following the British capture of Tripoli in January 1943, tentatively advanced Egypt's claim to Libya.⁴¹

The situation in Tripolitania was complicated by the occupation in January 1943 by Free French forces, commanded by General Leclerc and operating from Chad, of the Fezzan oases of southern Tripolitania and a strip of territory twenty miles wide, including the oases of Ghadames, Derg and Sinauen bordering on south-eastern Tunisia, and the proclamation of French military government. General de Gaulle had territorial designs on southern Libya which was 'le lieu géographique entre le Sud-Tunisien et le Tchad'. The Fezzan was intended to be Free France's share of the 'fruits' of the Allied victory in North Africa. This objective clearly ran counter to the plans of the British military administrators for British control throughout Tripolitania and Saharan Libya, in order to frame a clear-cut administrative policy which would be, as far as possible, in the best interests of the Arab inhabitants. They hoped also to allay Arab fears that western Libya was to be partitioned with the French being allowed to add the Fezzan to their Central African territories.

Developments in French North Africa following the 'Torch' landings were to dictate the British response. Eden and the Foreign Office were anxious to build up de Gaulle's political position vis-à-vis General Giraud in order to encourage the formation of a united front for the liberation of France. The Foreign Office succeeded in persuading the War Office that if the British government pressed de Gaulle to make concessions over the administration of the Fezzan it would only create 'bad blood' between the British and the Free French and undermine de Gaulle's growing prestige. The British military and political authorities in Cairo were forced to concede that considerations of *haute politique* must take precedence over local administrative concerns.⁴²

It soon became plain that the French intended to isolate the Fezzan and the oases on the south-eastern border of Tunisia from the rest of Libya. These territories were integrated administratively and financially with southern Algeria, with the local garrison commanders, who also acted as the political and administrative officers, governing in collaboration with the local prominent family, the Saif-al-Nassir (whose head Ahmad Bey had led the Fezzanese resistance to the Italian occupation before being forced into exile in Chad in 1931; he returned with 'la colonne Leclerc' in 1943 and was installed as *mutasarrif* in Murzuk, the old trading capital of the Fezzan by the Free French). The military administration also pursued a

progressive economic and social policy, accompanied by repression of political activities, in an attempt to persuade the 30,000 Fezzanese of the benefits of continued French rule. In order to facilitate rapid land and air communications between French North and Central Africa, a military road (Track no.5) was built linking Gabes in Tunisia to Lake Chad via Sebha, and airfields established at Ghadames, Ghat, Sebha and Brak. The French initiated these developments in the hope of permanently retaining the Fezzan within French North Africa under the terms of the future peace treaty.⁴³

The varying nature of the military administrations was to influence British thinking on the future of Libya. This developed rapidly following the fall of Italy's last colony in Africa, the signs of an impending collapse in Italy and the first serious peace-feelers put out by disgruntled Italian military and political figures. The formulation of Great Britain's 'desiderata' with regard to the future of the Italian colonies was intended to avoid prejudicing British interests in any future armistice. By early May 1943, as the Allied armies finally overcame the Axis resistance in Tunisia, it was clear from the inter-departmental discussion in Whitehall that opinion was generally in favour of Italy losing its colonies. It was not until August, however, that a relatively junior official in the Foreign Office, Viscount Hood of the Economic and Reconstruction Department, was able to draw up 'preliminary conclusions' on the future of these territories, as a result of further discussions between London, Cairo and Nairobi.⁴⁴

Hood thought that Somalia, along with French Somaliland, British Somaliland and the Ogaden should be formed into a Greater Somalia which, as it would not be ready for independence, should probably be under international trusteeship, preferably with British administration. It was felt that Eritrea should be given to Ethiopia in return for the surrender of the Ogaden, which would be incorporated in Greater Somalia, and subject to the cession of the Bani Amr tribes of North-Western Eritrea to the Sudan and the establishment of base facilities for the use of the United Nations in the Massawa-Asmara area, either under international trusteeship or Ethiopian sovereignty, but administered by Great Britain. But the most influential official in the Foreign Office on Ethiopia at this time, Gilbert Mackereth, of the Egyptian Department, denied that they had reached a preliminary conclusion to this effect. He said there had been little thought on this and regarded it as far more important to secure the agreement of Ethiopia to the adjustment of its frontiers with Kenya and the Sudan than to create a Greater Somalia, including the Ogaden.⁴⁵

As for Libya, Hood proposed a separate fate for Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, which was already implicit in the decision to maintain separate military administrations in these two territories. Cyrenaica might be placed under Egyptian sovereignty or trusteeship, or made into an international trusteeship, subject to the safeguarding of Great Britain's undertakings to the Sanusi and the establishment of extensive military, naval and air facilities for the use of the United Nations. The advantage of Egyptian sovereignty was that it might provide a useful card in extracting facilities for Great Britain's defence requirements in Egypt. But the Foreign Office hoped that the defence of the Suez Canal could be arranged without stationing troops in the Nile Delta and instead depending on a ring of satellite bases around Egypt, including Cyrenaica, Eritrea and Somalia, in which the Strategic Reserve might be located. It was not thought that the Soviet Union, which was assumed by the Foreign Office to be a cooperative and friendly power in the summer of 1943 (although not by the Strategic Planners of the Joint Planning Staff who, in December 1942, had pointed to a possible air

threat in the Red Sea should the Soviets establish themselves in the Persian Gulf) would object, as it would no doubt realise that the Red Sea was a vital sea route for the British Empire. In fact it was at this time that the Soviet government first indicated that it favoured depriving Italy of its colonies and that they expected to be consulted on their future.⁴⁶

None of the various possibilities for Tripolitania (incorporation in the British Empire, cession to the Bey of Tunis or France, or return to Italy under certain conditions) were deemed free from objections. The most likely solution seemed to be to place it under international trusteeship, with Great Britain or Malta, France, the United States, Greece, Turkey, or even Italy, as possible administrators. But the main obstacle to Foreign Office plans remained the Colonial Office, which wanted 'to end not extend the mandate system.' It was in order to outflank the Colonial Office that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Nigel Ronald, was instructed to do some 'discreet snooping' during his visit to Washington to ascertain unofficially American views on the future of the Italian colonies, and especially on international trusteeship, which would enable the Foreign Office to work out detailed proposals for submission to the War Cabinet.⁴⁷

British planning was also affected by American anti-colonialist pressure. The British government recognised the need to diffuse American criticism of British imperialism, since cooperation with the United States was deemed to be both necessary and desirable for the survival of the British Empire. But there was a division of opinion in Whitehall as to how far Britain should go towards the American concept of international trusteeship.⁴⁸ The refusal of the Colonial Office and the Dominions Office, backed by Churchill, to entertain the idea of independence for colonies and dislike of the vague American proposal of international trusteeship meant that Eden and the Foreign Office gave a cool response to Hull's advances on this subject in Washington in April and Quebec in August 1943. As a counter to this the British government, at the instigation of the Colonial Office, evolved the idea of international cooperation on economic and defence matters through regional commissions but with the 'parent' or 'trustee' States retaining control of the development of their colonies in order that they might eventually achieve self-government.⁴⁹

British planning was complicated by various proposals for using these captured territories as temporary or permanent refuges for displaced or persecuted minorities, such as the Greeks, the Assyrians of Iraq and the Jews. The Middle East Relief and Rehabilitation Agency and the Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Middle East (CCAO, ME) in Cairo, Major-General Hone, rejected as unworkable proposals for admitting Greek refugees from Cyprus to Cyrenaica and settling Assyrians in Cyrenaica or Eritrea, although the latter suggestion was briefly reconsidered later in the war.⁵⁰

It is possible to exaggerate the importance of the fact that the Ministerial Committee on Palestine accepted the view of Arnold Toynbee and the Foreign Office Research Department that Jewish settlement in Libya and Eritrea was 'a definite *possibility* though one fraught with economic and political hazards' and approved it in principle. The political departments of the Foreign Office, supported by the Colonial Office and the Deputy Minister of State in the Middle East, Lord Moyne, had already succeeded in scuppering these plans by casting doubts upon their economic and political feasibility. The Jewish settlement project died long before the Palestine partition scheme came to nought in 1944. Ironically, the Foreign Office had been prepared to consider temporary Jewish settlement in Libya

during the war but was opposed by the War Office and the C.C.A.O., M.E. in Cairo on security grounds. In the event, illegal Jewish immigrants and convicted terrorists were sent from Palestine to Eritrea, but not to settle. They were interned.⁵¹

The Allies said nothing in the armistice with Italy about the fate of its colonies in order not to hold out any hope that it would recover them and at the same time not to alienate Italian opinion. The Italian intermediary, General Zanussi, later claimed that the British Minister Resident in the Mediterranean, Harold Macmillan, and the American representative in North Africa, Robert Murphy, had told him that in their personal opinion they thought Libya, Eritrea and Somalia would be returned to Italy, with some slight rectification of the Egyptian frontier, but there is no evidence to corroborate this statement.⁵²

The omission of any reference in the armistice to the future of the Italian colonies, coupled with Churchill's casual remark in the House of Commons on 21 September that 'the Italian Empire has been lost – irretrievably lost'⁵³, was regarded as an ominous sign by prominent Italian exiles, who on their return to Italy, began to agitate for the restoration of Italy's older colonies (Eritrea, Somalia and Libya). Although they received no succour from the British and the Americans, these Italian spokesmen derived some comfort from the fact that the leader of the Free French, General de Gaulle, had intimated to Count Sforza that he would support Italy's claim to remain 'an African power'. He made it clear, however, that whilst he favoured Italy retaining Tripolitania, Eritrea and Somalia, the Italians would have to accept the loss of Cyrenaica to Great Britain, of Fezzan to France, and be prepared to make concessions to Ethiopia in Eritrea.⁵⁴

Rossi has said that the solutions put forward by the British government on the future of the Italian colonies after the war were based on the plans conceived between 1941 and 1943 and that they were symbolised by the idea of a 'Greater Somalia'.⁵⁵ It has been shown, however, that British planning commenced not in 1941 but in 1940, and that if anything symbolised British planning in their period it was the limited declaration in January 1942 that 'His Majesty's Government is determined that at the end of the war the Sanusis in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination', which, as Eden made clear in June 1942, entailed the end of Italian rule in Cyrenaica. The idea of a 'Greater Somalia' was still too nebulous a concept at this stage to be considered a definite British plan, let alone a commitment. But the start of British planning on the future of the Italian colonies should be seen as part of the process of preserving the paramount influence of Great Britain in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East and dealing with the threat posed by Italy and its colonies to the British position in the region.⁵⁶ It should also be noted that, for reasons of imperial strategy, the Foreign Office sought cooperation in the summer of 1943 on the future of the Italian colonies with the State Department. But the extent to which the State Department would take the British position into account in formulating its policy on the Italian colonies would depend not only on developments in the occupied territories but in Washington, London and on the international stage.⁵⁷

Notes.

¹ The only recent monographs, based on Western archival sources, are my own *Cold War in the Desert. Britain, the United States and the Italian Colonies, 1945-1952* (London, 2000) and *War and Politics in the Desert*

(London,2010). There are earlier such studies by G.L. Rossi, *L'Africa Italiana verso L'Indipendenza, 1941-49* (Rome,1980), W.R. Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51. Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford,1984), ch.7 and his 'Libyan Independence, 1951: The Creation of a Client State', in P. Gifford and W.R. Louis, (eds), *Decolonization and African Independence* (London,1988), W.Bowring, 'Great Britain, the United States and the disposition of Italian East Africa', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol 20, No.1 (1992), and S.L. Bills, *The Libyan Arena. The United States, Britain and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945-1948* (London,1995). For a study based on Russian Foreign Ministry files see S. Masrov, 'The USSR and the Former Italian Colonies, 1945-50', *Cold War History*, Vol.3,No.3, (2003).

² G.H. Becker, *The Disposition of the Italian Colonies*, (Annemasse,1952), p.231.

³ I.M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia. Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (Harlow, 1980), p.125.

⁴ After Italy's conquest of Ethiopia in 1936, its older colonies of Eritrea (1890) and Somalia (1905) were incorporated into a unified structure under a viceroy, who resided in Addis Ababa.

⁵ Sayyid Idris (head of the puritanical Sufi order of the Sanusiyya, and the leader of the Sanusi tribes of Cyrenaica), had fled to Egypt following the outbreak of the second Italo-Sanusi war in 1923 (the first war erupted after the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911 and was brought to an inconclusive end by the Bu Maryam Agreement of 1917). Following the Italian 'pacification' of Cyrenaica in 1932, he was joined by the surviving Sanusi shaikhs. The British military authorities had planned to use these exiles to help foment revolt in Libya in the event of war with Italy. But the actual initiative in the formation of this force had been taken by Sayyid Idris and the exiled Sanusi shaikhs themselves; see M. Khadduri, *Modern Libya. A Study in Political Development* (Baltimore, 1963), pp. 29-33; The National Archives (TNA), Kew, Foreign Office: General Correspondence: Political, FO 371/24644/J1830/281/66, Lampson to Halifax, 23.viii.40 and 14.x.40; PRO, War Office, War of 1939 to 1945, Military Headquarters Papers: Middle East Forces, WO 201/336, WO to GHQ, ME, 5.vii.40 and 8.vii.40.

⁶ J. Connell, *Wavell: Scholar and Soldier, to June 1941* (London, 1964), pp. 358-63; FO 371/24645/J2211/2211/66, Beaumont-Nesbitt to Norton, 21.xi.40.

⁷ FO 371/24645/J2211/2211/66, Dixon and Nichol minutes, 2.xii.40.

⁸ *Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, House of Commons*, Vol. 367, col. 128.

⁹ FO 371/25645/J2211/2211/66, Thompson to Beaumont-Nesbitt, 17.xii.40.

¹⁰ FO 371/24645/J2211/2211/66, Beaumont-Nesbitt to Norton 21.xi.40; Rossi, pp. 17-18.

¹¹ FO 371/24644/J1830/281/66, Morton to Hopkinson, 22.viii.40, etc.

FO 371/24645/J2211/2211/66, Norton minute, 30.xi.40, Thompson to Beaumont-Nesbitt, 17.xii.40.

¹² TNA, Cabinet Office, War Cabinet Memoranda, CAB 66/14/W.P. (41)5, 7.i.41; TNA, Cabinet Office, War Cabinet Minutes, CAB 65/17/W.M. 5(41)6, 13.i.41.

¹³ These are glossed over in the semi-official history by Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration of Occupied Territories in Africa during the years 1941-1947* (London, 1948), pp. 20-4, and neglected by Rossi, ch.1; CAB 66/14/W.P. (G) (41)20, 11.ii.41, W.P. (G) (41) 21, 19

¹⁴ Rennell, pp. 34-9; C.C. Segre, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (London, 1974), p. 167; Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford, (hereafter M.E.C.) Longrigg Papers: 'First Quarterly Report.... On Cyrenaica'; FO 371/27571/J3102/143/66, Bateman minute, 11.iii.31.

¹⁵ R. Lamb, *The Ghosts of Peace, 1935-1945* (Salisbury, 1987), p. 179; for discussion of Free Italian Colony see FO 371/27571/27573/29924/29936/29958; CAB 66/15/W.P. (41) 51; CAB 65/17/W.M.17 (41) 1, W.M. 19 (41)12, CAB 65/18/W.M. 28 (41) 11; M.E.C., Killearn Diaries (MS), 26.iii.41.

¹⁶ Lamb, p. 153; FO 371/27454/J153/153/16, Lampson to FO, 23.i.41, FO to Lampson, 20.iii.41; FO 371/27573/J368/527/1011/368/66; Killearn Diaries (MS), 3, 7, 29.ii.41; FO 371/27460/J220/220/16, Woolley to Seymour, 6.ii.41.

¹⁷ FO 371/27573/J874/368/66, Killearn Diaries (MS), 26.ii.41., Baring minute, 11.iv.41; Killearn Diaries (MS), 26.ii.41.

¹⁸ This was the old colony of Eritrea. The Tigrinya-speakers south of the Mareb and Belesa rivers and the 'Afar in the lowlands north of the Awash, which were included within Eritrea after the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-6, were returned to Ethiopia in 1941 and 1944 respectively.

¹⁹ After the rallying of Djibouti to the Free French in December 1942, the British returned the northern part of the belt of Ethiopian territory, from the Ethiopian frontier with Eritrea to the southern shore of Lake Abde, to Ethiopia. They refused, however, to relinquish control of the Franco-Ethiopian railway, or to see Ethiopian rule restored over the North-East part of Harar Province, where the British Somali tribes had their grazing grounds.

²⁰ H. G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, 1941-1974* (London, 1983), pp. 9-12; Rennell, pp. 73-4, 141-7; Great Britain, Foreign Office: *Agreement and Military Convention between the United Kingdom and Ethiopia January 31, 1942, Cmd. 6334* (London, 1942).

²¹ CAB 66/16/W.P. (41) 124, 6.vi.41; CAB 65/18/W.M. 58 (41) 4, 9.vi.41; Bodleian Library, Rhodes House, Oxford, Mitchell Diaries (MS), 9.vi.41; FO 371/27532/J508/1196/508/1; FO 371/27524/J3882/15/1, Ethiopian Committee minutes, 21.xi.41; FO371/27525/J4109/4112/15/1; FO 371/50788/U2619/51/70, Mitchell memo., undated.

²² The indigenous population of the old colony of Eritrea in 1943 numbered some 760,000, divided approximately equally between Coptic Christians on the Central Plateau around Asmara, and Muslims in the Western Province and Eastern Lowlands: see S. H. Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea* (Oxford, 1945), appendix C, p.178.

²³ G.K.N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea. A Colony in Transition: 1941-1952* (London, 1960), pp. 18-24, 36-43; Rennell, pp. 97-140; Marcus, *Ethiopia*, p. 12.

²⁴ Apart from being the 'custodian of Abyssinian tradition', the Coptic Church sought the return of its extensive landed estates, which had been expropriated by the Italian government and which the British refused to return, pending the peace treaty with Italy. Moreover, the Abuna Marqos had co-operated with the Italians and had been consecrated by an Italian puppet Archbishop, the Abuna Abraham, and had every reason to be zealous in the Ethiopian cause if he were to retain his see. Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, pp. 29-36, 46-60.

²⁵ FO 371/31608/J2807/2807/1, Howe to Eden, 29.v.42, Eden to Howe, 27.vi.42; S. Pankhurst, *British Policy in Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia* (Woodford Green, Essex, 1945), pp.2, 10-21; Trevaskis, *Eritrea*, pp. 57-62, 70; L. Ellingson, 'The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950', *Journal of African History*, Vol.18, No. 2 (1977), pp. 261.

²⁶ Lewis, pp. 117-119; Rennell, pp. 50-5, 157-60.

²⁷ Lewis, pp. 119-122; Rennell, pp. 182, 487-8.

²⁸ The idea of creating a 'Greater Somali' had first been mooted in 1941 by Major Erskine and Lieutenant-Colonel Hamilton (two anti-Amhara officers who had been involved in fomenting revolt in Italian East Africa) and Major-General Sir Philip Mitchell. FO 371/27576/J1167/2626/964/66; FO 371/50788/U2619/51/70, Mitchell memo., undated.

²⁹ For discussion of future of Eritrea and Somalis see TNA, Colonial Office, Africa Original Correspondence, CO 847/22/20; Mackereth to Lloyd, 19.xii.41; FO 371/31597/J365/1530/2843/3017/3467/66/1; TNA, Colonial Office, Somaliland Original Correspondence, CO 535/138/46219/1942, Beckett to Glenday, 30.iii.42 etc.; K.D.D. Henderson, *The Making of the Modern Sudan* (London, 1953), p. 267,

³⁰ Khadduri, pp. 34-5; FO 371/27573/J2841/4031/4103/368/66.

³¹ Rossi, p.32; FO 371/27573/J2841/386/66, Lyttelton memo. 'The Sanusis', 21.viii.41; CAB 66/19/WP (41) 232, 4.xi.41; CAB 65/19/W.M. 100 (41) 8, 6.x.41,

³² Khadduri, pp. 34-7; *Parl. Debs., 5th ser. H. of C.*, vol.377, cols. 77-8; for debate between Cairo and London on the wording of the declaration see FO 371/33226/R357/96/22.

³³ R. Casey, *Personal Experience 1939-46* (London, 1962), pp. 112-113; E.A.V. De Candole, *The Life and Times of King Idris* (London, 1988), pp. 63-4; TNA, Air Ministry, Overseas Commands, AIR 23/1298, M.E.W.C. (42) 24, 12.v.42, M.E.W.C. (42) 12th Mtg., Item 6, 13.v.42, 13th Mtg. Item 5, 27.v.42.

³⁴ Rossi, p.29; AIR 23/1298, M.E.W.C (42) 12th Mtg., Item 3, 13.v.42, 13th Mtg., Item 4, 27.v.42; TNA, War Office, British Military Administration of African Territories, WO 230/88, *Report by the Chief Political Officer of 17th of August 1942 on the work of the Political Branch, G.H.Q., M.E.F., and the O.T.A. of Cyrenaica and Eritrea to 30 June 1942*, enclosures 3 and 4; TNA, Foreign Office Administration of African Territories, FO 1015/71, Rucker to Eden, 26.v.42, extract from M.E.W.C. (42) 21, 9.v.42.

³⁵ During the winter of 1942/43 it was decided to adopt a uniform nomenclature for the military government of occupied territories which could be used by both the British Eighth Army and General Eisenhower's armies in French North Africa. The term 'Civil Affairs' was adopted and as a result the 'Political Branches' (e.g. in Cairo) became 'Civil Affairs Branches', the 'Chief Political Officer' became 'Chief Civil Affairs Officer', etc. The old terms continued to be used, however, until the spring of 1943 in correspondence between Cairo and London. Rennell, pp.250-1, 317-318.

³⁶Rennell, pp. 251-7; Segre, pp. 167-8; Khadduri, p.45; FO 1015/71, Home to WO, 27.xii.42 etc.; FO 371/35660/J343/73/66, French to Mackereth, 17.i.43 etc.; FO 371/31587/J3736/5145/1528/16; WO 230/1, Hone to Cumming, 1.xii.42 etc.

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- ³⁷ See FO 1015/74, minute for V.C.I.G.S., 28.ix.42; FO 371/32146/Z10201/10217/8325/17; FO 371/32147/Z10285/8325/17; United States National Archives (USNA), Record Group 59, State Department Decimal Files (hereafter RG59/SDDF) 1940-44, Box 5059, 865C.01/13, Leahy (for J.C.S.) to Hull, 10.xii.42, etc.
- ³⁸ TNA, War Office, Private Office Papers: Permanent-Under-Secretary, WO 258/34, Alexander to Grigg, 8.i.43, Hone to Kennedy, 9.i.43; FO 1015/71, WO to Hone, 9.i.43; CAB 66/34/W.P. (43) 84, 24.ii.43; CAB 65/33/W.M. (43) 36, 1.iii.43.
- ³⁹ The majority of the native population of some 650,000 were of Berber origin, and 23% of them were still Berber-speaking. A large proportion of the Italian population of Tripolitania had not been evacuated, some 50,000 remaining (including 18,000 in Tripoli City) out of a pre-war total of 90,000. There was a long-established Jewish community of about 26,000 concentrated mostly in Tripoli and Garian. Rennell, pp.266-7, 284.
- ⁴⁰ Rennell, pp.284-9, 466.
- ⁴¹ FO 371/35660/J1196/73/66, Bovenschen to Cadogan, 10.ii.43 etc.; FO 371/35661/J3346/3582/4019/4276/73/66; FO 371/35666/J440/440/66, Lampson to Eden, 11.i.43 etc.; FO 371/41511/J9/16, Anderson to FO, 17.xii.43; T. G. Evans, ed. *The Killearn Diaries, 1934-1946* (London, 1972), pp.245-6.
- ⁴² FO 1015/72, Lush to Hone, 12.i.43, etc.; FO 1015/74, Nye minute, 1.xii.42, etc.; FO 371/31987/Z10932/10934/221/17; FO 371/36039/Z1313/1460/1516/3782/4380/95/17; C. de Gaulle, *Memoir de Guerre, l'Appel, 1940-42* (Paris, 1954), pp.249-51, *L'Unite, 1942-1944* (Paris, 1956), pp.29-30, 63, 423; *Lettres, Notes et Carnets, Juillet 1941- Mai 1943* (Paris, 1982), pp.401-3, 510; F. Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle* (London, 1981), pp.216-17, 223-230; R.T. Thomas, *Britain and Vichy. The Dilemma of Anglo-French Relations, 1940-42* (New York, 1979), pp.140-1; S. Kelly, "'Ce Fruit Savoureux de Desert': Britain, France and the Fezzan, 1941-56", *The Maghreb Review*, Vol.26, No.1, (2001), pp.2-21.
- ⁴³ Kersaudy, pp.283-84; Nuffield College, Oxford, Rennell Papers, MS. Rennell I, MS. Rennell 4, Chapter XII, p.30-1; G.E. Kirk, *The Middle East in the War* (London, 1953), pp.401-2; J. Wright, *Libya. A Modern History* (London, 1981), pp. 49-50; United Nations General Assembly. General A/1387, 22.ix.50, pp. 9-16; FO 1015/72, C.C.A.O. memo, 17.v.43 etc.; FO 371/50792/U7102/51/70, Reid to FO, 11.ix.43; FO 371/69406/J1052/277/66, F.O.R.D. memo, 'The Fezzan', 12.ii.48.
- ⁴⁴ W.R. Louis, *Imperialism at Bay* (Oxford,1977), pp.64-5; FO 371/35414/U1860/682/70, Hood minute, 4.v.43.
- ⁴⁵ FO 371/35414/U3575/682/70, Hood minute, 11.viii.43, Mackereth minute, 16.viii.43.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*; FO 371/35407/U516/516/70, MSC/53 (Revise), 22.vi.43, 'Record of the meeting at the Foreign Office on 23 June, 29.vi.43; TNA, Cabinet Office, Joint Planning Staff: Files, CAB 119/65, JP (42) 1025, 20.xiii.42; J. Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-49* (Leicester,1993), pp.12-13.
- ⁴⁷ FO 371/35414/U3575/682/70, Hood minute, 11.viii.43; Louis, *Imperialism*, p.67.
- ⁴⁸ For the development of U.S State Department thinking on trusteeship, see H. A. Notter, Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945 (Washington D.C.,1949), and USNA, RG 59/Lot 60D 224, Records of Harley A. Notter, 1939-1945, especially Boxes 54-56, 59-63, and 76, 79, and 85 which contain material on Italian Colonies.
- ⁴⁹ Kent, p.10; Louis, *Imperialism*, pp.214-16, 219, 227-9, 251, 258, 276.
- ⁵⁰ FO 371/36714/W7091/1731/48, Casey to FO, 8.v.43, etc.; CAB 66/36/W.P. (43) 193, 4.v.43; WO 230/168, Hone to French, 28.v.43, etc.; FO 371/33500/E1286/148/93, Baxter to Under-Secretary of State for Air, 3.iv.43; FO 371/45288/E1270/3870/5098/78/93.
- ⁵¹ Louis, *Imperialism*, pp.60-2; CAB 66/36/W.P. (43) 178, 28.iv.43; TNA, Prime Minister's Office: Confidential Papers: PREM 4/52/1, Amery to Churchill, 29.iv.43; PREM 4/52/5/Pt.2/W.P. (43) 337, 26.vii.43; TNA, Cabinet Office, War Cabinet Committees on the Middle East and Africa: CAB 95/14/P (M) (43) 29, 20.xii.43; FO 371/36714/W14309/15550/1731/48; see also S. Kelly, "'Annexes au foyer national juif en Palestine.'" Churchill, Roosevelt et la question des colonies de peuplement juives en Libye et en Erytree (1943-1944)', *Maghreb-Machrek*, No.204, Ete 2010.
- ⁵² TNA, Prime Minister's Office: Operations Papers: PREM 3/247, Eden to Churchill, 21.ix.43; texts of the armistice may be found in Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents relating to the Conditions of an Armistice with Italy (September-November 1943)*, Cmd. 6693 (London, 1945); Rossi, pp.43-4.
- ⁵³ *Parl. Debs*, 5th ser., H. of C., Vol.399, col. 102.
- ⁵⁴ Kirk, p.403; Rossi, pp.47-8; FO 371/37257/R11872/131/22, Makins to Dixon, 11.xi.43; de Gaulle, *L'Unite*, p.193; FO 371/36105/Z10848/10848/17, Makins to FO, 18.x.43.
- ⁵⁵ Rossi, p.4.
- ⁵⁶ Kent, p.11.

⁵⁷ For the next stage of this question, see S. Kelly, 'The Colonial versus the Anti-Colonial: The Failure of Anglo-American Planning on the Future of the Italian Colonies, September 1943-June 1945', in C. Baxter, M.K. Dockrill and K. Hamilton, *Britain in Global Politics. Vol.1 From Gladstone to Churchill* (London,2013), pp.261-281; also S. Kelly, 'Britain, Libya and the Start of the Cold War', *The Maghreb Review*, Vol.31, Nos.1-2, (2006), pp.42-61.