**Both Mussolini’s domestic and foreign policy could appear on Paper 3**. This guide will only deal with his foreign policy – you should have revised his domestic policy already for Paper 2.

By the end of your revision, you should be comfortable with the following ‘big picture’ questions:

**1. What were the key events and policies followed by Mussolini in his foreign policy?**

**2. What evidence is there to suggest that he was an opportunistic gambler in foreign policy?**

**3. What evidence is there to suggest that he was a planner who followed a clear foreign policy throughout?**

**4. How successful was his foreign policy?**

Now use the TACKLED essay frames for some active revision.

In order to answer a question on Mussolini’s foreign policy you will need to be very aware of the sequence of events and decisions made below. You must be careful not to regurgitate them as a narrative in the exam; the challenge will be to develop an analytical/evaluative argument, as addressed in the second section of this hand out.

**Key Events in Mussolini’s Foreign Policy**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Event** | **Explanation** |
| **1922** | **The Corfu Incident** | Italy occupied the Greek island of Corfu after the murder of an Italian General there. He stands up to criticism from the League of Nations, obtaining compensation and a public apology from Greece before withdrawing. |
| **1924** | **Fiume** | Mussolini gains the long disputed town of Fiume through a treaty with Yugoslavia – a prestigious achievement. |
| **1925** | **Signs the Locarno Pact** | Mussolini flamboyantly commits Italy to these international agreements, which committed their signatories to peaceful policies. He is keen to be seen as a constructive partner in the eyes of Britain and France – at this point viewing effective diplomacy as the best means of getting them to review the Treaty of Versailles and gifting him more land from Austria. |
| **1928** | **Signs the Kellog Briand Pact** |
| **1934** | **Dolfuss affair** | Following the assassination of Chancellor Dolfuss in Austria by the local Nazi Party, Hitler attempted to capitalise by preparing the German army to invade during the chaos. Mussolini mobilised the Italian army, fearful that a German takeover of Austria would be the end of Italian ambitions there, forcing Hitler to back down. |
| **1935** | **Signs the Stresa Front** | After the Dolfuss affair and when Hitler said he would no longer observe the Treaty of Versailles, Mussolini signs an agreement with GB and France to safeguard the Treaty of Versailles. |
| **1935** | **London Naval Agreement** | GB, seeking to appease Hitler, signing an agreement with him allowing for the expansion of the German navy – Mussolini is not consulted (despite the recent Stresa Front) and is livid. |
| **1935** | **Abyssinia** | Italy invades Abyssinia. GB & France had given secret approval in the Hoare-Loval Pact, but when this was leaked to the press they were forced to step in anyway as Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations. GB and France now had to support League sanctions against Italy. This is the major turning point in pushing Mussolini away from the democracies and into the arms of Hitler. |
| **1936** | **Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War** | Mussolini intervened in the conflict, supporting his fellow fascist Franco. Mussolini cooperates with Hitler in this and signs a commercial and friendship treaty with Germany (feels betrayed by GB & France over Abyssinia, giving fighting in Absyssinia and Spain he needs to secure relations with Hitler in the north, Germany was one of the few countries to trade with Italy on account of the League’s sanctions, Hitler’s increasing power appealed to Mussolini much more than the appeasement policies of GB and France). |
| **1937** | **Signs the Anti-Comintern Pact and leaves the League** | Moves into close alliance with Germany and Japan and follows Hitler in leaving the League of Nations. |
| **1938** | **Munich Conference** | Mussolini allows the invasion of Austria by Hitler and supports his claim on the Sudentenland at the Munich Conference. He is increasingly regarded as Hitler’s lapdog and starts to lose his independence of action. |
| **1939** | **Pact of Steel** | Full military alliance signed with Hitler – successfully invades Albania on his own account |
| **1940** | **Enters WW2** | Mussolini delayed entering the war on the side of Germany as he got cold feet about taking on GB and France **(he was still attempting to negotiate a peace deal in 1939)** – eventually attacks France as their defeat became inevitable, launching (a still unsuccessful) surprise attack only two weeks before they surrender. Italian troops proceed to launch disastrous invasions of Greece and North Africa – in both cases the German army has to save them. |
| **1943** | **The end** | Italian troops perform poorly in all theatres. When the allies invade Sicily in 1943 he is overthrown by his own supporters. Despite being briefly (forcibly) reinstated by Hitler for a time, he is eventually assassinated by partisans. |

**What phases can we identify in Mussolini’s foreign policy methods?**

As the colour coding indicates in the above table, Mussolini’s foreign policy can (broadly speaking) be seen to be passing through three distinct phases:

**1. The use of diplomacy to woo GB and France** – Mussolini seeks to minimise external conflicts in order to consolidate his power in Italy, feels cooperating with GB & France are the key to his goal of amending the Treaty of Versailles.

**2. A more aggressive phase and a move towards Hitler**– as the rise of Hitler and Japan distract GB and France (coupled with their seeming reluctance to take any assertive action and their ‘betrayal’ of him with regards to Abyssinia) emboldens Mussolini to use force and to shift his allegiance towards a more like minded Germany. He is beginning to play ‘second fiddle’ to Hitler.

**3. The loss of independence** – once Mussolini finally commits himself to war on the side of Germany, he effectively loses his independence as he increasingly relies on German support to prop up his incompetent military and vulnerable domestic position.

**Was Mussolini’s Foreign Policy successful?**

As ever, to answer first such a question we must first consider what he set out to achieve:

1) Mussolini wanted to establish a modern **Roman empire in the Mediterranean.**   
2) A successful foreign policy might **distract Italians** domestic problems. *(Note the increased aggression following the Great Depression)*  
3) Mussolini was disappointed with the small territorial gains from WW1, and the **humiliating Treaty of Versailles**.   
4) Fascist ideology preached **national glory**.

**Evidence of Successes?**

Mussolini’s policies until the mid-1930s can be seen to be successful. His active relations with GB and France raised the status of Italy far higher than it had been at the close of WW1 (it is hard to imagine that Italy would have achieved so little at the Treaty of Versailles if he had been in charge). He established influence in the Mediterranean (Fiume, Corfu) and became a central and valued figure on the world stage in the Locarno and Kellog-Briand agreements and the Stresa Front. He also initially kept Hitler in check – his mixture of diplomacy backed up by a certain level of aggression proved effective in this first phase. His regime remained well-supported at home until WW2, partly as a result of this.

**Examples to note:** 1923-Corfu (Greece), boosted Mussolini’s image, 1924 – Fiume (had become an iconic issue for Italians), 1934-Succeeded in preventing Hitler from taking Austria, Italy’s high status in the eyes of GB and France until 1935 as evidenced by the agreements signed.

**Evidence of Failures?**

While some of his foreign policy appeared on the surface to be successful from the invasion of Abyssinia onwards (second phase), Mussolini’s increased aggression led him into the arms of Hitler and the ultimate defeat of WW2. His policy became increasingly confused – on the one hand seeking military involvement, on the other desperate to avoid an all-out war with GB and France (as evidenced by his last minute attempts to make peace between Germany and GB in 1939 and his considerable delay in joining in the German invasion of France). Obviously, his foreign policy had failed in all areas as a result by 1943.

**Examples to note:** Mussolini fails to reverse the humiliation in WW1 and TOV, Even though Mussolini acquired more territory and achieved some of his foreign policy aims (establishing Italy as dominant power in Mediterranean), the invasion of Abyssinia was a failure. It was a huge cost for Italy to invade the country, and Italy did not get any economic gains from the invasion. Only 2 percent of trade with Abyssinia by 1939 - the huge cost of this dubious policy was the move into the orbit of Hitler, leading to the disaster of WW2.

**Overall judgment?**

Since Mussolini’s ultimate foreign policy aim was to increase his power, he was in the end a complete failure. WW2 brought fascism to an end, and even before 1939, Mussolini had only succeeded in increasing his power superficially. He had expanded his empire in Africa by taking Abyssinia, which was a huge cost for the country, and made some other minor territorial gains in Europe. He had not been successful in overturning TOV, and he was constantly overshadowed by Hitler. Italy did not have the economic or military strength to compete with the great powers such as France, Germany and Britain. Therefore, Mussolini failed in his foreign policy aims.

**Historiography**

While debate is limited in terms of success (given the obvious nature of his ultimate failure), there is a debate that mirrors that which surrounds Hitler – i.e. to what extent did he plan his foreign policy? A planner or an opportunist?

You could bring the following schools of thought into an essay that focuses on how consistent his policy was (for example):

- **The Intentionalist School**: His policy was consistent in that he planned from the start to conquer land. His ‘diplomatic phase’ was merely a temporary measure to get the most out of Italy’s relative military weakness.

- **The Structuralist School**: Mussolini had no master plan, simply grabbing opportunities as they occurred with little thought for long term implications – particularly if they provided opportunities for him to strut around looking important. In the words of AJP Taylor, he was *“without either ideas or plans”.*  Mr Tipney agrees with this too – as part of your revision find evidence from the timeline to support both views and make up your own mind.

**Sneaky examiners**

The examiner is likely to focus on one period of Mussolini’s foreign policy in the question – **so watch out for the dates in these questions**! They will unlikely include up to 1943 as this would make a judgement on his success redundant (but you should know what happened just in case)