



# WHIS MUN 2024

## **STUDY GUIDE**

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STUDY GUIDE

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League of Nations

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Agendas :

1. Addressing Potential Reforms to the League of Nations to address the league's capacity for conflict resolution.
  2. Resolving immediate threats to international peace and security with reference to growing tensions in Europe and Asia.
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## **Letter from the Executive Board**

Greetings Delegates,

Welcome to Committee X, **the League of Nations**, being simulated at WHISMUN 2024. This committee is set for a **Freeze Date of 15th March, 1939**. A time period where your diplomacy will be key to avoiding the escalation of the geopolitical landscape into another World War.

In order to help you research well, we have prepared this background guide which will introduce you to the committee and will further give you an overview of the agenda at hand. We hope this helps kick start your portfolio related as well as agenda related research. The delegates must make it a point not to confine their research to this guide. We encourage you to conduct extensive research individually and then lobby effectively to make the committee benefit from your unique and valuable viewpoint.

As you prepare to become diplomats representing your respective nations, it is imperative for each of you to understand the gravity of such a position of power in this time period. We expect all of you to display immaculate diplomacy and courtesy during as well as outside the committee. We strongly urge you to be diplomatic, not demanding. We also request you to adhere to your foreign policy. Your analytical skills, your negotiation skills and your ability of consensus building would be of paramount importance.

Wishing you good luck for the conference!

Regards,

Dhruv Thakker, Chairperson

Bhagyashree Birje, Vice-Chairperson

Committee X, WHISMUN 2024.



## **About the Committee**

### **Powers and functions<sup>1</sup>**

The League of Nations started its activities in accordance with the articles of the Covenant on 10 January 1920, when the Treaty of Versailles came into force, with the aim to exercise itself as follows:

The League aimed to resolve international disputes peacefully through arbitration, judicial settlement, or inquiry by the Council (Articles 12-15).

The League promoted the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and was tasked with addressing the concerns related to private manufacture of munitions and its regulation (Article 8).

The League managed former colonies and territories of the Central Powers, assigning them as mandates to member states under conditions ensuring the well-being and development of their inhabitants (Article 22).

Members were required to submit disputes likely to lead to war to arbitration or the Council and to refrain from war until three months after the decision (Article 12).

Resorting to war in violation of these provisions was considered an act of war against all other members (Article 16).

In cases where a member violated the Covenant by resorting to war, the League could impose economic and military sanctions (Article 16).

The League endeavored to secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labor worldwide, oversaw agreements related to the traffic in women and children and the traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs, took steps to prevent and control disease on an international level and aimed to secure and maintain freedom of communications and equitable treatment for commerce (Article 23).

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<sup>1</sup> Covenant of the League of Nations: [https://libraryresources.unog.ch/ld.php?content\\_id=32971179](https://libraryresources.unog.ch/ld.php?content_id=32971179)



All international treaties and engagements by members had to be registered with the Secretariat and published (Article 18).

Members agreed to support one another in implementing sanctions to minimize losses and resist special measures by the offending state (Article 16).

### **Structure of the League**

The League comprised three main organs: the Assembly, the Council, and the Secretariat. The assembly consisted of each member state of the League and every member had one vote, regardless of its size or power.

Initially, the Council consisted of representatives from the Principal Allied and Associated Powers (United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Japan). Additionally, four other member states were selected by the Assembly to serve on the Council. This number was later increased to include more non-permanent members. Each member of the Council had one vote, and decisions typically required unanimity, though procedural decisions could be made by a majority.

The Secretariat included a staff of international civil servants who carried out the day-to-day work of the League. This staff was appointed by the Secretary-General with the Council's approval.

### **Need for Reforms**

In the face of a rapidly deteriorating geopolitical landscape, the following critical weaknesses of the League of Nations were brought to light:

The requirement for unanimous decisions in both the Assembly and the Council often led to deadlock, as any single member could veto a resolution.

Although the US President, Woodrow Wilson, played a pivotal role in the process of creation of the League of Nations, he was not able to secure the majority necessary at the US Senate for the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. In the end, the United States never joined the organization.



This absence of key nations, notably the United States, weakened the League's authority and effectiveness. Additionally, other major powers like Germany and the Soviet Union were initially excluded. The structure gave significant influence to colonial powers, often marginalizing smaller and non-Western nations.

The League's ability to address economic and social issues was constrained by its limited authority and resources. It also lacked its own military force, relying on member states to contribute troops for peacekeeping, which they were often reluctant to do.

The League struggled to effectively manage and resolve international disputes, as seen in the following cases:

1920: Poland seized Vilna, the Capital of Lithuania

1923: Italy occupied the Greek Island of Corfu.

1931-1932: Japan invaded Manchuria

1935-1936: Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia)

1936: Foreign powers got involved in the Spanish Civil War

1938: Germany Annexed Austria

1938: Britain and France allowed annexation of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia

The League's structure and processes were not sufficiently adaptable to the rapidly changing international landscape and lives were being lost at a scale as never imagined before.

Thus there were necessary reforms required in the domain of faster and efficient decision making, improving representation and inclusivity, and to resolve disputes with the necessary resources.

### **Procedure for Reforms**

Amendments to the Covenant could be proposed by any member of the League. These proposals needed to be discussed and agreed upon by both the Assembly and the Council.

A proposed amendment had to be ratified by a majority of the Assembly unless otherwise specified.

The Council also needed to approve the proposed amendment. Decisions in the Council required unanimity among the members present, excluding the representatives of the parties to the dispute (in case of conflicts).

Once an amendment was approved by both the Assembly and the Council, it had to be ratified by the member states. Specifically, amendments would take effect only when ratified by the members of the League whose representatives composed the Council and by a majority of the members of the League whose representatives composed the Assembly.

This meant that not only did the principal powers need to ratify the amendment, but also a majority of the entire League membership.

No amendment would be binding on any member state that signified its dissent from the amendment. If a member state dissented from an amendment, it was not bound by it, but it had to cease being a member of the League (Article 26).

### **Failure of Reforms**

"It was not the League which failed. It was not its principles which were found wanting. It was the nations which neglected it. It was the Governments which abandoned it."<sup>2</sup>

This sentiment of the Delegate of France was shared by many observers after the failure of the League of Nations in 1946.

However, for our timeline set in March of 1939, this still holds true.

Lack of political willingness from numerous member states was observed when they were reluctant to cede sovereignty or commit resources for collective security measures.

The resurgence of nationalism and militarism in the 1930s saw a climate of distrust and hostility which encouraged national interests to take precedence over the League's ideologies.

The Great Depression of the 1930s contributed to economic instability and diverting attention and resources away from international initiatives like the League of Nations.

The domination of major powers over the smaller member states hindered the process of enacting meaningful reforms since their interests were often misaligned.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/league-of-nations/transition>



The absence of key major powers like the United States, and later the withdrawal of countries such as Germany and Japan, weakened the League's ability to implement comprehensive reforms.

The League's procedures and need for wide-ranging agreement among diverse member states often led to slow and incremental changes rather than swift, decisive reforms.







## **Agenda 2: Resolving immediate threats to international peace and security with reference to growing tensions in Europe and Asia.**

### **Introduction**<sup>3</sup>

#### **Context of the Late 1930s**

As of March 15, 1939, the world stands at the brink of unprecedented conflict and upheaval. The geopolitical landscape is marked by aggressive expansionism, ideological battles, and the failure of existing international mechanisms to maintain peace. The League of Nations, established to prevent such conflicts, has been largely ineffective in curbing the aggressive policies of totalitarian regimes in Europe and Asia. This historical moment is critical in understanding the immediate threats to international peace and security that the League is tasked with addressing.

#### **Rising Tensions in Europe**

<sup>4</sup>Europe in the late 1930s is a powder keg of political and military tensions. Nazi Germany, under Adolf Hitler, has pursued a policy of aggressive expansion. This is evident in the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria in 1938, and the occupation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland following the Munich Agreement, a move that was ostensibly aimed at appeasing Germany but ultimately emboldened its ambitions. The most recent occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 has sent shockwaves through Europe, signaling that appeasement has failed and that further German aggression is likely imminent.

Similarly, Italy, under Benito Mussolini, has embarked on a campaign to recreate a Roman Empire-like presence, as evidenced by its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and its active participation in the Spanish Civil War on the side of Francisco Franco's Nationalists. These actions have not only destabilized Europe but also challenged the efficacy of international responses and the principles of collective security enshrined by the League of Nations.

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<sup>3</sup> [Avalon Project — The Avalon Project : Munich Pact 9/29/38avalon.law.yale.edu](https://avalon.law.yale.edu)

<sup>4</sup> [CyberCemetery — Staff Report: Chapter IIgovinfo.library.unt.edu](https://cybercemetery.unt.edu)

## **Escalating Conflicts in Asia**

In Asia, Japan's imperial ambitions have led to significant regional instability. The invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the subsequent establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo were early indicators of Japan's expansionist policies. The full-scale invasion of China in 1937 marked the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, a brutal conflict characterized by widespread atrocities and a disregard for international norms. The League of Nations' inability to effectively intervene has further emboldened Japan, raising concerns about the security of other territories in East and Southeast Asia, including European colonial possessions.

## **The League of Nations' Challenges**

The League of Nations, conceived as a guarantor of global peace, faces significant challenges in this era of rising threats. Its structure and decision-making processes have proven inadequate in dealing with aggressive powers. Key member states have often prioritized national interests over collective action, and the absence of major powers like the United States has weakened the League's influence. The failures in responding to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Japanese aggression in China have particularly highlighted the League's impotence.

## **Economic and Ideological Underpinnings**

The economic turmoil of the Great Depression has exacerbated political instability worldwide, contributing to the rise of extremist ideologies. Fascism in Germany and Italy, and militarism in Japan, have thrived in environments where economic despair has made radical solutions appealing. The ideological battle between fascism, communism, and democracy further complicates the international response to these threats. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) serves as a microcosm of this ideological struggle, with fascist, communist, and democratic forces vying for control, drawing in international support and escalating the conflict.

## **Diplomatic Efforts and Alliances**

Efforts to maintain peace through diplomacy have been fraught with challenges. The Munich Agreement of 1938, intended to appease Germany, only delayed conflict and



undermined trust in diplomatic solutions. Meanwhile, the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany, Italy, and Japan signifies a formalization of alliances among aggressive powers, further isolating nations seeking to uphold international law and order. These diplomatic developments underscore the need for a reevaluation of strategies to ensure peace and security.

## **Timeline of Events**

### **Post-World War I and Early 1920s**

- 1919, June 28: The Treaty of Versailles is signed, officially ending World War I. The treaty imposes heavy reparations and territorial losses on Germany, contributing to future economic and political instability.
- 1920, January 10: The League of Nations is established with the aim of maintaining world peace and preventing future conflicts. The United States, however, does not join the League.

### **Early 1920s**

- 1923, November 8-9: The Beer Hall Putsch, an attempted coup by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Munich, fails. Hitler is imprisoned, during which he writes "Mein Kampf," outlining his future plans for Germany.

### **Late 1920s**

- 1929, October 29: The Wall Street Crash leads to the Great Depression, causing widespread economic hardship and political instability globally, which contributes to the rise of extremist movements in Europe.

### **Early 1930s**

- 1931, September 18: Japan invades Manchuria, establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. This marks the beginning of Japan's aggressive territorial expansion in Asia.
- 1933, January 30: Adolf Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany, marking the rise of the Nazi regime. Germany begins a significant rearmament program, violating the Treaty of Versailles.



- 1933, October 14: Germany withdraws from the League of Nations, signaling its rejection of post-World War I international agreements.

### **Mid-1930s**

- 1935, March 16: Hitler announces the reintroduction of conscription in Germany, further violating the Treaty of Versailles.
- 1935, October 3: Italy invades Ethiopia, demonstrating the League of Nations' inability to prevent aggression by its members.
- 1936, March 7: Germany remilitarizes the Rhineland, another violation of the Treaty of Versailles. The lack of response from France and the United Kingdom emboldens Hitler.
- 1936, July: The Spanish Civil War begins. Germany and Italy support Franco's Nationalists, while the Soviet Union and international brigades support the Republicans. The war becomes a proxy battle between fascist and communist ideologies.

### **Late 1930s**

- 1937, July 7: The Second Sino-Japanese War begins with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, escalating Japan's invasion of China.
- 1938, March 12: Germany annexes Austria in the Anschluss, further violating the Treaty of Versailles. This lack of international response encourages further aggression.
- 1938, September 29-30: The Munich Agreement is signed by Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy. This agreement cedes the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia to Germany in an attempt to appease Hitler and avoid war.
- 1938, October 1: German troops occupy the Sudetenland. The Munich Agreement is widely seen as a failed act of appeasement.
- 1938, November 9-10: Kristallnacht, a coordinated attack on Jewish people and their property across Germany and Austria, further exemplifies the increasing brutality of the Nazi regime.

### **Early 1939**

- 1939, March 15: Germany invades and occupies the remaining parts of Czechoslovakia, creating the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This marks



the end of Czechoslovak independence and a clear indication that Hitler's ambitions extend beyond merely uniting German-speaking peoples.

This comprehensive timeline highlights the critical events leading up to March 15, 1939, showcasing the aggressive policies of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, and the failure of appeasement strategies by European powers. The annexation of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia are pivotal moments that underscore the immediate threats to international peace and security in Europe and Asia.

## **Threats to International Peace and Security in Europe**

### **The Rise of Totalitarian Regimes**

The lead-up to March 1939 witnessed significant threats to international peace and security in Europe, driven predominantly by the aggressive actions of totalitarian regimes. The rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany and Benito Mussolini in Italy resulted in policies that defied the post-World War I order and destabilized the continent.

### **Nazi Germany's Aggressive Expansion**

Germany, under Adolf Hitler, embarked on a path of territorial expansion and militarization that directly violated the Treaty of Versailles. Key events include:

1. Reoccupation of the Rhineland (1936): On March 7, 1936, German troops reoccupied the demilitarized Rhineland, violating the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaties. This move went unchallenged by France and the United Kingdom, emboldening Hitler to pursue further aggressive actions.
2. The Anschluss (1938): On March 12, 1938, Germany annexed Austria in the Anschluss. This annexation, a direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles, occurred with minimal international opposition, signaling to Hitler that further expansion could be achieved with little resistance.
3. The Munich Agreement (1938): The Munich Agreement, signed on September 30, 1938, allowed Germany to annex the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. Britain and France's policy of appeasement aimed to prevent war but ultimately emboldened Hitler. This agreement marked a critical failure in curbing Nazi

ambitions, as it showed that territorial gains could be achieved through diplomatic pressure without military confrontation.

4. Occupation of Czechoslovakia (1939): On March 15, 1939, German forces occupied the remaining parts of Czechoslovakia, creating the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This invasion went beyond the pretext of uniting ethnic Germans, as Czechoslovakia had been assured of its security by the Munich Agreement. The occupation revealed Hitler's broader aims for European domination and his willingness to flout international agreements. The swift takeover involved the German military's entry into Prague and the establishment of a Nazi-controlled administration. This act was a stark indication of Germany's expansionist strategy and disregard for international diplomacy, significantly heightening tensions in Europe.

### **Italy's Expansionist Policies**

Italy, under Mussolini, pursued aggressive expansionist policies that threatened European stability:

1. Invasion of Ethiopia (1935-1936): Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935, aiming to expand its colonial empire. The League of Nations' failure to impose effective sanctions on Italy demonstrated the weaknesses of international mechanisms designed to maintain peace.
2. Intervention in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): Italy, alongside Germany, provided substantial support to Franco's Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. This intervention not only influenced the outcome of the war but also served as a testing ground for new military strategies and solidified the Rome-Berlin Axis.

### **The Weakness of the League of Nations**

The League of Nations, established to prevent such conflicts, proved ineffective in dealing with the aggressive actions of Germany and Italy. Its failure to enforce collective security measures and the absence of key global powers like the United States weakened its authority and ability to maintain peace.



## **Implications for International Peace and Security**

The aggressive expansions of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, coupled with the ineffective responses from the League of Nations and other major powers, highlighted the immediate threats to international peace and security. These events set the stage for the outbreak of World War II, as diplomatic efforts to contain the totalitarian regimes failed, and military confrontations became increasingly likely.

## **Threats to International Peace and Security in Asia**

### **Japanese Imperial Ambitions**

The period leading up to March 1939 saw significant threats to international peace and security in Asia, driven primarily by the imperial ambitions of Japan. Japan's aggressive expansionist policies were motivated by a combination of economic needs, nationalist fervor, and militaristic ideology. These policies led to widespread conflict and instability in the region.

### **Invasion of Manchuria (1931)**

The first major act of Japanese aggression occurred on September 18, 1931, when Japan invaded Manchuria following the Mukden Incident, an event staged by Japanese military personnel as a pretext for invasion. By 1932, Japan had established the puppet state of Manchukuo. This invasion demonstrated Japan's willingness to use military force to achieve its goals and exposed the weaknesses of the League of Nations, which failed to effectively respond to the aggression. The League's inability to stop Japan's expansion set a dangerous precedent for future conflicts.

### **Withdrawal from the League of Nations (1933)**

In response to international condemnation and the League of Nations' investigation into its actions in Manchuria, Japan withdrew from the League in 1933. This move signified Japan's rejection of international norms and its commitment to pursuing its imperial objectives without regard for global opinion or diplomatic repercussions.



## **Second Sino-Japanese War (1937)**

The Second Sino-Japanese War, which began on July 7, 1937, marked a significant escalation in Japanese aggression. The conflict was triggered by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, a skirmish between Japanese and Chinese troops near Beijing. Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China, leading to brutal military campaigns and widespread atrocities. Key events in this conflict include:

1. The Battle of Shanghai (1937): One of the earliest and largest battles of the war, where Japanese forces eventually overcame Chinese resistance after months of intense urban warfare.
2. Nanking Massacre (1937-1938): After capturing Nanking (Nanjing), the Japanese army committed mass atrocities, including the killing of an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese civilians and prisoners of war. The brutal occupation of Nanking highlighted the extreme violence of Japan's military campaigns and significantly damaged Japan's international reputation.

### **Expansion in China**

Beyond the major battles, Japan sought to control vast swathes of Chinese territory, establishing puppet governments and exploiting resources to fuel its war effort. The prolonged conflict devastated China, leading to millions of deaths and widespread suffering. Japan's actions in China were part of a broader strategy to dominate East Asia and secure the resources necessary to support its growing industrial economy.

### **Regional Impact and International Response**

Japan's aggressive policies in Asia had significant regional and global implications:

1. Destabilization of Asia: Japan's invasions and occupations created instability throughout the region. Neighboring countries, including the Soviet Union and various Southeast Asian nations, grew increasingly concerned about Japanese expansionism.
2. Strained International Relations: Japan's actions strained its relations with Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, which had economic and strategic interests in Asia. These tensions would eventually contribute to the broader conflict of World War II.





3. Economic Exploitation: Japan's occupation of Chinese territories involved extensive economic exploitation, including the seizure of natural resources and forced labor. This exploitation further fueled resistance movements and exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in occupied regions.

### **The Failure of Diplomatic Efforts**

Efforts to curb Japanese aggression through diplomacy largely failed. The League of Nations' inability to enforce sanctions or military action against Japan highlighted the limitations of international diplomatic mechanisms at the time. This failure emboldened Japan to continue its expansionist policies, contributing to the overall threat to international peace and security.



## **Conclusion**

By March 15, 1939, the global landscape was marked by severe threats to international peace and security, stemming from aggressive actions in both Europe and Asia. The rise of totalitarian regimes in Germany and Italy, alongside Japan's imperial ambitions, significantly destabilized their respective regions.

In Europe, Nazi Germany's aggressive expansion under Adolf Hitler fundamentally challenged the post-World War I order. Key events, such as the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss with Austria, the Munich Agreement, and the subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia, demonstrated the failure of appeasement policies and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. Hitler's ambitions went unchecked, setting a dangerous precedent for unchecked aggression and highlighting the vulnerabilities in international diplomatic efforts.

Italy, under Mussolini, similarly pursued expansionist policies, most notably with the invasion of Ethiopia and intervention in the Spanish Civil War. These actions further destabilized Europe and showcased the League of Nations' inability to enforce collective security measures.

In Asia, Japan's aggressive expansionist policies, starting with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and escalating with the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, created widespread conflict and instability. The brutal occupation of China, exemplified by the Nanking Massacre, and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations underscored its disregard for international norms and its commitment to imperial ambitions. Japan's actions not only destabilized Asia but also strained relations with Western powers, contributing to the broader global tensions that would lead to World War II.

The League of Nations, established to maintain peace and prevent conflicts, proved largely ineffective in the face of these aggressive actions. Its failure to enforce sanctions or military action against Germany, Italy, and Japan highlighted its limitations and the need for more robust international mechanisms to ensure peace and security.

The aggressive policies and territorial expansions of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan significantly undermined international peace and security. The failure of appeasement and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations allowed these regimes to pursue their ambitions unchecked, setting the stage for the outbreak of World War II. As



Europe and Asia moved closer to full-scale conflict, the world faced an increasingly volatile and dangerous international environment.

This period serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of unchecked aggression and the importance of effective international cooperation and enforcement of collective security measures to maintain global peace.

