

Background Briefing—Italy

In 1915 we were approached by British representatives who persuaded us to join them in their war against the Central Powers. Although originally allied with Germany and the other Central Powers, it proved in our interests to switch to the Allies. This decision was predicated on the 1915 Treaty of London signed with Britain, France, and Russia.

The Treaty of London promised us sections of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire which included a chunk of Slovenia and the northern part of the Dalmatian coast as well as colonial rights in Africa and the Middle East. We kept our end of the agreement by fighting the Austro-Hungarian forces all along the Alpine front where we suffered half a million dead and as many seriously wounded. In addition to these sacrifices, our economy was devastated by the war. We have debts of \$3.5 billion and we endured wartime inflation higher than any other country besides Russia. Therefore, it is vital that any peace settlement result in our receiving some type of financial compensation.

Italians did not all support the war, and now that it is over these divisions within our country are coming to the surface. We have a lot to concern with in our own country, so we do not wish to be hampered by delays in the fulfillment of our previous agreements. We want what we are due, now.

Had it not been for our entry into the war and the sacrifices we made, British and French forces would have been greatly outnumbered

at the start of the conflict when they were in dire straits.

The discussions of forming a new “southern Slav” state called Yugoslavia in order to placate the Serbs is not justified if it means denying us areas that we were promised. This is especially the case if Croats and Slovenes, who fought for Austria-Hungary, are given territory in the new Yugoslavia that was paid for in Italian blood. The port of Fiume, although not originally a part of the Treaty of London, has become vital to a strong Italy and should not be given to Yugoslavia. Fiume, the “jewel of the Adriatic,” has an Italian majority within the city proper and was captured by Italian forces by war’s end. In addition, all of the territory was at one time under Roman rule with Italian culture found throughout. Rumors of our having to abandon Fiume have already circulated around Italy, causing great unrest among our people. This unrest could pave the way for extremist groups like the Bolsheviks or nationalists to seize control of our government which could result in revolution. Already there’s talk of the “mutilated victory” which would be underscored if we don’t receive all that we were promised in the Treaty of London as well as Fiume.

The political and ethnic realities of the Balkans make any discussion of self-determination a moot point. We are entitled to the demands for which we fought and are determined to achieve them.