

4 Challenges to, and the fall of, the Fascist State, c1935–46

Italy's international standing in 1935

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When Mussolini came to power he had certain foreign policy aims, including modernising Italy's armed forces and expanding her colonies in North Africa. He did not have a plan to achieve them, however. By the end of the 1920s, Mussolini was more secure in his power and became more adventurous in foreign policy.

Mussolini's foreign policy aims

Mussolini's early aims were to:

- achieve 'Great Power' status for Italy, making her an equal of Britain and France
- promote fascism and Italian prestige abroad, and gain colonial possessions
- establish Italian dominance in the Mediterranean, the Adriatic Sea and the Balkans, especially in Albania.

Problems with achieving these aims

In 1922, Italy had little influence on the international stage. Britain and France were still the key powers, they supported the Versailles settlement and both ruled over powerful empires. Italy could not challenge Britain and France in either military or diplomatic terms at this point. This did not stop Mussolini being determined to reverse the Treaty of Versailles, although he maintained good relations with Britain and France on the surface.

Mussolini's theory of encirclement

In Mussolini's speeches he both claimed friendship with Italy's First World War allies and denounced them as 'parasites'. He declared that he would destroy the British Empire and developed a theory that Italy was a prisoner in the Mediterranean, encircled by British and French military bases. This became the centre of Mussolini's foreign policy.

Mussolini and the search for allies

Strong alliances were necessary if Italy was to begin an assertive foreign policy. Mussolini signed treaties with many European countries in the early–mid 1920s. They were largely commercial treaties, though, and did not bring him the prestige he sought.

Mussolini had a reputation for switching allegiances when the circumstances suited him, so the treaties counted for little politically. Mussolini's search for allies had the reverse effect to that which he intended: he acquired a rather negative reputation as a politician as a result of it.

The impact of foreign policy success and failure before 1934

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Fascist propaganda depicted Mussolini as a heroic figure, outwitting foreign statesmen and defending Italian interests. In fact, the picture was much more mixed before 1934, with some successes and some failures.

Corfu, 1923

In August 1923, an Italian general, Enrico Tellini, and four of his aides were assassinated in Greece. They were part of a League of Nations mission to establish the location of the border between Greece and Albania. Mussolini made extensive demands on Greece, including an official apology and an indemnity of 50 million lire.

When the Greek Government refused these terms Mussolini ordered the bombardment and occupation of Corfu.

The matter was referred by the League of Nations to the Conference of Ambassadors, which largely supported Italy. Greece was ordered to pay the indemnity. Britain demanded the withdrawal of Italian forces from Corfu and Mussolini was forced to comply. The Corfu Incident showed Italy could not claim equal Great Power status. It revealed the constraints on Italian foreign policy, but also that international organisations could condone the threats of dictators like Mussolini.

The Balkans, 1924–26

When Ahmed Zog took power in Albania in 1924, Mussolini seized the opportunity to pressurise Yugoslavia into accepting Italian influence in the Balkans. He gave Zog financial support and in 1926 signed a treaty of friendship which confirmed Albania's position as an Italian **satellite state**. Albania bordered Yugoslavia, and Mussolini further destabilised Yugoslavia by supporting Croatian separatist groups and right-wing militias.

The Locarno Treaties, 1925

A conference of representatives from Britain, France, Germany and Italy was held at Locarno in Switzerland in an attempt to ease rising tensions in Europe. It proved very successful. Germany's western frontiers were confirmed, and the powers committed themselves to further work on settling Germany's eastern borders. Mussolini was content to work with the European powers, and Locarno presented Italy as a major European power.

The Kellogg–Briand Pact, 1928

In 1928, Mussolini signed the Kellogg–Briand Pact, outlawing war as a means to resolving conflict between powers. Nine powers signed the pact on 27 August 1928. A further 56 nations signed it afterwards.

Mussolini tried to use the pact as a chance to demonstrate his influence, attempting to persuade the delegates to travel to Rome to sign it. This proposal failed. The pact carried little weight with the powers, and Mussolini dismissed it in the Italian parliament shortly after signing it.

Relations with Britain, France and Germany

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Relations between Fascist Italy and the other European powers wavered in the 1920s and early 1930s. Mussolini was torn between trying to maintain cordial relations with all the powers while having expansionist goals.

Britain and France

Mussolini was wary of straining relations with Britain and France. He portrayed himself as supportive of their interests. The following actions were intended to demonstrate this approach:

- Italy remained a member of the League of Nations.
- Mussolini signed the Locarno Treaties.
- He signed the Kellogg–Briand Pact.
- He reached agreement with Britain about colonial borders in North Africa.

Though Mussolini signed these agreements he was not fully committed to them, but was prepared to exploit the changing international situation to benefit himself and Italy. He hoped his actions would win him the favour of Britain and France, which would hopefully lead to concessions in Italy's favour.

Germany

In the late 1920s, Mussolini began to fund German right-wing political groups in the hope that a pro-Fascist government would emerge. He was aware that a strong Germany would act as a counter-balance to the power of Britain and France, and hoped this would make them more supportive of Italian aims in the Balkans and North Africa.

Relations were tense between Germany and Italy when Hitler came to power in 1933. Mussolini called for a Four-Power Conference in Rome between Italy, France, Britain and Germany following Hitler's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and League of Nations.

Mussolini pronounced the conference a great triumph for Italy but it ended with no resolution, and Mussolini was still afraid that Fascist Italy would be subordinated to Nazi Germany.

Austria was on Italy's northern border, and Mussolini was concerned that Germany might seize any opportunity to annex the German-speaking state. He encouraged the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss to clamp down on Austrian Nazis and create a regime based on Fascist principles. When Dollfuss was assassinated by Austrian Nazis in July 1934 Mussolini feared a German invasion of Austria. He sent 40,000 troops to the Austrian border to discourage Hitler from taking action.

The Stresa Front, 1935

Hitler's announcement in 1935 that Germany was developing her air force, introducing military conscription and rearming contravened the Treaty of Versailles. Mussolini called for a meeting with Britain and France to discuss these actions. The conference was arranged in April 1935 in Stresa, northern Italy.

- All three powers criticised German rearmament, which contravened the Treaty of Versailles.
- They agreed to co-operate to prevent any country from abandoning previously agreed peace treaties.
- They reaffirmed their support for the 1925 Locarno Treaties.
- They agreed to support an independent Austria.

Result

This was the high point of Mussolini's co-operation with Britain and France. The Stresa Front was vague, however, and did not include specific commitments for action from any power. They were not prepared to invade Germany to prevent further breaches of the Treaty of Versailles.

There was also division between the three powers on how to deal with Hitler. Britain undermined the pact when they signed the Anglo–German naval agreement in June 1935 without consulting France or Italy, and Mussolini used this as an excuse for abandoning it.

Foreign policy, 1935–40

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The invasion of Abyssinia and its consequences

At Stresa, Mussolini gained the mistaken impression that Britain and France would condone an Italian invasion and takeover of Abyssinia. There were several reasons why Mussolini was determined to launch a campaign in Africa:

- To satisfy Italy's Nationalist and colonial ambitions and increase the regime's popularity at home.
- To provide fascism with a major propaganda victory.
- To demonstrate to the world that Italy was a major power.

In December 1934, a military confrontation took place at the Wal Wal oasis in which 150 Abyssinians and 50 Italians were killed. Mussolini used the Wal Wal incident to prepare for the invasion of Abyssinia. He built up his forces throughout the summer of 1935 and had 220,000 troops on the Abyssinian border by October. The Abyssinian Emperor, Haile Selassie, sought support from the League of Nations, but the League refused to intervene.

Invasion, 1935

Mussolini authorised the invasion of Abyssinia on 3 October 1935. He hoped for a quick victory. Adowa was captured on 6 October, the site of a humiliating defeat for Italy in 1896. After this, however, the advance was slow.

In 1936, Italy finally won the war with a massive military build-up involving 600,000 troops and air power. The final assault on the capital, Addis Ababa, resulted in Selassie's exile and the end of the war on 5 May 1936.

It was trumpeted as a huge Italian victory and resulted in growing popularity for Mussolini at home. However, there were many negative consequences:

- The economic cost of the war was huge. It led to the devaluation of the lira, and reduced Italy's trade with Africa.
- Garrisons were established which occupied a large number of troops.
- Italy used mustard gas against Abyssinian civilians, which gave them a reputation for brutality.

Impact of the Abyssinian Campaign

Tensions grew with Britain and France. They did not want to push Mussolini towards Nazi Germany but recognised the need to prevent further aggression by him. They supported only limited sanctions against Italy. The Hoare–Laval Pact of December 1935 stated that Italy could retain most of Abyssinia but a smaller independent nation would be established. This was rejected by Mussolini and condemned in Britain and France. From 1936 onwards the relationship between Italy, France and Britain was arguably damaged beyond repair.

Intervention in the Spanish Civil War and its consequences

Mussolini decided to support General Franco, a fellow Fascist, who was involved in a civil war against supporters of the Spanish Second Republic. This was partly because France supported the Republicans and Mussolini wanted to gain more influence in the Mediterranean. He also did not want to seem subservient to Hitler, who also supported Franco.

He provided air, ground and artillery support for Franco, who defeated the Republicans in March 1939. The German and Italian military support was a key reason for this. Britain and France did not provide the Republicans with the same level of support. They refused to offer any official support and declared neutrality. Italy and Germany argued they were preventing the rise of socialism in Europe, as the Republicans received support from Stalin and the USSR.

Public opinion turned against Italy in western democracies. There was widespread sympathy for the Spanish Republican cause across Europe. Mussolini's relationship with Hitler and Franco severely damaged relations with Britain and France.

Franco's victory strengthened the position of Germany and Italy within Europe and weakened France and Britain. For Italy, the intervention had negative financial consequences. Much money was spent, Italian trade was disrupted and military strength sapped. Italy was involved in the conflict for a much longer period than Mussolini had hoped for.

The move towards Germany

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The relationship between Italy and Germany was heavily influenced by the personalities of the two leaders.

Mussolini admired and feared Hitler's growing power by the end of the 1930s, and Hitler influenced Mussolini's foreign policy decisions towards the end of the 1930s.

In 1938, Hitler carried out the *Anschluss*, the invasion and annexation of Austria. Mussolini's agreement to *Anschluss* in 1938 led to him losing popularity in Italy, despite it being obvious that Mussolini could not prevent Germany annexing Austria. It also led to Mussolini becoming the weaker partner in his relationship with Hitler. There were three main reasons why Mussolini and Hitler moved closer together by the end of the 1930s:

- The worsening relationship between Italy, Britain and France and the breakdown of the Stresa Front.
- The Italian economy became more dependent on Germany from 1936.
- By the end of the 1930s Mussolini was becoming more impressed by Hitler personally.

These factors resulted in the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact on 6 November 1937 with Germany and Japan, a pact driven by a hatred of communism. These powers would become known as the Axis Powers, and made a formal alliance between Italy and Germany more likely.

Impact of the Sudetenland Crisis, 1938

In 1938, Hitler sought the return of the Sudetenland, given to Czechoslovakia in the Treaty of Versailles. This worsened European tensions. Mussolini recommended a conference in Munich between Britain, Italy, France and Germany to resolve the crisis. This provided Hitler with a diplomatic way to regain the territory, and the resulting agreement did this on 30 September 1938.

The Italian annexation of Albania, March 1939

In March 1939, Mussolini ordered the invasion of Albania. It was launched on 25 March and quickly defeated the small Albanian force. King Zog fled to London, and a Fascist regime was set up. As a result, Britain and France guaranteed military support to Greece and Turkey, convincing Mussolini of the need to draw even closer to Germany.

Domestic tensions

The alliance with Germany, the introduction of anti-Semitic laws and the possibility of war appalled the Italian elites and some Fascists. Anti-German feeling was reported among all social classes and the population was unprepared and unenthusiastic about war. The propaganda and military spending caused anger and ridicule, and Fascist squads were used to violently attack those who questioned the regime. Mussolini still remained relatively popular but criticism of the Fascist regime was increasing.

The Pact of Steel, 1939

The Pact of Steel was signed on 22 May 1939 and was a formal alliance between Germany and Italy. Hitler wanted the alliance because of his plans to invade Poland in 1939. The alliance would mean British and French forces remaining in the Mediterranean instead of fighting in Germany.

The pact committed Germany and Italy to supporting each other in time of war even if they had started the war. Effectively Italy was committed to following Hitler's foreign policy. After signing the pact Mussolini sent Hitler a message that Italy did not want to enter a war for at least three years. Hitler ignored this and invaded Poland in September 1939.

Italian neutrality, 1939–40

Italy remained neutral until June 1940. She was supportive of Germany's actions but was not prepared to join the fighting. There were several reasons why Mussolini chose neutrality:

- The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939) was a secret agreement between Germany and the USSR to divide Poland and avoid war for ten years. Mussolini portrayed this as a betrayal of the pact against communism.
- Mussolini was playing a waiting game – he did not want to commit to the losing side of the war.
- Italy was not ready for war – Italy's economy, industry and military were unprepared for war. Modernisation processes were incomplete.

The impact of the Second World War, 1940–43

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Hitler's *blitzkrieg* attack against France on 10 May 1940 was successful, and German forces made quick progress. Mussolini was frustrated by Italy's neutrality and decided that Italy would enter the war. This happened on 10 June 1940, for the following reasons:

- He feared Italy becoming a second-rate nation in a Europe dominated by Germany.
- Mussolini believed in war and violence as a way to achieve political goals and glorify fascism.
- Mussolini was a victim of his own propaganda and had to maintain the image of a man of action.
- It appeared that the Allies were close to defeat, and Mussolini wanted to make territorial gains.

Italy's entrance into the war was not welcomed within Italy or by Hitler.

Military failures in France, North Africa and the Mediterranean

The Italian army suffered a series of humiliations rather than glorious victories. Italy was the minor partner in the Axis alliance.

France

On 21 June 1940, France declared an armistice with Nazi Germany, and Italy launched an offensive along the Alpine front. Italy's army only advanced a few miles before stalling due to resistance by French troops. The armistice was signed on 22 June. Mussolini hoped to gain a lot of territory but was not invited to the armistice. Italy received only a small amount of territory – two small towns.

North Africa

Mussolini was affronted at the insignificant gains from the French offensive. He tried to make gains in North Africa, ignoring the advice of his generals and invading British Somaliland. Troops were also sent into Egypt and towards the Suez Canal in September 1940. This inevitably prompted a counter-attack, one that was devastating to Italian forces. British forces advanced and took territory in Libya and by April 1941 took Abyssinia. One hundred and twenty five thousand Italian soldiers were taken prisoner and German forces had to be sent in to retrieve the situation.

Despite the arrival of German forces, the Axis powers were on the retreat in North Africa in 1942. They surrendered on 12 May 1943, paving the way for the Allied invasion of Sicily two months later.

The Mediterranean

Mussolini's failure to act decisively in the Mediterranean highlighted the weaknesses of the Italian navy and air force:

- Gibraltar was an important choke point for Britain in the Mediterranean. Even after Britain's land forces were ejected from Europe in 1940, Italy was reluctant to take action to secure the colony.
- Malta posed a constant threat of a close blockade of southern Italy by British naval and air bases. Italian forces had not had sufficient training to launch an amphibious attack on the island. Malta also threatened Italy's supply lines with Libya.
- In 1940, Mussolini refused Hitler's offer of the French colony of Tunisia, fearing that Italy would be dragged into a prolonged campaign by the French colonial authorities.

Disaster in Greece

Mussolini decided to use Albania as a base to invade Greece and gain some more territory. He did not inform Hitler as he saw the Balkans as his own sphere of influence. On 26 October 1940, Mussolini's ambassador presented Greece with an ultimatum – to grant Italy the right to occupy areas of Greece in exchange for Italian neutrality. Unsurprisingly, Greece rejected the offer. On 28 October 1940, therefore, 70,000 Italian troops invaded Greece from Albania.

The invasion did not proceed as planned. The Italian commanders thought it would take only two weeks to occupy Greece but the army was too small and poorly led. While the Greek army was small it was determined and knew the territory well. They offered significant resistance, pushing the campaign into the winter. Many Italian soldiers surrendered, and a Greek counter-attack in December 1940 drove the Italians back into Albania. A spring offensive made little progress, as did massive reinforcements. The British navy inflicted another crushing defeat on the Italian navy at Cape Matapan in March 1941.

The Greek campaign made Italy a laughing stock around Europe and drew Hitler's disapproval. In spring 1941, Germany invaded and took over Greece and Yugoslavia. Both countries surrendered by May 1941. The Balkan coast was under German control and Italy was clearly the junior partner once again in the Axis alliance.

War economy and military weakness

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In 1940, the Italian economy and military were unprepared for war. The army was poorly equipped, undermanned and badly commanded, and there were shortages of fuel and ammunition. Furthermore, Allied bombing raids into northern Italy dramatically dented industrial production.

Italy's economy was not geared towards war production. Italy's proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) directed towards war production never exceed 25 per cent. This strongly contrasted with Germany, where the figure was 64 per cent. As a result, weapons, clothing and food were in short supply. It meant smaller British forces could defeat substantial Italian armies.

Fascist Italy had failed to develop an efficient centralised economy directed towards efficient war production. The bureaucratic system was poorly led, inefficient and corrupt. There was no economic reorganisation and vital war materials had not been stockpiled prior to June 1940.

The Italians depended almost entirely on German coal for fuel due to a shortage of oil imports. Germany could only send 1 million tonnes of coal per month, and many Italian factories lacked basic raw materials. This led to a poor rate of weapon and ammunition production. Steel production even fell in wartime. By 1942, a better level of arms production was achieved but this was then destroyed in Allied bombing raids which began in the autumn of 1942.

Italy's military weaknesses

Italy's military forces had many different weaknesses:

General weakness	Specifics
Command structures	There were no unified lines of command and a limited hierarchy below Mussolini. This led to a lack of co-ordination with disastrous results.
Mussolini	He insisted on being involved with strategy and command but made disastrous and ill-informed decisions. He had little experience of war or foreign policy, and failed to establish a coherent strategy.
Training	The military academies were outdated and field officers poorly trained. The training they had was obsolete.
Lack of strategy	There was an overall lack of planning or strategy.
Poor morale	The army was used to losing by spring 1941, and although the soldiers fought with courage they were badly supplied and equipped, not to mention unenthusiastic about the cause.
Equipment	Weapons were inadequate. There were only enough weapons to arm half of the units, and due to the lack of planning the artillery was often sent to the wrong place. The army was largely an infantry army, often using the same equipment as in the First World War.
Supplies	Clothing and food rations were inadequate. The rations were low, and the clothing supplied was worse than in the First World War.

Political tensions in 1943

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Italy's entry into the Second World War led to increasing opposition to Mussolini and fascism.

Causes of political tensions

From late 1942, disillusion with, and opposition to, Mussolini and the Fascist regime grew dramatically. Allied bombing raids took their toll on national morale. Protests turned into political and anti-Fascist demonstrations. When the Government restricted an evacuation allowance to heads of families only, 100,000 workers went on strike for a week in March 1943, the most significant series of strikes since 1925.

Workers began to protest openly about their working conditions. These were fuelled by longer working hours, more stringent working conditions and increased bombing raids on factories. The strikes in March 1943 marked the start of more organised opposition to the regime. Moreover, many factories were at a standstill because of a lack of fuel and raw materials.

Declining living standards were an important reason for opposition to the Fascist regime. Food shortages were endemic, and prices rose to unprecedented levels. Groups that had been historically opposed to fascism, for example Catholics, Socialists and supporters of democracy, saw a chance to attract support and oppose the regime. Socialist and communist groups, encouraged by the extent of the Milan strikes, grew in numbers and influence. The Fascist propaganda machine began to fall apart in 1943 as an increasing number of people listened to the news from trusted sources such as Britain's world service and the Vatican's radio service.

Other factors added to the political and social crisis facing the regime in 1943:

- Returning soldiers with tuberculosis brought news of the conditions at the front line, adding to the anger and disillusionment of the population.
- The loss of 200,000 Italian soldiers at Stalingrad infuriated Italians who saw that as Germany's war. Additionally, skilled Italian workers had been sent to work in German factories.
- Many Italians were opposed to the brutal methods used by German forces in Greece and Yugoslavia.
- Younger Fascists were angered by the exemption of senior PNF men from military service, and criticism of corruption and inefficiency increased.

As a result, PNF party numbers fell dramatically.

By mid-July 1943, Italy was close to military defeat. Allied forces had landed in Sicily and were making rapid advances against both Italian and German forces. Mussolini blamed a range of people for this, from various Italian generals to Hitler. Most Italians, however, saw Mussolini as the reason for their problems. They were convinced that the war had been lost, and they wanted to abandon the German alliance, remove Mussolini from power and reach a peace agreement with the Allies. By 1943, this view was also held by leading Italian Fascists.

The Allied invasion and the removal of Mussolini, July 1943

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Allied forces landed in Sicily on 10 July 1943. They hoped the invasion would lead to the collapse of the Italian Fascist regime and the withdrawal of Italy from the war. US forces were led by Lieutenant General Patton and General Montgomery led the British ground forces. The main forces landed in Sicily. British and American soldiers drove the German and Italian troops from Sicily after 38 days of fighting. The Italian mainland was now under serious threat of invasion and defeat seemed inevitable for Italy.

Allied troops encountered only light resistance. Hitler had only left two German divisions in Sicily, and the defence was also weakened by German and Italian losses in North Africa.

The Allied invasion of Sicily fatally undermined the Fascist regime. On 25 July 1943, Mussolini was deposed and arrested and the first Italian troops withdrew from Sicily. Hitler instructed German forces to make withdrawal plans but also to continue their fierce resistance to Allied attacks. Axis troops were driven back towards the north-eastern corner of Sicily.

As Allied forces closed in on the port of Messina, the German and Italian armies successfully evacuated 100,000 men and various vehicles, supplies and ammunition to the Italian mainland. On 17 August 1943, US forces entered Messina and discovered Axis forces had evacuated. This undermined the Allied victory, but the next stage was to invade the mainland in September.

Mussolini deposed, July 1943

Mussolini's removal was partly caused by King Victor Emmanuel III. He was pressurised into action by frustrated Italian generals. It was also partly caused by opposition to Mussolini from within the Fascist Grand Council. This was significant since they had been selected for their loyalty and had never seriously threatened his position before.

In 1943, Mussolini announced his intention of holding a meeting of the Grand Council. It had not met since the beginning of the Second World War. He hoped to pressurise its members to declare their support for him and his policies.

Leading Fascists such as **Dino Grandi** saw this as an opportunity to remove Mussolini. The military defeats and subservient relationship to Germany had made them lose faith in Mussolini as leader. Grandi, Giuseppe Bottai and Count Galeazzo Ciano aimed to persuade the other Grand Council Members to support Grandi's resolution that the Council had lost confidence in Mussolini as Fascist leader of Italy. The King would become the head of the Grand Council and parliament.

The meeting was held on 24 July. Mussolini seemed to be taken by surprise during the meeting, especially when the Council voted 19 to 7 to support Grandi's resolution. Mussolini initially ignored the vote and met with the King on 25 July. He intended to intimidate the King into supporting him.

During the meeting the King informed Mussolini that he believed the war was lost, and that Mussolini had been replaced as Prime Minister by Marshal Badoglio. He was then arrested and taken away as a prisoner. Mussolini was liberated in a daring raid by German paratroopers on 12 September 1943 and placed in charge of the **Republic of Salò**.

The Allied invasion, the Republic of Salò and the Government in the south

Following the invasion of Sicily, the Allies planned to invade mainland Italy. This, alongside Mussolini's rescue by German paratroopers, led to the establishment of two separate Governments in Italy.

The Allied invasion

American troops landed on the Italian coast at Salerno on 9 September 1943. The German army nearly succeeded in pushing back US forces. They halted the Allied army advance for four months. It took Allied soldiers four gruelling battles over several months to break through heavily fortified Monte Cassino and the Gustav Line of German defence. This was finally achieved in May 1944. The German commander, Field Marshal Kesselring, managed to organise a successful retreat of most of his army, which prolonged fighting further.

American forces entered Rome on 4 June 1944, but the D-Day landings in Normandy were scheduled for 6 June and this took priority over the Italian campaign. Six Allied divisions were removed from Italy as a result of D-Day, and heavy rain further delayed advances.

The priority for the Allied High Command was to keep as many German divisions in Italy as long as possible rather than to achieve a rapid victory, which meant the war in Italy was brutal and protracted.

Northern Italy became the scene of a vicious civil war between Italian Fascists and **partisans** who were determined to destroy the Fascist regime.

The Republic of Salò

The Italian Social Republic, commonly referred to insultingly as the Republic of Salò, was established by the Nazis in northern Italy with Mussolini at its head. There was no clear central authority for the Republic of Salò. Hitler would not let Mussolini establish a central government in Milan because of fears he would develop an effective power base and threaten German interests in Italy. Rome was made the official capital even though it was not under Mussolini's control.

The republic only lasted 600 days. Mussolini was both Head of State and Foreign Minister, and refused to

recognise the authority of the Italian King. Various government departments were established under loyal Fascists, and the PNF was replaced by the Republican Fascist Party. The small membership of this party shows how unpopular fascism was after 1943.

The republic had an army, navy and air force, which fought alongside German forces with around 50,000 men. Fear and oppression was used to 'encourage' participation. There was a Fascist police force and militia, who played a key role in fighting partisans.

All those who voted for Grandi's motion on 25 July (see page 86) were condemned to death and five were executed – including Mussolini's son-in-law Count Galeazzo Ciano.

The power of the Salò Republic was very limited for the following reasons:

- Many Italians had lost faith in Mussolini and the Fascists.
- The Republic heavily depended on German support.
- Mussolini was treated as a puppet leader by the Germans.
- Mussolini had lost his charisma and was suffering from ill health.
- By 1944, the partisans posed a serious threat to German forces and the Salò Republic.

The Government in the south

The part of Italy ruled by the King and Provisional Government was small. The Allies directly ruled Sicily and most of southern Italy as the Allied Military Government (AMG). The Provisional Government controlled Sardinia and four south-eastern provinces. The Government had minimal influence, even after the signing of an Armistice on 8 September 1943. It barely had an army. It was initially led by Marshal Badoglio, who was replaced by Ivanoe Bonomi as Badoglio was seen as being too close to the Fascist Government.

Fighting in Italy was slow and bitter, with many Italians having to live in terrible conditions with an extortionate black market and widespread corruption. This made Italians less supportive of the Allies. Gradually politics in the south returned to 'normal' – alliances of Catholics, Socialists and Liberals coming together to form a government.

German surrender and Mussolini's death, 1945

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By 1945, the collapse of fascism and the defeat of German forces in Italy were inevitable. Without the support of German troops the Salò Republic could not survive.

The German surrender

In January 1944, Allied troops landed at Anzio and in May the German Gustav defensive line collapsed. Cassino fell into Allied hands. By April 1945, Germany was on the verge of defeat across Europe and her troops in Italy rapidly retreated to the Austrian border.

At 61 years old, Mussolini lacked the charisma and energy of his early years in power. He was a broken man by this point. Mussolini blamed the Italian population for the failure to achieve the glorious expansion of the Italian empire and the vast majority of Italians were no longer motivated or persuaded by Fascist propaganda. Mussolini hoped a new German miracle would reverse the Allies' military advance. He also hoped that the USA and Britain would turn on the USSR and would need the support of Italy and Germany, but those hopes were completely unrealistic.

On 9 April 1945, the Allies launched a final push into northern Italy. Allied soldiers pushed across the Po Valley in northern Italy in May 1945 and German forces in Italy surrendered on 2 May 1945, two days after the collapse of Berlin.

Mussolini's death

Mussolini tried to leave Italy with an entourage when the Allied advance began, heading for the border to Switzerland on 25 April. Mussolini had no clear plan. He and the German military envoy that was leaving at the same time were stopped by communist partisans near the border, and Mussolini taken prisoner. Mussolini, his mistress and other leading Fascists were executed and their bodies displayed publicly in Milan.

Italian partisans

Partisan resistance groups were active throughout northern and much of central Italy after September 1943. Many were former soldiers cut off from home (including former British, Greek and Slav prisoners of war) and still in possession of their weapons, while others did not want to be conscripted by Mussolini. They specialised in surprise attacks, sabotage, seizure of goods and political assassination. Partisans were fighting three types of war: a civil war against Italian Fascists, a war of national liberation against German occupation and a class war against the ruling elites. The communists led the largest group of partisans, numbering at least 50,000 in 1944, and fought for all these reasons, while Catholic and monarchist partisans had different priorities.

The outcomes of the referendum and elections in 1946

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The Second World War was disastrous for Italy, leading to high unemployment, high cost of living and the loss of nearly all her colonies. Italy's first post-war Government was established in June 1945. It consisted of Socialists, Communists and Christian Democrats, providing a show of unity. After five months a new Government was formed in November 1945. It was dominated by the Christian Democrats, the successors of the Catholic *Popolari*.

The 1946 referendum on the monarchy

After the war, King Victor Emmanuel III was unable to regain his authority and he abdicated in April 1946. The King hoped that his son, Umberto, might revive popular support for the monarchy in time for the referendum on the monarchy in May. However, the Italians voted by 52 per cent to 48 per cent to abolish the Savoy monarchy and establish a republic. Italy therefore became a republic in 1946, but opinion was not evenly spread throughout the country: the north voted mostly for a republic, while the south voted to keep the monarchy. The royal family went into exile and Enrico de Nicola became the provisional head of a new republican state. A new electoral system was introduced, based upon proportional representation.

The elections of 1946

Elections were held for a new 'Constituent Assembly' on the same day as the referendum on the monarchy. For the first time, the electoral franchise was extended to allow women to vote in the election. The election results were interesting: the Christian Democrats, the Catholic heirs to the *Popolari*, won 35.2 per cent of the vote and 207 seats. The Communists won 102 seats, the Socialists 115, the Liberals 41 and the other minor parties made up the rest of the Assembly. The three main parties made up the Government, alongside the new Republican Party, which had 23 seats.

The senate was to be elected, the President was a largely symbolic figure and the Prime Minister was elected mainly by the parliament. Government was to be by a cabinet of ministers which would be responsible to the parliament. This Government was anti-Fascist by construction and definition. It was a weak government that would not be able to repeat the Fascist years.

The Second World War had a horrendous impact on Italy but it paved the way for the collapse of fascism and the emergence of democracy.

Exam focus

REVISED

Below is an exam-style question and high-level model answer. Read it and the comments around it.

To what extent were Mussolini's foreign policy successes responsible for the popularity of the Fascist regime in the years 1922–41?

Mussolini's foreign policy successes, particularly the Abyssinian Campaign, were the main reason for the popularity of the regime in the 1930s. However, Mussolini had few foreign policy successes in the 1920s, and therefore other factors such as the accommodation with the Roman Catholic Church and his campaign against communism are more likely to explain the regime's popularity in the 1920s. Certainly, Mussolini's economic policy contributed little to the popularity of the regime as living standards either stagnated or declined for the majority of Italians in the years 1922–41.

Between 1922 and 1941 Mussolini's foreign policy had two major successes, both of which strengthened the popularity of the Fascist regime. The first was the annexation of Fiume. In March 1923, Mussolini sent Italian troops into the Adriatic port of Fiume. He claimed they were there to stop a revolution. However, in reality he ordered the occupation of Fiume in order to gain control of the area. The policy was a success and Italy's control of Fiume was secured by the Treaty of Rome which Italy signed with Yugoslavia in 1924. This was clearly a success for Mussolini as Italian control of Fiume was a key objective for Italian Nationalists, because it was one of Mussolini's key territorial goals and because the Italian people had shown their support for a takeover of Fiume during D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume in 1919. This was a major foreign policy success and increased the popularity of the regime soon after it was founded because it allowed Mussolini to claim that fascism had achieved something that Liberal politicians had failed to do in their negotiations over the treaty of Saint-Germain at the end of the First World War, or Giolitti's negotiation over the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920.

This paragraph shows a detailed knowledge of the annexation of Fiume. It also shows why the policy was a success and analyses why this led to support for the Fascist regime.

Another success was the Abyssinian Campaign of 1935–36. Mussolini's objective was to extend the Italian Empire in Africa by conquering Abyssinia. The campaign started in October 1935. By May 1936, Italian forces, led by Peitro Badoglio, had defeated the forces of Haile Selassie I. Again, this was a success because it achieved Mussolini's objective of extending the Italian Empire. The Italian media also claimed that it demonstrated the excellence of the Italian Army, and the use of 254 aeroplanes, 595 tanks, 30,000 trucks and 4.2 million shells showed Italy's military strength. Additionally, Mussolini refused to back down even when the League of Nations condemned the invasion. Consequently, Mussolini could claim he had beaten not only Abyssinia, but the League of Nations. Therefore, the Abyssinian Campaign, Mussolini's greatest foreign policy success, was clearly responsible for the popularity of the regime because Mussolini had shown he could extend Italy's empire and stand up to the League of Nations.

This paragraph uses precise detail to support its points.

Other foreign policy successes did not lead to a major increase in the regime's popularity. For example, Italy's involvement in the Spanish Civil War from the middle of 1936 did not lead to increasing popularity. This is because, unlike the Abyssinian Campaign, Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War did not lead to a quick success or extend the Italian Empire. Equally, Italian involvement in the Second World War from July 1940 did not increase the regime's popularity because the Italian people were not enthusiastic about fighting such a major war, and because by 1941, Italian territorial gains were small. In both cases, these later foreign policy successes were not responsible for the popularity of the Fascist regime because military success did not lead to obvious gains for Italy.

This paragraph extends the chronological range of the essay to 1941. Consequently, together with the earlier discussion of Fiume, it covers the whole period specified by the question.