Interwar Period: France & Italy
Objectives

- Comprehend the factors that contributed to French and Italian foreign policy during the interwar years.
- Describe the factors that influenced French and Italian military doctrine during the interwar period.
France
Transition to Peace

- While the rest of the WWI combatants returned home from the battlefield, France was left with the battlefield.
- Traditional trading partner: Germany.
- Tremendous amounts of money was required for reconstruction in France.
- However, this money was tied to the German reparation plan as France had little to no capital herself.
- French government was aggressive in this pursuit – 1923 occupation of Rhineland.
French Political Climate

- Inconsistent political leadership
- Significant problems:
  - National debt is huge
  - Huge sums needed to rebuild France
  - German reparations slow
  - Taxes too low to balance the budget.

Over the next 15 months between 1925 – 1927, six different premiers take office

Franc’s value drops 50% in 1924
Road to Recovery and Security

- Slowly the French economy recovers and by 1928 has strengthened.
- Most of the French countryside has been repaired by 1929. The problem now is...what to do about national security?
  - Traditional Russia?
  - Traditional enemy – Great Britain?
  - Germany?
- Population (Interwar)
  - France: ~ 39 Million
  - Germany: ~ 62 Million
Defense Strategy

- France cannot afford another WWI on French soil
- Trench warfare worked in halting Germany in WWI, the trenches were just poorly placed
- Hence...between 1920 and 1940 the Great Wall of France is constructed – Maginot Line
French Air Force

- Little significant thought given to airpower development in the interwar period
- While in 1933, France created a separate air force service it was sectionalized in supporting *regional* army commanders
- Airpower viewed only in serving a reconnaissance or limited army support role
- Little to no thought given to attack aircraft
- Air Force pilots, with a few exceptions, viewed the Air Force as a gentleman’s flying club, not a military unit
Interwar Period: France

- Battle proven
- Joint operations with Army
- Allies privy to military plans
- Adaptive to new technology
- Consistency of command and organization
- Technologically advanced defense industry
Italy
Rise of Fascism

- In April 1915 during WWI a secret treaty was signed in London by which Italy, in exchange for entering the war, was promised territory.
- At Versailles in 1919 Italy was severely dissatisfied with the territory allocated to her.
- The areas Italy received were extensive: Southern Tyrol and the Trentino area in the north and the Istrian Peninsula in the east.
- The other territories were denied on the principle of national self determination ...the Allies could not grant Italy the territory it had been promised because it was not theirs to give, since most of the territory promised to Italy was not populated by Italians.
Rise of Fascism

- Democracy as an institution was unstable and novel to the Italians, with universal male suffrage only having been granted in 1912.
- National debt was 6 times larger than prior to WWI
- In the elections of May 1921, 35 fascists, including Mussolini, were elected to the Chamber of Deputies, representing about 250,000 official party members drawn mostly from the lower middle class.
- Political tensions between the Fascists and the Communists mounted in Italy almost to the point of civil war.
- By the summer of 1922, the Fascist army marched from Naples to Rome, declaring their loyalty to the king, Victor Emmanuel, and to the Roman Catholic Church.
- Mussolini used his private army, now turned into a militia, to purge local governments of any opposition to fascism. He consolidated his power under the motto: "All in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state."
Military Strategy

- Mussolini’s foreign and military policy is to modernize Italy for war in order to recapture the glory of the Roman Empire
- Douhet vs Mecozzi
  - Battle plane vs. Attack/Support
  - Mecozzi’s philosophies win out
- Invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-36
- Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)
  - Over 750 aircraft, 5,700 personnel
- Very balanced Air Force with established doctrine
The problem Italy faced (especially in its air force) was not a lack of doctrine or training, but simply technology. Italy’s defense industry was not capable of competing with other nations both in terms of quantity or quality.
Interwar Period: Italy

- Battle proven (Spain)
- Reliable Allies privy to military plans
- Consistency of command and organization
- Technologically advanced
- Industrial base to produce highly-technical weapons
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