

[Summary]

Dictators through Diplomatic Eyes: Europe in Switzerland's Diplomatic Documents before the Second World War

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Abstract

Building on the author's earlier research on wartime Japan based on Swiss diplomatic documents, this article examines prewar Europe through the same archival lens. Focusing on France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, it analyzes how diplomats of neutral Switzerland observed, interpreted, and reported on the rise of authoritarian regimes and their leaders during the interwar period.

Drawing on Swiss diplomatic correspondence from the early 1920s to 1936, the article highlights numerous direct contacts between Swiss diplomats and key political figures of the era, including Benito Mussolini, Franz von Papen, Joseph Goebbels, Konstantin von Neurath, and Werner von Blomberg. While no direct personal encounter with Adolf Hitler is documented in this study, the sources include detailed contemporary accounts of a public speech he delivered in Zurich shortly before the Munich Putsch, as well as observations by a Swiss diplomat of one of his early major speeches to the Reichstag in 1934.

Particular attention is paid to approximately thirty recorded conversations between Swiss diplomats and Mussolini, exchanges between Swiss Foreign Minister Giuseppe Motta and leading Nazi officials, and detailed assessments of Italy's domestic and international situation in the period preceding its invasion of Ethiopia. By foregrounding the perspectives of diplomats from a neutral state, this study sheds new light on how contemporary observers perceived authoritarian power, political radicalization, and the progressive erosion of the European international order before 1936.