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CABINET.**DISPOSAL OF THE ITALIAN COLONIES.**

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

I.—Introduction.

MY purpose in this paper is to summarise the salient features of this question, to describe developments during recent months and to examine a number of alternative solutions. Facts and figures on the population and finance are given in Annexes A and B.

2. The major points on which any consideration of this question must be based will appear in the course of what follows; but its primary importance to us lies in the fact that these territories are at present in our possession by right of conquest and are under British military administration, and that they flank the main line of Imperial communication between the United Kingdom, India, Australia and New Zealand. The war with the Axis has demonstrated their strategic importance and any decision as to their disposal must be closely related to the broad question of Imperial Defence.

3. It is my wish, before His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom come to any decision on the policy to be adopted, to confer with my Dominion colleagues so that we may agree on a policy which will not only satisfy the interests of the British Commonwealth, but will also take into account the necessity of arriving at a practical solution and of obtaining the acceptance of the major Powers, so far as is possible, and of the inhabitants of the territories themselves.

4. The advantages and disadvantages of arriving at an immediate solution are examined in paragraphs 20-23. Whether it is wise or not to delay the final international arrangement disposing of these territories, it is at least imperative in my view that we should decide urgently in our own minds what our immediate policy is to be. I cannot over-emphasise the responsibility which the Government of the United Kingdom is bearing in its present administration of these territories and if it should be decided to postpone decision on the policy to be adopted we shall still have to decide in what form this administration is to continue.

5. There are in my view two questions of great urgency which have to be decided as quickly as possible, even if it is resolved to hold over any decision on the whole problem of the Italian Colonies to a later date:—

- (1) Our present position in the Ogaden and the Reserved Area, which are both territories under Ethiopian sovereignty, is dependent on a treaty with Ethiopia which expires next March. It has to be decided, therefore, whether, in order to obtain our objectives in East Africa, we should proceed at once to negotiate an agreement with the Emperor of Ethiopia.
- (2) The problems of the present administration of the Italian Colonies are discussed more fully in this paper. The urgent question at the moment is to decide how the administration is to continue if we feel it is wise to maintain it for any protracted period. There are not only acute difficulties of staff. There are grave dangers of trouble, particularly in Libya, if His Majesty's Government continue to make no declaration of policy which satisfies to some extent the heavy pressure which

the inhabitants themselves are putting on the administration. If no such declaration is made, it is inevitable that our popularity will wane, and that the inhabitants will add violence to their pressure, and ultimately it may be impossible to put through any proposals on which we may finally decide. At the same time it must be borne in mind that we are bound under International Law to pursue a policy of Care and Maintenance, and any unilateral action which we may take must be such as not to have International repercussions, that would equally render impossible the application of our final proposals.

6. On those two points an early decision is required. The broader question of the final settlement is one which needs yet more careful consideration, and in this paper I have attempted to set out the advantages and the disadvantages of the alternative proposals which have been made.

II.—Retrospect.

His Majesty's Government's Commitments.

7. His Majesty's Government, up to September of last year, had entered into the following commitments :—

- (i) On the 8th January, 1945, the then Secretary of State said in the House of Commons : " His Majesty's Government are determined that at the end of the war the Senussis in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination." In addition, in 1940 General (now Field-Marshal) Wilson told an assembly of Senussi Chiefs : " We shall co-operate . . . so that the Arabs may be entitled to regain their freedom and take back their lands from Italian oppressors and restore their independence once more."
- (ii) They are committed to consultation with the British Somalis by pledges given in Parliament that their status would not be changed without consultation.
- (iii) They are morally bound to consider the interests and wishes of the inhabitants of the former Italian Colonies and, in particular, they subscribed to the Declaration in the San Francisco Charter (Article 73) in recognising the principle " that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount " and of accepting " the obligation . . . to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the people and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions." The inhabitants, in particular of Libya, have been given to believe that they will be formally consulted before any decision is taken on their future.

Council of Foreign Ministers, September 1945.

8. Before the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in September the British ideas for the future of the Italian Colonies were as follows :—

- (a) Tripolitania to be placed under international trusteeship with Italy as Administering Authority.
- (b) Cyrenaica to be placed under international trusteeship with the United Kingdom as Administering Authority.
- (c) Italian Somaliland, together with British Somaliland, the Ogaden and the Reserved Areas, to be placed under international trusteeship with the United Kingdom as Administering Authority.
- (d) Eritrea to be given to Ethiopia, except for the North-Western Lowlands which were to be joined to the Sudan.

These proposals were not submitted to the Council of Foreign Ministers in September because the situation was radically altered by the presentation of the United States plan for Collective Trusteeship and the Soviet demand for Tripolitania.

9. *The United States proposals* are as follows :—

- (a) Libya will be granted independence at the end of ten years. In the interval it will be under a U.N.O. trusteeship agreement. This will provide for an administrator with full executive power appointed by

and responsible to the Trusteeship Council of U.N.O. To him will be attached an Advisory Committee of seven composed of representatives of the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, France, Italy and the United States and a European and an Arab resident of Libya selected by the five Governments named.

- (b) Eritrea will be accorded the same treatment as in the case of Libya, the Advisory Committee in this case, however, to include two residents of Eritrea appointed by the five Governments. There will, however, be a territorial cession in favour of Ethiopia which will give Ethiopia access to the sea through the port of Assab.
- (c) In the case of Italian Somaliland, there will be a similar trusteeship arrangement, without, however, any fixed date for independence. There will be an administrator appointed by and responsible to the Trusteeship Council of U.N.O. and an Advisory Committee including two residents of Somaliland in addition to the representatives of the five Governments named.
- (d) In the case of all three colonial areas, the Security Council of U.N.O. may, if it deems necessary, select strategic points for administration by it as strategic areas in the interest of world security.

10. The Cabinet decided to give the American proposal conditional support for the following reasons:—

- (a) The probable effect on public opinion in this country;
- (b) The proposal provided a means of dealing with the embarrassing Russian request for sole trusteeship over Tripolitania;
- (c) The importance of assisting the United States Administration to engage American responsibility in this field, while public opinion in the United States was in the mood.

The decision of the Cabinet was made on the assumption that, if the United States plan was accepted, the United States would play its part. This, it was pointed out, was vital.

11. The decision of the Council of Foreign Ministers in September was to refer to the Deputies "for preliminary consideration the matter of trusteeship for the Italian Colonies, suggesting that they should make the widest use possible of the proposals of the United States Delegation and take into account the views expressed by the other Delegations . . ." and "asked the Deputies to present their report on this question to the Governments members of the Council not less than fourteen days before the opening of the next Plenary Conference of the Council."

Views of other Governments.

12. The *French* advocate Italian trusteeship over all the Colonies, subject to certain territorial rectifications with adjacent French territory.

13. *Egypt* considers that a plebiscite should be held in Libya and would welcome any of the following solutions: a free and independent Libya which could become a member of the Arab League; incorporation in Egypt; or an International Trusteeship to be exercised by Egypt or the Arab League. These Egyptian proposals have been endorsed by other Arab States.

14. The Emperor of Ethiopia has laid claim to both Eritrea and Italian Somaliland and recently despatched representatives to discuss with the Foreign Office the whole question of Ethiopia's frontiers. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister was informed that His Majesty's Government wished to solve the problem of the grazing grounds of the British Somali tribes which lay in Ethiopian sovereign territory, and that the solution which His Majesty's Government put forward in the interests of the inhabitants was the unification of all the Somali territories, and that if the Emperor was prepared to consider this solution favourably it would be easier for His Majesty's Government to support Ethiopia's claims to Eritrea.

Views of the Government of South Africa.

15. The *South African* Government transmitted on the 20th September, 1945, a memorandum which stated that in their view "the chief issue of the disposal of the Italian Colonies is whether or not the protection of the strategic Empire route through the Mediterranean and Red Sea is to be maintained or abandoned." It continued that the future control of strategic bases in Cyrenaica and Italian

Somaliland should contain an effective guarantee to the British Commonwealth that the danger it had to fight against during the last two wars should not occur again, and that, as a result of Russia's expansion in the Near East, to place the Colonies under international control would expose the Arabs to increased Soviet influence. The memorandum concludes that the Red Sea communications are as important as ever and that therefore in order to reconcile British strategic interests with the United States proposal for Collective Trusteeship—

Cyrenaica should be retained under strategic control either—

- (i) as a British strategic base under the Security Council; or
- (ii) by granting independence to the Senussi and making a treaty with them under agreement with the Security Council; or
- (iii) by putting it under Egyptian administration on condition that the military clauses in the Egyptian Treaty applied to *Cyrenaica*.

Tripolitania should either be returned to Italy and demilitarised or placed under International Trusteeship.

Eritrea should be given to Abyssinia and the *Somali territories* unified under British mandate.

16. In a message addressed to me on the 6th October, 1945, Field-Marshal Smuts pointed out that "Russia had had her reward for her enormous efforts in Europe. Why should the British Commonwealth not have theirs for their immense efforts in Africa and the Mediterranean basin and elsewhere? We are prepared also to concede to the United States of America much of a free hand by way of strategic bases in the Pacific. She should loyally support us in our vital African interests," and should appreciate "that ours is not a mere selfish interest, but a vital necessity of future world balance and world peace." In another context Field-Marshal Smuts stated that *Eritrea* should only be given as trust territory to Ethiopia on condition that the United States accept the Massawa area as a security base, since it is in British interests to associate the United States in this all-important line of communication.

17. At the end of January a message was received from Field-Marshal Smuts setting out his views in the light of current developments on the three principal objectives to be achieved in the disposal of the Italian Colonies—

- (a) to exclude Russia from any share in the Italian Colonies whatever;
- (b) to preserve British strategic interests in North and East Africa;
- (c) to win the lasting friendship of Italy.

Field-Marshal Smuts concludes that the United States plan is dangerous to British interests, and urges strongly that we should "play for time (he mentions a period of five years) rather than commit ourselves to steps which we may regret in future." In his view we should keep *Cyrenaica* and *Tripolitania* for the time being, with a view to restoring at any rate *Tripolitania* to Italy under trusteeship; meanwhile we should appeal to the United States to adopt a helpful attitude to us over the Italian Colonies, just as we are doing with the United States over Pacific territories.

18. At a meeting in the Dominions Office on the 15th February the representatives of the Dominions associated themselves with Field-Marshal Smuts' view that the Mediterranean-Red Sea communications were of vital importance and also shared his concern at the expansion of Russian influence in this area.

III.—Undesirability of Delaying Tactics.

19. The various proposals which have been made for the disposal of the Italian Colonies reveal two principal differences of approach. Certain of them postulate that an immediate international agreement should be arrived at, while others maintain that decision on their future must be delayed.

20. The arguments for delay are—

- (1) The international situation is so confused that it is preferable to wait until it clarifies before arriving at any decision.
- (2) It is still uncertain whether the United Nations Organisation is capable of bearing the great responsibility of colonial administration in this period of its perilous infancy, and whether therefore any of the Italian Colonies can safely be entrusted to its charge under collective trusteeship.

21. On the other hand, there is no advantage in playing for time unless we are likely to be in a better position to attain our objectives at the end of the time gained than we are at present. Delay might see Russia better placed in a few years time for asserting her aims in the Mediterranean and Levant, and the United States might be even less willing than now to share in responsibility in this area. It is therefore unsafe to assume that delay would improve our chances of keeping Russia out of Africa.

22. Delay would, moreover, have the following serious disadvantages:—

- (i) If we refuse to discuss final arrangements for the Italian Colonies, the Russians will probably retaliate by refusing to commit themselves on the future of the Dodecanese and even on the Italian Peace Treaty as a whole, while throwing on us the odium of obstructing a settlement.
- (ii) The United Kingdom would bear an increasingly burdensome administrative and financial responsibility for the colonies. There are already acute difficulties over staff which are increasing as demobilisation proceeds.
- (iii) The uncertainty about the future complicates the task of the British Military Administrators and affords in the administered territories, and in the Middle East generally, grounds for criticism and intrigue which are likely to become increasingly embarrassing and to make the final settlement more difficult. The longer that British tutelage lasts the greater will nationalist feeling grow, and after a number of years it might become impossible to impose any settlement which could be agreed internationally. It is probable also that Libya may become infected with the Soviet propaganda that is active in the Middle East, and that Ethiopia will stir up trouble in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland.
- (iv) Finally our present position in the Ogaden and the Reserved Areas has a definite time limit. It depends on the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of December 1944, which was secured only in the face of very keen opposition and which expires in March 1947. Failure to conclude a new Agreement with Ethiopia on the future of Italian East Africa might result in British troops continuing to occupy the Ogaden and the Reserved Areas beyond the time-limit of March 1947. We should then be in precisely the same position as Russia has been in recent weeks with regard to Persia. Moreover, the United States Government recognise Ethiopia's frontiers as those of 1935 and do not consider that there is any dispute regarding them. Unless we can push through our plan for a unified Somalia before the expiry of the present agreement, we shall never do so, unless we are prepared to involve ourselves in serious international complications, including perhaps the loss of American sympathy.

23. These are strong arguments for reaching a settlement now. But it is also becoming urgent to state our position in the discussion of the Italian Peace Treaty. The American Delegation have maintained their earlier proposals and have elaborated them without, however, giving any precise idea of how they would work in practice. The French Delegation has maintained that trusteeship over all the colonies should be exercised by Italy. The Russian Delegation has repeated its claim to individual trusteeship over Tripolitania, stating that it would agree to Collective Trusteeship for the other three colonies. It is understood that Mr. Dunn recently informed M. Gousev that the United States Government could not support a claim by any one of the Big Four to Individual Trusteeship over any of the colonies. Whilst the United Kingdom Deputy has attempted to postpone any decision on the future arrangements in the Colonies by taking the line that this was a matter which could be considered at leisure and that the only immediate decision required was agreement on a provision in the Italian Treaty that Italy should renounce her sovereignty over the colonies, it is now clear that the United States and Soviet Governments at least are not prepared to defer discussion of the future arrangements, and in view of the instructions given to the Deputies by the Council in September (see paragraph 11) it is becoming increasingly difficult for His Majesty's Government to refuse to take part in such discussion. According to these instructions, the Deputies' report should have been available by the 15th April, and it is therefore necessary that His Majesty's Government should contribute to the discussion of this question as early as possible.

Our Objectives.

24. As I have stated above, the question of the Italian Colonies is closely related to that of Imperial Defence. In my view it is essential that we should maintain our position in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. It is not only a question of preserving this life-line in time of war, but also the vital importance of acting in peace-time on the soft under-belly of Europe from the Mediterranean. If we maintain our position along this life-line, the stability of the Middle East generally will be an essential factor. The attitude of the neighbouring Arab States is, therefore, important in its relation to the future of the Italian Colonies and the solution must not be one which will disturb our relations with those countries. If, as I believe, we should develop British East Africa as a strategic reserve without renouncing our position in the Middle East, our approach to the problem of the Italian Colonies must be based on:—

- (i) denial of these Colonies to any hostile influence, and perhaps even
- (ii) retention by us of certain strategic facilities at key points.

In my view, therefore, unless the decision is taken to renounce our position in the Mediterranean and the Middle East we must agree to no solution which does not fulfil (i) above and it may also be desirable to satisfy the requirements of (ii).

25. Therefore, as I see it, our main aims must, therefore, be:—

- (a) to arrive at a settlement which satisfies the interests of imperial defence;
- (b) to prevent the Russians gaining control of any one of the colonies, and to reduce to a minimum their share in any international arrangements and their opportunities for interference;
- (c) to sponsor a settlement which will meet, to the fullest extent practicable the needs and wishes of the inhabitants of the ex-Italian Colonies, *i.e.*—
 - (i) self-government for Libya;
 - (ii) a united Somalia;
 - (iii) the fusion of the major part of Eritrea (*i.e.*, excluding the Moslem area) with Ethiopia;
- (d) to secure United States support.

26. I believe that even if it were possible to dispose of the Italian Colonies in opposition to the United States, that it would be most undesirable from every point of view that we should attempt to do so. In order to secure United States support it is essential for me not to go back on my decision in September to accept the United States plan in principle, subject to certain modifications and further examination of its practical application. I am not, perhaps, committed to support of this plan in its entirety since if it proves impracticable I will be justified in recommending its abandonment, but I am committed to giving it very serious consideration and I do not believe that we would obtain the support of the United States if we did not at least accept as starting-point the principles on which the American Collective Trusteeship proposals are based, namely:—

- (i) that there should be no imperialist exploitation of the ex-Italian Colonies;
- (ii) that the independence of the inhabitants should be recognised as soon as practicable.

Principal Alternative Solutions: General.

27. The solutions which present themselves can be based in the case of each territory on the following four general principles:—

- (a) the principle of Collective Trusteeship (as proposed by the United States);
- (b) the principle of Individual Trusteeship by a Power other than Italy (on which were based the British ideas of last September, the Russian claim to Tripolitania, and the proposals made by Field-Marshal Smuts);
- (c) the restoration of her Colonies in some form to Italy (as proposed by the French Government and in the case of Tripolitania only, by the British plans which were not tabled at the Foreign Ministers' Conference in September);

- (d) the recognition of local independence either by the creation of new States (as suggested for Cyrenaica by Field-Marshal Smuts, para. 15 above) or by the transfer of certain territories to the States to which they naturally belong.

A.—*Collective Trusteeship.*

28. The advantages and disadvantages of the American proposals for Collective Trusteeship lie principally in its possible methods of application. The American proposals aim at avoiding the projection of Great Power politics into the Italian Colonies. It is for this reason that the plan lays down that Trusteeship should be exercised not by the Four Great Powers but by U.N.O. acting collectively through the organ of the Trusteeship Council. If as a result of its application the plan leads to the introduction of a number of nationals from the Great Powers, there are clearly strong objections to it. It is inevitable that the nationals of certain Great Powers, and particularly Russia, will not be internationally minded, but will merely be the instrument of that State's power politics and also probably the disseminators of propaganda.

29. Moreover, as pointed out by the French Deputy, the system of Collective Trusteeship is a new conception which would place a considerable burden on the United Nations, itself an unfledged organisation. Its practical application would need, therefore, to be worked out very carefully. Considerable study has been given to this problem by an inter-departmental working party in Whitehall, who have reported that the United States proposals are feasible if the following points are all satisfactorily covered in the practical application of Collective Trusteeship :—

- (i) The "Advisory Committees" of the United States plan would have to be eliminated as they would be likely to lead to a clash of responsibility, to project into each territory Great Power rivalry (which it is precisely the object of the Americans to avoid), and at the same time to provide the U.S.S.R. with opportunities for direct interference. The United States Deputy, no doubt aware of this danger, has now indicated that the Committee's powers would be very limited.
- (ii) Wide authority would have to be given to the man on the spot.
- (iii) An international Colonial Service would be required to ensure continuity of policy and administrative efficiency.
- (iv) The arrangements for each territory would have, moreover, to take account of local conditions and would thus vary widely. Where possible, elaborate machinery superimposed from outside should be avoided, and we should seek instead to build on whatever already exists locally, reinforcing it at the beginning if need be with outside talent, but striving from the very start to make the maximum use of local institutions and local personnel. The United States memorandum proposes a standard plan to be applied in all territories alike, and in this respect will thus require substantial modification.

30. In general, therefore, Collective Trusteeship, if suitably modified, might be the form of International Trusteeship least open to the dangers of Great Power politics.

B.—*Individual Trusteeship.*

31. The principle of Individual Trusteeship is open to several very serious objections. It is true that the British Commonwealth has a better claim than any other Power to be awarded the individual trusteeship of one or more of the Italian colonies, which they conquered almost alone and which have endowed with an efficient British administration ever since. But a reversion to the idea of Individual Trusteeship would certainly give strength to the Russian claim to Tripolitania. It is imperative to exclude Russia from the large share in the colonies which she would be able to claim if either Individual or Four-Power Trusteeship was applied. Whilst trusteeship by a group of Powers might in theory be acceptable, it would in practice be very difficult to exclude in every case the U.S.S.R. from such a group, and by adopting this principle we should thus run the grave risk of giving the U.S.S.R. a larger share than she will enjoy under a system of Collective Trusteeship.

32. Moreover, the Commonwealth would be exposed once more to a charge of imperialism if any part of the Italian Colonies were placed under British rule.

The international implications of a request for British trusteeship over any of the territories must thus be balanced against the strategic advantages which we would thereby acquire. Such a request would not obtain the support of the United States Government, since, as mentioned above, the American Secretary of State's Deputy in London has stated that they could not support a claim by any one of the Big Four to Individual Trusteeship over any of the Colonies. Trusteeship by one of the British Dominions would probably be regarded as a subterfuge of British imperialist interests, and would equally not receive United States support.

C.—Restoration to Italy.

33. The return to Italy of her Colonies might help to make her a friendly and sound democratic Power in the Mediterranean. On the other hand her Empire was an economic liability to her and provided her with little outlet for emigration. Its loss would thus cause no serious injury to her economy and might in fact relieve her of a burden which, in her present financial position, she might be unable to bear. Moreover, the populations of all the colonies, whatever their differences, are united in their hostility to Italy and restoration of Italian rule in any form could only be enforced with great difficulty, perhaps only by force of arms. Finally, any effort to restore it by force would have most unfortunate results on our position in Egypt and the whole of the Middle East.

D.—Independence or Union with natural motherland.

34. The recognition of local independence is a question which must be discussed in its relation to each territory in turn. The only general consideration is that all the Colonies, even the Somalis, would wish to have their sovereignty recognised in theory even if they exercised no administrative powers in practice.

Principal Alternative Solution in Relation to each Colony.

35. I shall now examine in respect of each of the Italian Colonies the various alternatives which have been put forward bearing in mind:—

- (a) their practicability;
- (b) British interests;
- (c) international implications;
- (d) the wishes of the inhabitants;
- (e) His Majesty's Government's commitments.

Eritrea.

68. The American proposals would place Eritrea under Collective Trusteeship for a number of years and thus retain the present frontiers under one administration. As Eritrea had never existed as a political entity until the Italians created it at the end of the last century, and it is ethnically disunited and economically non-viable, there is no good reason for preserving it as an administrative unit under any form of administration, whether under Individual Trusteeship or restored Italian rule. The right solution would seem to be to dismember it along its natural lines of cleavage. Since there is no prospect, or indeed desirability, of a recreated Kingdom of Tigrai, the best course might be to meet the wishes of the Christian Unionists of Eritrea who desire incorporation in Ethiopia. This transfer would give Ethiopia the highlands in the centre of the Colony. Although the Danakil inhabitants of the southern coastal areas are neither Christian nor sympathetic to Ethiopia, it is difficult to see what alternative there is to the course of giving them also to Ethiopia which would unite them with a large number of Danakils in the Aussa province. They are hardly numerous enough to be considered as a possible future independent entity and therefore are not a suitable subject for trusteeship. To incorporate both the Coptic Christian highlands of Tigrinyan Eritrea and the Danakil lowlands to the south would give Ethiopia access to the Red Sea and at least one port in Assab.

69. There are, however, alternatives to Ethiopian annexation of the district around Massawa which is mainly inhabited by Moslems. It is probable that the Emperor, in claiming a port on the Red Sea before he expanded his claim to cover the whole of Eritrea, had Massawa rather than Assab in mind. It is very doubtful whether his acceptance of the United Somalia plan would be granted unless he was given at least Massawa in addition to the Christian and Danakil areas mentioned above. It has also been proposed that Massawa should be a United Nations security base operated either by the United Nations as a whole through the Security Council or by the United States (paragraph 10). The objections to the former are probably that this would give Russia a direct interest and control at an essential point in the Red Sea. It is questionable whether the

Americans would wish to establish themselves in Massawa though it may well be desirable to associate them in this line of communication. If it is considered that the British Commonwealth require exclusive strategic facilities in Massawa, it is possible that the agreement which we shall have to negotiate with the Emperor over the whole question of Eritrea and the Somalilands might include an undertaking by us to support his claim to the port provided he offered us such facilities there as we might require. It is, however, doubtful whether we can achieve the United Somalia project unless we offer the Emperor sufficient inducement to part with the Ogaden and Reserved Area. It may therefore even be necessary to be in a position to offer him the whole of Eritrea without any limitations on his sovereignty, including the Moslem areas in the North and North West.

70. There are two principal alternatives for these North-Western areas:—
- (i) incorporation in Ethiopia, which would run counter to the wishes of the inhabitants. It would also probably burden the Government of the Sudan with an extremely troublesome frontier dividing the Sudanese Beni Amer from the Eritrean Beni Amer with consequent border disturbances;
 - (ii) transference of these North-Western areas to the Sudan to which they naturally belong.

The main objection to this second course is that it lays the British Commonwealth open once more to the charge of painting more red on the map and if we feel it necessary to call on the other Big Powers to renounce their claims to the Italian Colonies, we shall have to make a similar renunciation ourselves and apply it to any government in which we play a major part.

71. Eritrea is in many ways at a higher stage of development than Ethiopia. Its inhabitants are on the whole more progressive and Italy achieved there a great measure of economic development. In order to prevent Eritrea relapsing it might be better to award it to the Emperor with the stipulation that he must give certain guarantees to the United Nations. On the other hand, to insist on such reservations might make it impossible to conclude an agreement with the Emperor which would satisfy our requirements in the Somali territories.

Conclusion.

72. I have an open mind as to the best course. I am, however, satisfied that we can hammer out a Commonwealth policy which we can all advance without fear. Although the problem is very difficult, there are four encouraging factors of fundamental importance. In the first place, we are occupying the territories under discussion and no settlement can be arrived at, to which we object. Secondly, our administration is popular in all the territories, and the views and needs of the inhabitants coincide very closely with our own. Indeed, they would almost certainly accept any settlement which we proposed, provided it was based on the principles underlying this paper. Thirdly, we have the goodwill of the United States, although this would almost certainly not extend to any purely British settlement. Finally, the interests of the Arab League and our own are very close, and a solution acceptable to the League would immeasurably strengthen our position in the Middle East.

E. B.

*Foreign Office, S.W. 1,
18th April, 1946.*

ANNEX A.

BACKGROUND.

1. The former Italian Colonies have few features in common. The two principal ones are their poverty and the attitude of the inhabitants to their former rulers. In spite of an energetic colonial policy, it was only possible for the Italians to run their colonies at an economic loss. Their colonies indeed were developed not so much for economic reasons as for strategic. Although the inhabitants of each of the territories are dissimilar and in Eritrea far from homogeneous, they all nevertheless share hostility to Italian rule, which varies from bitter hatred to intense reluctance to be restored to it.

2. There are certain features in each territory which deserve separate consideration.

ERITREA.

13. The problem of Eritrea presents three principal similarities to that of the Somali territories. In the first place it is closely connected with the position of Ethiopia and, in the second, the political frontiers of Eritrea run counter to history, geography, economics, religion, race and language. There is as clear a case for the rationalisation of the political geography of this territory as there is for the Somalilands. Thirdly, both the Somali territories and Eritrea have never been in a position to meet their expenses from local revenues and have depended on outside assistance.

14. The present population of Eritrea is about 800,000, of which 37,000 are Italians (confined almost entirely to the Asmara district). The natives fall into three main divisions: Tigrinyans, Beni Amer and Danakils.

15. The Ethiopian province of Tigrai, which was the nucleus of the ancient Kingdom of Ethiopia and, until the usurpation of the Shoan dynasty, provided the rulers of that Empire, is divided in two by the 1935 Eritrean-Ethiopian frontier. There are thus 3,000 or 4,000 Tigrinya-speaking people in the mountains of Eritrea who are closely akin to the ruling class of Ethiopia. The frontier between the Sudan and Eritrea divides the nomad Beni Amer into two sections, although their affinity is such that the chiefs of each part are drawn from the same family. The Danakils are divided between the Red Sea plains of Eritrea, French Somaliland and the Ethiopian hinterland. The pre-eminence of the Sultan of Aussa in Ethiopia is recognised by the Danakils in

all of the three territories. The Tigrinyans are Coptic Christians, and the Beni Amers and the Danakils are Moslem. There are thus three main divisions of Eritrea, two Moslem sections separated by a Christian.

16. Although the inhabitants of Eritrea are politically backward and inarticulate compared with the population of Italian North Africa, they have expressed their wishes in simple and clear terms. The Moslems, whatever their district, class, occupation or political development, are united in objecting to Coptic Christian rule whether it should be exercised by the Christian Eritreans, a reconstituted Kingdom of Tigrai or by the Emperor of Ethiopia. The Moslems of the North, including the districts of Keren, Agordat, Massawa and the Dahlak islands have through their chiefs petitioned for independence under United Nations trusteeship exercised by the United Kingdom for from ten to fifteen years, in view of the knowledge and understanding of Eritrea's problems that British administration has acquired during its existence. The Moslems of this northern area would presumably be satisfied by incorporation in the Sudan since these territories lie close to and have close affinity with the tribes west of the Sudanese frontier. The Danakils of Eritrea join to some extent in the wish for United Kingdom trusteeship and in opposition to Christian rule, although they have shown no objection to union in Ethiopia with their Aussa brethren.

17. The Tigrinyans in the central Eritrean mountains are divided into "separatists" and "unionists." The present relative strengths of these two Christian parties are not easy to estimate. The Separatists join with the Eritrean Moslems in reluctance to come under the Shoan dynasty of Ethiopia, though they have a traditional yearning for union with their Tigrinian neighbours in Ethiopia within a restored Kingdom of Tigrai. The Unionists, centred principally in Asmara, support incorporation in Ethiopia.
