

COMMUN VII

2022 | Commonwealth School, Boston



Historical Committee: Abyssinia Crisis

Background Guide

Committee Head: Jay Sweitzer-Shalit



Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to COMMUN VII. I'm Jay Sweitzer-Shalit, a Sophomore at Commonwealth and the crisis head, and I'm excited to be leading this committee. This is my first year as a crisis head, but I was co-chair at COMMUN VI last year and I've been doing model UN since 6th grade. Model UN was challenging at first – not getting everything I wanted was difficult – but over time I learned how to negotiate, work together, and compete as needed. Civility and respect is important at our conference, and we, together with you, will do our best to maintain it.

Our committee, the Abyssinian War Crisis committee, is a crisis committee. This means that each delegate has unique powers, being able to ask their country to take actions, as well as being able to work together as a whole. Additionally, this is a historical committee, meaning that it takes place starting on January 3rd, 1935. Although you may not agree with your country's views, remember that your goal is to stay true to your country within reasonable bounds. The course of history need not repeat itself. Could perhaps the war be prevented? Will other foreign powers become involved? These questions are for you to find out. As always, please reach out if you have any questions.

Jay Sweitzer-Shalit

Crisis Head

Jsweitzer-shalit@Commschool.org



Abyssinia Crisis - Historical Committee

“His rule, his safety, depended upon prestige”

- Winston Churchill, on Benito Mussolini

Background:

You have been asked by the Ethiopian government, led by Emperor Haile Selassie I, to arbitrate between Ethiopia and Italy due to tensions caused by the Walwal incident. There is widespread fear that this is not the end of Italian aggression. You can work alone to take country specific actions and/or work as a group to create peace and prosperity for many years to come.

Discussion: The League of Nations

The League of Nations, the precursor to the UN, was founded shortly after World War I in 1919. Its goal was to prevent future conflicts and lead to greater peace and prosperity. Woodrow Wilson was a main proponent, seeing it as key to ensuring the spread of democracy and the limiting of facism and communism. It originally consisted of over 40 nations, although membership fluctuated over time. In 1935, the executive council consisted of four permanent members – The United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Russia – as well as 11 non-permanent countries. The league could theoretically take independent actions, such as imposing sanctions, but in practice needed countries' assistance to do almost everything out of the ordinary. It was widely viewed as a disappointment but in 1935 it was still a place for countries such as Ethiopia to turn for arbitration.

This committee will use modified voting rules that require a simple majority (50% + 1) to pass resolutions.

History of Ethiopia

Unlike other African countries, the Abbaysian (Ethiopian) Empire successfully maintained its independence and freedom from European powers. After a long period of mostly decentralized control (1500s - 1855), Tewodros II (1855-1868) became emperor, leading to centralization of power. Menelik II (1889-1913) was the next strong emperor but faced a growing threat from Italian imperial ambitions. Italy received a paper agreement from Britain that Ethiopia was within the Italian sphere of influence, and



negotiated a treaty with Menelik in 1889. Soon after however, Menelik grew dissatisfied with the treaty and revoked it. In Italian it required Ethiopia to conduct its foreign affairs through Italy while in Amharic it gave Ethiopia the option of conducting its foreign affairs through Italy. This sparked the first Italo-Ethiopian war in 1896. In the battle of Adwa, the Italians were annihilated as they marched towards the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. After Ethiopia's decisive victory, Italy and the rest of Europe recognized Ethiopia's independence. In 1930, Haile Selassie I was crowned emperor, opening the door to a bright Ethiopian future.

Italy Since Reunification

The Italian Empire, made up of the Kingdom of Italy and its territories, was created in Africa in the late 1800's. In 1886, Italy annexed Massawa, a port bordering the Red Sea and located in Eritrea, then a region of Ethiopia. This move landlocked the Ethiopian empire, and in 1887 Italy led an invasion of Ethiopia, thus starting the Eritrea War. The war ended with the signing of a treaty that gave Italy the Ethiopian land surrounding Massawa. Italy also acquired what would be known as Italian Somaliland, a territory on the southern side of the Horn of Africa. Following World War I and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Italy conquered Sazan Island in Albania and a portion of Dalmatia, lands that had been granted to expand the Dodecanese, Eritrea, Libya, and Somalia.

In 1922, Benito Mussolini's fascist government arose and promoted the colonization of lands outside of Italy as well as the immigration of Italians to the surrounding colonies. In 1923, Mussolini established official dominance over the Dodecanese Islands and Libya, and in the following year, added Jubaland to Italian Somaliland (previously ruled by Britain). His government currently continues to push for expansion, and strives for sole ownership of the Mediterranean, claiming that unopposed waters are the key to national sovereignty. See map on page 7 for more details.

Interwar European Politics

The first World War concluded with the Treaty of Versailles on June 28th, 1919. The treaty blamed Germany for the war and established harsh reparations that rewrote European borders, crushed the German economy, and disarmed the German army. The treaty was hailed as a great achievement that would deny Germany the ability to ever start another war. Today, however, most historians agree that the harsh terms of the Armistice in 1918 and the Treaty in 1919 unintentionally produced the conditions that motivated German nationalism and the belligerence that would spark the second World War.



The 1920s were celebrated as a decade of peace and diplomacy. Europe was rebuilt after the war, and the League of Nations was established in an attempt to regulate international relations. Not all nations joined – ironically, the majority of the countries that participated in WWI did not join: The US, Germany, and Soviet Union were all absent (although the Soviet Union was later admitted). Such absences made the League largely ineffective in resolving international disputes even in a decade of diplomacy. There were some diplomatic achievements however: the 1925 Geneva Protocols banned the use of chemical weapons, eliminating one of World War I's most dangerous tools of trench warfare.

Economically, conversion of wartime production to civilian economic output and the widespread adoption of oil power created a worldwide economic boom. Many technological advances also took place in the period: automobiles came into more widespread use, the assembly line revamped manufacturing, and industrial development and heavy machinery became essential to nations' productive capabilities. These new capabilities also influenced development of new military technology in the next decade.

In 1929, the stock market crashed in the United States. A global economic downturn began, and governments passed protective tariffs intended to help their own industries and economies. This led to the collapse of global trade and the Great Depression. Many different social and political movements stemmed from popular outrage, misery, and suffering during this period.

During the interwar period, democratic systems faced significant pressure from economic, social, and international stressors. Some countries, including Germany, Spain, and Italy, enacted nationalist autocratic policies under increasingly fascist systems. The patriotic aggression inherent in these social systems played a major role in sparking both World Wars: under the guise of defending their own interests or securing the future of their own people, many nations sought to enforce economic, political, and military dominance over their neighbors. Other nations, most notably the Bolshevik Soviet Union, adopted communist systems that centralized the economy and abolished private property. In the United States, the New Deal reshaped the American economy as one of the most progressive pieces of legislation in the country's history. Other European democracies also faced similar pressures during this time. With the weakness of the British Empire, the emergence of Japan as a naval power, and the isolationism of the United States, there was no clear global hegemon enforcing the international order. In Germany in 1930, the National Socialist German Workers, better known as the Nazi Party, emerged as the second largest political faction in Germany by stoking the fears and



resentments of a German nation devastated by reparations, the Great Depression, and hyperinflation. In 1933, a politician named Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany and completed the dismantling of democratic systems under the Weimar Republic by merging the positions of Chancellor and President, making himself dictator.

Under Hitler, Germany began to violate the Treaty of Versailles: Germany began to rearm, increase heavy military production, and crack down on political dissent, culminating in the Blood Purge on June 30 1934, in which 5,000 - 7,000 political dissidents were murdered. In stark contrast, Britain and France continued to decrease their military strength. Italy, concerned by German aggression, worked to ally themselves with France while still harboring plans for Ethiopia. Germany also threatened Austria by initiating a failed coup combined with a successful assassination of the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in 1934. While other countries turned a blind eye, Italy responded swiftly. As a new year dawned in 1935, France and Britain looked to avoid conflict and simply reaffirm ties with Italy while the rest of the world merely watched.

The Situation at the Start of Committee

By the 1930s, Italy had occupied part of Somalia, known as Italian Somalia. Italy, like many other European countries, wished to colonize parts of North Africa, and had already conquered part of Libya and, more recently, parts of Egypt and Sudan. Although, conquered may be the wrong word for this—Italy gained land from Egypt and Sudan in 1925 and 1934, respectively, by asking the British for more territory, which they were given. Logically, the next country in Mussolini's plans was Ethiopia.

On the other side of the arising conflict, Ethiopia was currently under the control of the Emperor Haile Selassie I, who had the general goals of modernizing Ethiopia and restructuring the country's power away from the nobility. July of 1931 saw Haile Selassie make two key declarations: that "the imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of His Majesty Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie", and that "In the Ethiopian Empire supreme power rests in the hands of the emperor." The government was united under Haile Selassie, as aside from Tigray, he controlled every strong Ethiopian province (the central Amhara province comprising the Shewa, Gojam, and Begemdir areas, plus the Kefa and Sidamo provinces). However, Haile Selassie did not attempt to directly upend the systems of nobility in these areas, believing it would lead to drastic social and economic changes that would be impossible to handle. Haile Selassie had a (fairly weak) army under his control, but instead he promoted his government peacefully by establishing a multitude of schools, importing printing presses to create newspapers, and establishing a national bank, among other actions.



Prior to late 1934, Italy and Ethiopia maintained relatively good relations with one another. The Italo-Ethiopian Treaty (1928) clarified the border between Italian Somalia and Ethiopia (pictured above), and Italy built a fort in the Walwal Oasis inside a boundary zone between the countries, though it was unclear if this action was consistent with the treaty. The Italians assumed their actions were allowed, as there was no subsequent protest. On September 29, 1934, the two countries released another statement emphasizing common peace. However, on November 22, 1934, 1000 Ethiopian troops traveled to the Walwal fort to ask the Italian-Somali troops stationed there to leave. The Italian-Somali general refused. On November 23, 1934, a group of Ethiopians and British traveled to Walwal. They were there to clarify the border between British Somalia and Ethiopia, and upon arrival at the Walwal fort were confronted by a larger number of Italian troops. The British group members left, so as not to create any further tensions, but the Ethiopians stayed.

The Walwal Incident

From December 5-7th, 1934, the Walwal Incident occurred. Roughly 100 Ethiopians and 50 Italian-Somalians were killed in the fighting, and each party provided their own reasons for the escalation. The Italians claimed the Ethiopians were the aggressors, attacking them with guns, while the Ethiopians claimed the Italians were the aggressors, attacking them with the help of tanks and aircraft. Beyond the cause, it was clear that neither party avoided escalation, as the Ethiopians repeatedly threatened the Italian troops and the Italians flew two planes over the fort. Other countries, especially those in the League of Nations, were disappointed in Italy because of the incident, viewing it as the aggressor.

Following the incident, Haile Selassie criticized the Italians (who he believed were responsible for the conflict) on December 6, 1934. On December 8, 1934, the Italians demanded an apology from Ethiopia and on December 11, 1934, the Italians repeated this demand with one offering monetary compensation. On January 3, 1935, Haile Selassie requested arbitration from the League of Nations, meaning that he wished for an independent body (an arbitrator) to settle the conflict. This is where the committee will begin, following Haile Selassie's request.

Military Strength

Ethiopia has a large but obsolete army consisting of at full mobilization in ideal conditions 800,000 troops. The army is a paper tiger and is armed with only 400,000



firearms of various conditions and types. Only a quarter of the troops have any military training whatsoever. It possesses 234 obsolete artillery pieces, around a thousand machine guns, seven armored cars, four obsolete tanks, and 13 aircraft.

The Italians, meanwhile, have 400,000 troops in Eritrea and 285,000 in Italian Somaliland, along with 3,300 machine guns, 275 artillery pieces, 200 small tanks, and 205 aircraft, though not all of these forces would be deployed in war against Ethiopia. There have been rumors of plans to increase these numbers, but as of yet, no concrete action has been taken. The Italians are reinforced by indigenous regiments recruited from Italy's colonial territories.

In short, Ethiopia would have no chance in a conventional war against Italy unless it received outside help, but may be able to initiate a guerrilla war with some small likelihood of success, as did the Boers when fighting the United Kingdom.

Possible Interventions

The League of Nations proved to need individual nation's assistance to make any decisions out of the ordinary. That being said, there are several actions that individual countries, or groups of countries, could take (this list is non-exhaustive). Sanctions on Italian exports could help in halting the conflict. Arms embargoes on one or both sides of the conflict, if enforced, would have a major effect. Finally, the most effective intervention would be, of course, direct military support, though highly risky.

All delegates can ask for and will receive information from their governments, which will provide all information it has. Delegates can also recommend courses of action to their governments but support is not guaranteed. Actions that could be recommended include statements, sanctions, arms support, arms embargoes, embargoes, blockades, and declarations of war.

Delegate Roles - Envoys to the League of Nations

1. UK

The United Kingdom is widely recognized as one of the world powers. You are the world's preeminent navel power and with its colonies its largest economy. If needed, you could call on colonial resources from all corners of the globe. You believe that Italy is an aggressive, rule-breaking, fascist power. At the same time, Italy going over to the side of Nazism would be a travesty. Your role in committee is to walk a fine line between those sentiments.

2. France

France, after defeating the Central powers in the great war, is in a prosperous but precarious state. Stable but deeply affected by the current depression, there are deep



divides about what to do about the growing Nazi threat. You have sometimes deferred to the United Kingdom, but now is the time to take your own stance.

3. USSR

The Union of Socialist Republics is the largest country in the world. Mistrusted due to its communist ideology, you are currently aligned with the Western Block, but precariously. You must decide whether condemning Italy is worth the economic and military risk.

4. Australia

As a member of the commonwealth, you mostly defer to the United Kingdom, but as you are thousands of miles away, you can afford to take more risks. At the same time, the conflict is not as poignant to you.

5. China

Currently under the control of Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists, you are fighting a desperate war against Japan, and can empathize with Ethiopia's plight. At the same time, you need the military assistance of any and all other nations, and are not willing to hurt your chances of getting it.

6. Czechoslovakia

The only remaining true democracy in Eastern Europe, is deeply concerned about Germany's growing aggressiveness. Its goal is to ally with the French and the British and at the same time send a message to any would be despots or conquerors.

7. Egypt

Recently colonized by the British, but still mostly under its control, you both empathize with Ethiopia and are compelled to mostly toe the British line.

8. Poland, Belgium

These countries must think about the threat of Nazi Germany to their country, and how that shapes their response to Italy. At the same time, these countries also act within their conscience *when it is feasible*.

9. Denmark, Chile, Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Finland

You must ask yourself – why do these countries care about the situation in Ethiopia? How does it relate to them? Do they care about human rights, to the rights of the country? What about economic prosperity?

Bibliography

Italy under Mussolini:

1. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20081243.pdf?ab_segments=0%252Fbasic_search_gsv2%252Fcontrol&refreqid=excelsior%3A4ddd25ac4ec2c8e709c876dbfb022959



2. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/260197.pdf?ab_segments=0%252Fbasic_search_gsv%252Fcontrol&refreqid=excelsior%3A001da8260e3714bf86e8cc146444c73f

Ethiopia under Haile Selassie I:

1. <https://philologiavt.org/article/10.21061/ph.v5i1.64/>
2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/719606.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A4e2b6bc8ce8fe39b8ea00ae7d96af018>
3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/523424.pdf?ab_segments=0%252Fbasic_search_gsv%252Fcontrol&refreqid=excelsior%3A131db7fc7d118c0e4ef02e43310aa0cd
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Italo-Ethiopian_War#cite_note-5

A history of Ethiopia (including the first Italo-Abyssinian war):

1. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.bpl.org/stable/2714261?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=First+Italo-Ethiopian+War&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DFirst%2BItalo-Ethiopian%2BWar%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ad38ee4138bdb72f56c6fcb3d24adcd4&seq=6#metadata_info_tab_contents
2. <https://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20150519095912/http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ettoc.html>

A basic history of the colonization of Africa and the area surrounding Ethiopia

1. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191737589.timeline.0001>
2. <https://www.britannica.com/place/western-Africa/Colonization>
3. <https://www.britannica.com/place/British-East-Africa>
4. <https://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/uhistory.htm>

The state of the world in the early to mid 1930s

1. <https://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1930.html#:~:text=1930%20Major%20News%20Stories%20including,fail%2C%20Smoot%2DHawley%20Tariff%20bill>
2. https://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/worldevents_01.html
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/11/1930s-humanity-darkest-bloodiest-hour-paying-attention-second-world-war>
4. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1007/s12290-014-0315-5>
5. *The gathering storm*, by Winston Churchill

League of Nations

1. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations>
2. <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/history/league-of-nations>
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_of_the_League_of_Nations#Council

Further reading:

Ethiopian Constitution

<https://chilot.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/ethiopian-constitution-of-1931.pdf>

History of Ethiopia

<https://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20150519095912/http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ettoc.html>

League of Nations

<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/history/league-of-nations>

Overview of the 1930s



<https://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1930.html#:~:text=1930%20Major%20News%20Stories%20including,fail%2C%20Smoot%2DHawley%20Tariff%20bill>