



General Certificate of Education

AS History

Unit 2: HIS2J

Britain and Appeasement, 1919–1940

Specimen Mark Scheme

The specimen assessment materials are provided to give centres a reasonable idea of the general shape and character of the planned question papers and mark schemes in advance of the first operational exams.

Further copies of this Mark Scheme are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

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Generic Introduction for AS

The AS History specification is based on the assessment objectives laid down in QCA's GCE History subject criteria and published in the AQA specification booklet. These cover the skills, knowledge and understanding which are expected of A Level candidates. Most questions address more than one objective since historical skills, which include knowledge and understanding, are usually deployed together. Consequently, the marking scheme which follows is a 'levels of response' scheme and assesses candidates' historical skills in the context of their knowledge and understanding of History.

The levels of response are a graduated recognition of how candidates have demonstrated their abilities in the Assessment Objectives. Candidates who predominantly address AO1(a) by writing narrative or description will perform at Level 1 or Level 2 depending on its relevance. Candidates who provide more explanation – (AO1(b), supported by the relevant selection of material, AO1(a)) – will perform at high Level 2 or low-mid Level 3 depending on how explicit they are in their response to the question. Candidates who provide explanation with evaluation, judgement and an awareness of historical interpretations will be addressing all 3 AOs (AO1(a); AO1(b); AO2(a) and (b) and will have access to the higher mark ranges. AO2(a) which requires the evaluation of source material is assessed in Unit 2.

Differentiation between Levels 3, 4 and 5 is judged according to the extent to which candidates meet this range of assessment objectives. At Level 3 the answers will show more characteristics of the AO1 objectives, although there should be elements of AO2. At Level 4, AO2 criteria, particularly an understanding of how the past has been interpreted, will be more in evidence and this will be even more dominant at Level 5. The demands on written communication, particularly the organisation of ideas and the use of specialist vocabulary also increase through the various levels so that a candidate performing at the highest AS level is already well prepared for the demands of A2.

CRITERIA FOR MARKING GCE HISTORY:**AS EXAMINATION PAPERS****General Guidance for Examiners (to accompany Level Descriptors)**

Deciding on a level and the award of marks within a level

It is of vital importance that examiners familiarise themselves with the generic mark scheme and apply it consistently, as directed by the Principal Examiner, in order to facilitate comparability across options.

The indicative mark scheme for each paper is designed to illustrate some of the material that candidates might refer to (knowledge) and some of the approaches and ideas they might develop (skills). It is not, however, prescriptive and should only be used to exemplify the generic mark scheme.

When applying the generic mark scheme, examiners will constantly need to exercise judgement to decide which level fits an answer best. Few essays will display all the characteristics of a level, so deciding the most appropriate will always be the first task.

Each level has a range of marks and for an essay which has a strong correlation with the level descriptors the middle mark should be given. However, when an answer has some of the characteristics of the level above or below, or seems stronger or weaker on comparison with many other candidates' responses to the same question, the mark will need to be adjusted up or down.

When deciding on the mark within a level, the following criteria should be considered *in relation to the level descriptors*. Candidates should never be doubly penalised. If a candidate with poor communication skills has been placed in Level 2, he or she should not be moved to the bottom of the level on the basis of the poor quality of written communication. On the other hand, a candidate with similarly poor skills, whose work otherwise matched the criteria for Level 4 should be adjusted downwards within the level.

Criteria for deciding marks within a level:

- The accuracy of factual information
- The level of detail
- The depth and precision displayed
- The quality of links and arguments
- The quality of written communication (grammar, spelling, punctuation and legibility; an appropriate form and style of writing; clear and coherent organisation of ideas, including the use of specialist vocabulary)
- Appropriate references to historical interpretation and debate
- The conclusion

Specimen Mark Scheme

GCE AS History Unit 2: Historical Issues: Periods of Change

HIS2J: Britain and Appeasement, 1919–1940

Question 1

- (a) Use **Sources A** and **B** and your own knowledge.

Explain how far the views in **Source A** differ from those in **Source B** in relation to British reaction to the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland. (12 marks)

Target: AO2(a)

- L1:** Answers will **either** briefly paraphrase/describe the content of the two sources **or** identify simple comparison(s) between the sources. Skills of written communication will be weak. **0-2**
- L2:** Responses will compare the views expressed in the two sources and identify some differences and/or similarities. There may be some limited own knowledge. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed. **3-6**
- L3:** Responses will compare the views expressed in the two sources, identifying differences **and** similarities and using own knowledge to explain and evaluate these. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed. **7-9**
- L4** Responses will make a developed comparison between the views expressed in the two sources and will apply own knowledge to evaluate and to demonstrate a good contextual understanding. Answers will, for the most part, show good skills of written communication. **10-12**

Indicative content

Source A essentially gives four views of British reaction to Hitler's reoccupation and his breaking of international treaties (Versailles and Locarno).

- With British encouragement, which was not given, France could have defeated Germany.
- Liberals (at least Lord Lothian), Labour and leaders of the (National) government did not wish to take action, a view encouraged by Hitler.
- The anti-appeasement view of General Spears is quoted but it was ignored.
- The 'back garden' argument fitted public opinion.

Source B tries to explain, in the views given, why Britain did not take action and uses a different longer term historical perspective.

- Governments had believed Versailles to be harsh and had tried to change it during the 1920s but had faced French resistance.
- British governments and the public sympathised with Hitler's ambition for Germany.
- The memory of the First World War remained.
- Churchill was a lone voice.

The sources therefore differ overall in that Source A is focused on the situation in March 1936 (although Spears's view, as an opponent of appeasement, looks forward to longer term consequences of inaction), whereas Source B sees the reasons for inaction in terms of past developments over a longer time span going back to the Great War. Answers should also identify some of the specific, detailed differences, as given above. However, there are points of agreement, or those which complement each other, between the views expressed: political inaction in 1936 reflected the longer term view of the harshness of Versailles; France was not encouraged to take action against Germany (though the French resolve of the 1920s had disappeared by 1936); British governments and especially public opinion did not want military action over Germany's revival and recovery of its 'back garden'; anti-appeasement views are given. Responses may, however, note that Churchill was not 'a lone voice' as Spears was quite clearly another. Overall the two sources contain not only different reasons for British reaction to the reoccupation, but also similarities.

Own knowledge can be used to provide context in comparison of the sources. This may include reference to some of the following: harshness of the Versailles terms especially over an area which was part of Germany, self-determination, lack of British preparedness for war, development of an appeasement policy by government, and detail about Churchill's (and possibly others such as Spears's) opposition to the Nazi regime and his criticisms of British defence as well as foreign policy.

(b) Use **Sources A, B and C** and your own knowledge.

How important was public opinion up to 1936 in influencing Britain's policies towards Nazi Germany? (24 marks)

Target: AO1(b), AO2(a), AO2(b)

L1: Answers may be based on sources or on own knowledge alone, or they may comprise an undeveloped mixture of the two. They may contain some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question or they may address only a part of the question. Alternatively, there may be some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. There will be little, if any, awareness of differing historical interpretations. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **0-6**

L2: Answers may be based on sources or on own knowledge alone, or they may contain a mixture of the two. They may be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the focus of the question. Alternatively, they may contain some explicit comment with relevant but limited support. They will display limited understanding of differing historical interpretations. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **7-11**

L3: Answers will show a developed understanding of the demands of the question using evidence from **both** the sources **and** own knowledge. They will provide some assessment backed by relevant and appropriately selected evidence, but they will lack depth and/or balance. There will be some understanding of varying historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **12-16**

L4: Answers will show explicit understanding of the demands of the question. They will develop a balanced argument backed by a good range of appropriately selected evidence from the sources and own knowledge, and a good understanding of historical

interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, show organisation and good skills of written communication. **17-21**

L5: Answers will be well-focused and closely argued. The arguments will be supported by precisely selected evidence from the sources and own knowledge, incorporating well-developed understanding of historical interpretations and debate. Answers will, for the most part, be carefully organised and fluently written, using appropriate vocabulary. **22-24**

Indicative content

Responses should assess the importance of British public opinion during 1933–1936. There may be reference to other factors influencing government policies such as fear of the emerging threat from Nazi Germany to European peace or the avoidance of war at almost any cost. The sources focus on the reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and all contain references to public opinion.

Source A records the policy of the government in 1936 (specifically mentioning Baldwin and Eden) on Hitler's action and gives the views of Lord Lothian and the Labour Party in support. It also gives the anti-appeasement view of General Spears, but states that he 'was not listened to' and that public opinion was behind the 'Lothian' 'back garden' stance. Source C expands on the view of Eden as Foreign Secretary with the anecdote about his taxi driver giving the view that 'Jerry' was simply moving into 'his own back garden' as representing majority public opinion. In taking a longer term perspective Source B gives the views that British governments and the public sympathised with Hitler's policies for Germany and how Churchill was a lone voice of opposition.

Own knowledge should also be used to assess the importance of public opinion's influence on governments' policies towards Nazi Germany from 1934–1936. They were considerably influenced by the public mood. Many in Britain, including ministers and MPs, did not wish to experience anything like the Great War again. Much of public opinion was anti-war, some of it pacifist, at least for the greater part of this period. The famous Oxford Union motion in February 1933 no doubt hardly influenced Hitler, but that university's student body reflected the general desire to avoid another Great War. It seemed to be supported in the result of the famous Fulham East by-election later that year. Lansbury, as leader of the Labour Party from 1931–1935, was a committed pacifist. The 1935 Peace Ballot, organised by League of Nations supporters, revealed that a majority in Britain still favoured disarmament, despite the belligerence of Mussolini in east Africa and Hitler's early defiance of the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty. MacDonald as Prime Minister (who had not renounced his own pacifist views) continued his belief in collective security and support for working through the League of Nations. Public opinion undoubtedly influenced Baldwin as Prime Minister from 1935. He was extremely cautious about re-armament in the 1935 election and later acknowledged that to advocate rearmament on any meaningful scale during the election would have been damaging to the national government in terms of votes. His appointment as Prime Minister in June 1935 coincided with the signing of the Anglo-German naval agreement, seen later as appeasement, but generally accepted as justified in Britain at the time. (It was incompatible with the terms of the Versailles Treaty.) In fact re-armament had been stepped up under Baldwin following formation of the Stresa Front despite the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and Churchill's concerns that Baldwin was not doing enough in terms of re-arming (and increased further after the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis later in 1936). Certainly there was public support for the concept of the Rhineland being viewed as Germany's 'backyard' in government policy. Later in 1936 most opinion also supported the gentlemen's agreement not to intervene in the Spanish Civil War (though clearly there was dissension from the Left in Britain in its determination to

oppose Fascism). If anything, experience of that war intensified some of the fears of war of the public in Britain.

Question 2

- (a) Explain why the attitude of British governments towards Germany changed in the years 1919 to 1924. (12 marks)

Target: AO1(a), AO1(b)

- L1:** Answers will contain either some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question or some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **0-2**
- L2:** Answers will demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they will provide some explanations backed by evidence that is limited in range and/or depth. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **3-6**
- L3:** Answers will demonstrate good understanding of the demands of the question providing relevant explanations backed by appropriately selected information, although this may not be full or comprehensive. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **7-9**
- L4:** Answers will be well-focused, identifying a range of specific explanations, backed by precise evidence and demonstrating good understanding of the connections and links between events/issues. Answers will, for the most part, be well-written and organised. **10-12**

Indicative content

Answers should outline the stages by which policy developed from that of punishment of Germany in 1918–1919 for ‘causing’ the Great War and that war’s devastation to the efforts to focus on the maintenance of (permanent) European peace including the partial rehabilitation of Germany by and in 1924. The British mood following the war, seen for example in the general election in 1918, and to a modified extent that of Lloyd George, was to punish Germany for causing the war. Hence the war guilt clause was promoted as the basis for the rest of the Versailles settlement. In practice, in Paris Lloyd George was able (with the help of Wilson) to modify the French objective of obtaining future security by permanently crippling Germany, an outcome which could have crippled also the whole economy of Europe. Clearly, however, the terms of Versailles and the other Peace Treaties did punish the defeated powers severely, notably Germany through denial of self-determination for many Germans, loss of colonies, forced disarmament, the territorial clauses and eventual decisions on the amount of reparations in cash and kind. It was principally Lloyd George who wished to limit reparations, though his achievement in getting more careful consideration still meant the crippling amount of £6,600 million decided by the Reparations Commission in 1921. What turned out to be Lloyd George’s final conference (of many), in trying to resolve post-war European (and world) problems, at Genoa in 1922, failed miserably (and helped unintentionally to bring about the Treaty of Rapallo between the two European outcasts, driving Germany to link with the Bolshevik government which Britain had failed to unseat in its intervention). From 1919–1923 Anglo-French relations

were bedevilled by disagreement on how to treat the new German republic with France, still conscious of how her territory had been invaded and occupied in the war, determined to punish and make Germany pay for the cost of the war. British governments under Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Baldwin and especially MacDonald took a more conciliatory line and understood Keynes's view that a permanently crippled Germany, especially economically, would hinder, if not prevent, the recovery of the whole post-war European economies. The Labour government played an important role in getting the French and Belgians to withdraw from the Ruhr and in particular getting them, as well as the Germans, to agree to the revised scheme of reparations payments under the Dawes Plan. However, the Conservative leadership also began to appreciate that Weimar Germany was democratic, wished to participate as a 'European partner' and that Gustav Stresemann was genuinely seeking reconciliation and permanent European peace. British support for working through the League between its establishment in 1920 and 1924 was varied, with the Labour government, and MacDonald in particular as Foreign Secretary, as well as Prime Minister, being more supportive. He believed firmly in the concept of collective security and instigated (the eventually aborted) Geneva Protocol which he wanted Germany, though not a member of the League, to sign.

- (b) 'International relations were vastly improved by the British Conservative government in the years 1924 to 1929.'
Explain why you agree or disagree with this view. (24 marks)

Target: AO1(a), AO1(b), AO2(b)

- L1:** Answers may **either** contain some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question **or** they may address only a limited part of the period of the question. Alternatively, there may be some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. There will be little, if any, awareness of differing historical interpretations. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **0-6**
- L2:** Answers will show some understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they may contain some explicit comment with relevant but limited support. They will display limited understanding of differing historical interpretations. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **7-11**
- L3:** Answers will show a developed understanding of the demands of the question. They will provide some assessment, backed by relevant and appropriately selected evidence, but they will lack depth and/or balance. There will be some understanding of varying historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **12-16**
- L4:** Answers will show explicit understanding of the demands of the question. They will develop a balanced argument backed by a good range of appropriately selected evidence and a good understanding of historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, show organisation and good skills of written communication. **17-21**
- L5:** Answers will be well-focused and closely argued. The arguments will be supported by precisely selected evidence leading to a relevant conclusion/judgement, incorporating well-developed understanding of historical interpretations and debate. Answers will, for the most part, be carefully organised and fluently written, using appropriate vocabulary. **22-24**

Indicative content

Baldwin, as Prime Minister, oversaw foreign relations, but Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary throughout the life of the government was principally responsible for the main developments which affected Britain. He continued the Labour government's policy of working through the League of Nations, when thought desirable in British interests, but with less enthusiasm for that institution than MacDonald. Chamberlain's and the Conservative government's period of office coincided with the relatively most economically prosperous period of the 1920s in Europe, when reconciliation of the former enemies, notably Germany, seemed real, as did closer co-operation with the French following their withdrawal from the Ruhr. He worked closely with Stresemann and the French to achieve the Locarno Pacts in 1925, which at least seemed to settle the western borders of Germany and demilitarised status of the Rhineland, as decided at Versailles, but this time with German agreement. However, there was no 'Eastern Locarno' achieved given the intensity of German feeling about lost territory especially to Poland. The problem was brushed over in the attempt to exude the new mood of reconciliation and lasting peace of the 'Locarno spirit', which was celebrated principally in Britain and France. Chamberlain is rightly regarded as a member of the triumvirate of himself, Stresemann and Briand, three 'European' politicians responsible for extending the spirit of Locarno into other peace-maintaining developments. Though the Kellogg-Briand Pact three years later was initiated by Briand and supported by the American Secretary of State, it developed out of the 'Locarno spirit' and continued close co-operation of the 'triumvirate'. Chamberlain played a major role in ensuring that not only Britain, but other Empire and European countries signed up to the Pact. During the period of the Conservative government the focus of British policy was centred on maintaining, and indeed promoting, peace rather than punishing Germany which, with Chamberlain's support, had been accepted into the League in 1926. Occupation forces in the Rhineland were withdrawn early (1926 and 1929). The Foreign Office (and Treasury) had important early input into what became the Young Plan, which was finalised after Labour came into office in 1929. This seemed to confirm that peace was permanent.

There is no doubt that the Conservative government and Chamberlain were helped greatly during 1924–1929 by the relative prosperity of that period (compared with the immediate preceding and succeeding years of that period), and the relative stability in Weimar Germany as its young democracy seemed to bed down. Its leading statesman was Stresemann and also important was Briand as French Foreign Minister. The triumvirate worked genuinely for reconciliation and permanent peace both through and independently of the League of Nations. The role of the Conservative government was clearly crucial to the successes which were achieved and few at the time were critical.

Question 3

- (a) Explain why Britain signed the Stresa Front with Italy in April 1935. (12 marks)

Target: AO1(a), AO1(b)

- L1:** Answers will contain either some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question or some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **0-2**
- L2:** Answers will demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they will provide some explanations backed by evidence that is limited in range and/or depth. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **3-6**
- L3:** Answers will demonstrate good understanding of the demands of the question providing relevant explanations backed by appropriately selected information, although this may not be full or comprehensive. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **7-9**
- L4:** Answers will be well-focused, identifying a range of specific explanations, backed by precise evidence and demonstrating good understanding of the connections and links between events/issues. Answers will, for the most part, be well-written and organised. **10-12**

Indicative content

Answers should outline the stages of the relationship from Mussolini's accession to power to the formation of the Stresa Front. There may well be focus on the later years of the period. Despite Italy's dissatisfaction and that of Mussolini in particular with the post-war peace treaties, relations between Britain (and also France) and Fascist Italy were generally amicable during the period. The countries had been allies in the First World War and the treatment of Germany maintained a common interest. Throughout the 1920s Britain regarded Italy as a generally supportive member of the League of Nations and both countries supported collective security. There were, however, 'hiccups' over Italy's bombardment of Corfu in 1923 and gaining of control over most of Fiume in 1924, but these were not regarded as serious breaches of the Peace Treaties or threats to European peace. The two countries came closer together diplomatically by being the two guarantors of the main Locarno Treaty in 1925. Both signed up to the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928. Many in Britain including Conservative politicians saw Mussolini as having ended the anarchy in Italy and as a strong opponent of communism. There was sympathy for Italy's imperial position and a piece of British Somaliland was transferred to Italy in 1925 to add to its African empire (of Italian Somaliland, Eritrea and Tripoli). Little attention was paid to the installation of Ahmed Zhogu in Albania in 1926. Even at the beginning of the 1930s with Mussolini's clearer intentions about the Mediterranean being 'Mare Nostrum' and designs on the independent Abyssinia, relations remained generally good. Economic depression problems dominated much of the political agenda in Britain. With the threat of a revived and re-armed Germany under Hitler, it was Italy which took the lead in developing the relationship to bring Britain (and France) closer together to oppose Hitler's breaking of the Versailles Treaty. Indeed it was Italy which prevented the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1934 by moving its troops into the Brenner Pass, a move supported diplomatically by Britain. It was Mussolini who initiated the Stresa Front of Italy, Britain and France in April 1935 to oppose the

common German threat and in particular intended to stop further German rearmament. Whilst committing itself to the Stresa Front, Britain undermined the relationship with Italy by direct negotiations with Germany, and responses may mention that Mussolini was not of course a party to the negotiations of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty to be finalised in June 1935, an act which significantly undermined the relationship and trust established at Stresa.

- (b) 'Britain's attempts to maintain good relations with Mussolini and Italy from October 1935 to 1939 were well-intentioned but totally unsuccessful.'
Explain why you agree or disagree with this view. (24 marks)

Target: AO1(a), AO1(b), AO2(b)

- L1:** Answers may **either** contain some descriptive material which is only loosely linked to the focus of the question **or** they may address only a limited part of the period of the question. Alternatively, there may be some explicit comment with little, if any, appropriate support. Answers are likely to be generalised and assertive. There will be little, if any, awareness of differing historical interpretations. The response will be limited in development and skills of written communication will be weak. **0-6**
- L2:** Answers will show some understanding of the demands of the question. They will **either** be almost entirely descriptive with few explicit links to the question **or** they may contain some explicit comment with relevant but limited support. They will display limited understanding of differing historical interpretations. Answers will be coherent but weakly expressed and/or poorly structured. **7-11**
- L3:** Answers will show a developed understanding of the demands of the question. They will provide some assessment, backed by relevant and appropriately selected evidence, but they will lack depth and/or balance. There will be some understanding of varying historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, be clearly expressed and show some organisation in the presentation of material. **12-16**
- L4:** Answers will show explicit understanding of the demands of the question. They will develop a balanced argument backed by a good range of appropriately selected evidence and a good understanding of historical interpretations. Answers will, for the most part, show organisation and good skills of written communication. **17-21**
- L5:** Answers will be well-focused and closely argued. The arguments will be supported by precisely selected evidence leading to a relevant conclusion/judgement, incorporating well-developed understanding of historical interpretations and debate. Answers will, for the most part, be carefully organised and fluently written, using appropriate vocabulary. **22-24**

Indicative content

In spite of Britain seriously undermining the significance and effectiveness of the Stresa Front by signing the Naval Treaty with Germany in June 1935, the British government did then work hard diplomatically to keep Mussolini and Italy on the side of Britain (and France) as a very useful ally in relation to Germany's rearming and the increasingly threatening speeches and policies of Hitler. The countries worked together both in the League and bilaterally. However, despite Britain's efforts and particularly those of Sir Samuel Hoare, the Foreign Secretary, the relationship eventually collapsed over the Italian invasion and conquest of Abyssinia/Ethiopia. For a considerable time Mussolini had been looking to extend the Italian empire in east Africa

by incorporating Abyssinia, one of only two independent states in the African continent, and to avenge Italy's defeat at Adowa in 1896. Mussolini believed that even if he had not been encouraged to invade by the close co-operation at Stresa, at the very least Britain (and France) would not object to his colonial adventure to give Italy a colonial gain of the kind denied to her in Paris in 1919. Abyssinia, however, was a member of the League of Nations, which responded to the Italian invasion in October 1935 more quickly than it had to Japan's aggression in the Far East earlier. Economic sanctions were imposed, but Britain strongly supported the exclusion of oil and kept open the Suez Canal to Italian shipping, which meant that the Italian war effort was not seriously hampered. Hoare was anxious to keep Italy as an 'ally' against Hitler (in the 'spirit of Stresa') and at the very least friendly relations despite the Abyssinian problem. Hitler's foreign policy was beginning to develop in a dangerous way. Hoare therefore worked together with Laval, the French Foreign Minister, to make concessions to Mussolini over Abyssinia in order to keep Italy on side against Germany. In December 1935 the 'Hoare-Laval plan' proposed giving extensive territorial and economic rights in Abyssinia, and in practice about two-thirds of Abyssinia to Italy. When details were leaked in Britain, there was very strong protest (out-of-line with the political and public's usual support of appeasement). As a result the plan was abandoned and Hoare resigned. The government's efforts to maintain good relations with Italy had brought fierce criticism which continued with the completion of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia by May 1936. Meanwhile Hitler had reoccupied the Rhineland in March. The British public seemed to be demanding stronger action against acts of aggression by Italy rather than that of Hitler. Following Hoare's resignation Britain supported the League's position in condemning the Italian invasion and refusing to recognise the conquest, a position which infuriated Mussolini and ended any possibility of Italy remaining as an ally against Germany's foreign policy.

Indeed the handling of the whole Abyssinian crisis by Britain can be construed as well-intentioned in the aim of retaining a united front against Hitler, but was unsuccessful and achieved the reverse of its intentions by driving Mussolini towards Germany despite the Italian dictator's concerns over Hitler's plans for Austria. Britain was helpless to stop the signing of the Rome-Berlin Axis in November 1936.

Again the establishment of the Non-Intervention Committee over the Spanish Civil War was well-intentioned by Britain (and France) to prevent outside interference and possible spreading of warfare beyond Spain's borders. It proved quite powerless to stop Germany, and Italy in particular in terms of forces and resources given, from assisting Franco and the rebel forces from fighting and winning the War. Britain (and France) were not prepared to take military action. During the Civil War relations between Britain and Italy deteriorated further as Germany emerged as the dominant partner in the Axis. In 1939 Italy was able in effect to incorporate Albania into its empire and look for further conquests such as Greece if European war broke out. (Mussolini waited until the fall of France in 1940 before joining fully with Hitler.) Quite clearly from 1935 to 1939 some of Britain's key policies had been to retain good relations with Italy, but these had completely failed over Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War. The turning point was over the former. Arguably it was a crucial step on the road to eventual European war. Military action by Britain (and France) in 1935 might have deterred Italy, strengthened the League and discouraged Hitler from his later acts of aggression. On the other hand Italy was militarily relatively strong in 1935 (as the British Admiralty perceived). War at the time could have equally forced Mussolini into the arms of Hitler just as actual events did.