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## THE RISE AND FALL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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**JCSP 40**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

**THE RISE AND FALL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS**

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Word Count: 3287

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## THE RISE AND FALL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The carnage and material damage inflicted during the Great War was such that the perspective that war must cease to be a normal instrument to settle international disputes coalesced amongst the peoples of the western world.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this broadly-based belief, when the delegations from the victorious countries met at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the creation of a body dedicated to international peace was central to the discussions.<sup>2</sup> Led by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, the extant great powers of the U.S., Britain, France, Italy, and Japan oversaw the creation of the League of Nations.<sup>3</sup> With the introductory words of the League's Covenant stressing its principal object to "promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security,"<sup>4</sup> it was envisioned that the world had seen the end of war.<sup>5</sup>

The League's foundation, which proved to be its greatest vulnerability, was the commitment of its member countries to relinquish certain sovereign rights, foremost of which was the right to resort to war. Instead, member countries agreed to submit

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<sup>1</sup> Eight and a half million soldiers and at least a million civilians died as a direct result of the Great War, and another 21 million soldiers were wounded; Miranda Carter, *George, Nicholas and Wilhem: Three Royal Cousins and the Road to World War I* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 415; Eduard Benes, "The League of Nations: Success and Failures," *Foreign Affairs* (October 1932): 1; Margret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 86; F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations its life and times 1920-1946* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 25.

<sup>2</sup> MacMillan, 85-86; Denys P. Myers, "Nine Years of the League of Nations," *Yearbook of League of Nations: 1920-1928* (1929): 1.

<sup>3</sup> The 'League of Nations' will henceforth in this paper be referred to as the 'League;' MacMillan, 85; F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations: Volume I* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952), 30-39.

<sup>4</sup> League of Nations, "The Covenant of the League of Nations," *League of Nations Official Journal* (February 1920): A3.

<sup>5</sup> MacMillan, 85-86.

international disputes to the League and abide by its decisions, to disarm to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety, and to take all necessary action to safeguard the peace of nations and preserve the territorial integrity and political independence of all member countries.<sup>6</sup> With an eventual total of 63 member countries, the League achieved many notable successes; however, it also experienced several first rate failures, which ultimately resulted in its demise.<sup>7</sup>

This paper will demonstrate that the League of Nations failed because the world's great powers<sup>8</sup> were unwilling to subordinate their national interests and sovereign rights to the League. It explores the great powers' involvement in the creation of the League to ascertain their commitment to it, and argues that the pervasive nationalistic inclinations of the great powers precluded the establishment of a Covenant that enabled the League to meet the full range of challenges that arose. The paper then examines the great powers' subsequent interactions with the League, and argues that the League failed because the great powers' approach to national governance and international relations was incompatible with the requirements of the League's Covenant.

## **THE LEAGUE'S CREATION**

On 28 April 1919, the League of Nations and its Covenant were unanimously approved by the Paris Peace Conference; however, this apparent universal acceptance

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<sup>6</sup> Myers, 1-5

<sup>7</sup> League of Nations: B4; Walters, *Volume I*, 64-65; Northedge, 41.

<sup>8</sup> In 1919, only the U.S., Britain, France, Italy, and Japan were considered great powers, as Russia's revolution and Germany's defeat precluded their ability to exert influence on a global scale; MacMillan, 63-65, 157-159.

belied discontent and disunity within the Covenant-making Committee and unease with the Covenant within the governments of the great powers.<sup>9</sup>

Wilson, who was the most commanding world figure at that time, insisted upon chairing the League Covenant-making Committee, and drove the drafting process.<sup>10</sup> He demanded speed and efficiency, and in so doing overshadowed other national delegates, forced the adoption of an Anglo-American draft, and refused to heed advice or entertain dissenting views.<sup>11</sup> With the great powers striving to advance their national agendas through the League, issues rapidly accumulated.

The first major contretemps occurred when the Italian delegation departed Paris prior to the finalization of the League's Covenant due to Wilson's rejection of its draft Covenant, a series of heated disagreements, and a violent quarrel between Wilson and Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando over Italy's claims to the Adriatic port of Fiume.<sup>12</sup> Given this inauspicious beginning, it is little wonder that Italy would disregard the League and later defy it.

Similarly, the Japanese delegation was deeply offended by Wilson's rejection of its proposal to include a statement in the Covenant "endorsing the principle of the equality of nations and the just treatment of their nationals."<sup>13</sup> The Japanese delegation initially expressed its intent to reconsider its League membership, but later acquiesced.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 33-39, 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> MacMillan, 85-86; Walters, *Volume I*, 33-39.

<sup>12</sup> MacMillan, 296-301; Walters, *Volume I*, 35, 64-65.

<sup>13</sup> Northedge, 45; Walters, *Volume I*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

F.S. Northedge suggests that due to this incident, it is “no coincidence that the first serious challenge to the League ... was to come from Japan.”<sup>15</sup>

To the consternation and frustration of the French delegation, Wilson stymied their overtures and bludgeoned through French arguments.<sup>16</sup> Incensed by Wilson’s rejection of French claims on Germany’s western frontier, and his rejection of its draft Covenant, France’s delegation, led by Leon Bourgeois, was distrustful of Wilson’s methods and sceptical of the outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

France’s foremost argument centred on the “belief that ‘covenants without swords’ are futile.”<sup>18</sup> Bourgeois repeatedly argued that the League must possess an international army if it was to ensure world peace.<sup>19</sup> He advocated strict disarmament under the oversight of a League body, with sweeping powers of inspection, and the establishment of an international force drawn from League members.<sup>20</sup> While most European delegations accepted this perspective, the British delegate, Robert Cecil, and Wilson refused to consider it.<sup>21</sup> They were unwilling to permit inspections of their armaments, to have their forces placed under foreign command in peacetime, or to have their forces deployed on operations via any other authority than that of their national parliament or Congress.<sup>22</sup> Despite the advantages of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization type force and command structure, as proposed by France, this option was outright

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<sup>15</sup> Northedge, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 33, 36; Northedge, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Leon Bourgeois was a past Prime Minister of France; Walters, *Volume I*, 33, 35-36.

<sup>18</sup> Northedge, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 62; Northedge, 44.

<sup>20</sup> MacMillan, 92.

<sup>21</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> It was presumed that any multi-national League force would be placed under the command of France’s “great soldier” Marshall Foch; Walters, *Volume I*, 62; MacMillan, 93.

rejected.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Wilson called for the inclusion of two articles in the Covenant. Article 8 required League members to voluntarily reduce national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety, and Article 10 required members to preserve the territorial integrity and independence of all League members against external aggression.<sup>24</sup> Article 10 included the caveat that the means by which it would be enacted would be decided in council should an event occur that precipitated its use.<sup>25</sup> While less responsive than the French standing force model, Wilson's proposed force generation methodology, which is not dissimilar to that employed by the United Nations today, could have been effective had member nations been committed to the League's effectiveness.<sup>26</sup>

Bourgeois remained dissatisfied with the Covenant; however, bowing to pressure from the French population, he "argued to the limits of Wilson's patience,"<sup>27</sup> but ultimately assented to the Covenant.<sup>28</sup> France's political and military elites considered the Covenant to be wholly inadequate. According to Walters, "Foch was [so] ... sceptical towards the League and its faulty Covenant that he asserted that the sole guarantee of the security of France remained the power of the French Army."<sup>29</sup> More crucially, Margaret MacMillan asserts that French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was ambivalent

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<sup>23</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Organization," last accessed 2 May 2015, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/organisation.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, "Office of Military Affairs," last accessed 2 May 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/about/dpko/oma.shtml>; The requirement for all League decisions to be unanimous was a critical shortcoming, which should have been revisited once its limitations were recognised. When the United Nations Charter was drawn up in 1944 and 1945, this shortcoming was rectified through the empowerment of the Security Council; Northedge, 283; Walters, *Volume I*, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

toward the League and its Covenant, famously remarking, “I like the League, but I do not believe in it.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, France became an original, albeit uncommitted and skeptical, member of the League.

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George was initially a strong advocate of the League; however, he eventually grew to discount the League, as, MacMillan surmises, he doubted that it “could ever be truly effective.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the British Foreign Office, Army, and Navy assessed that the League would be unreliable, and therefore incapable of replacing a strong national military. They decided “to put their faith in the old, sure ways of defending Britain.”<sup>32</sup> Characteristically and prophetically, Winston Churchill, Britain’s Secretary of State for War, asserted that the League “is no substitute for the British fleet.”<sup>33</sup> Britain, however, succumbed to domestic pressure and U.S. demands, and became another unenthusiastic member of the League.<sup>34</sup>

While Northedge concludes that the League was created to enforce the defeat of the Central Powers, Germany sought entry into the League as an original member.<sup>35</sup> Germany argued that precluding its entry would exclude an important segment of the European population and render the League to be “no more than a continuance of the hostile coalition against her.”<sup>36</sup> Germany offered a brief critique of the draft Covenant, and submitted a counter-draft, which it felt better addressed the League’s force generation needs. Britain and the European neutral countries supported Germany’s

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<sup>30</sup> MacMillan, 24, 86.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>34</sup> Northedge, 61; MacMillan, 93, Walters, *Volume I*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Northedge, 286; Walters, *Volume I*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 68.

entrance; however, France insisted that Germany first make reparations as stipulated in the Treaty. Wilson rejected Germany's request.<sup>37</sup> This rejoinder was indicative of the treatment that Germany would endure over the coming years, and resulted in Germany's perception of the League as a league of victors.<sup>38</sup> Given this auspicious beginning, Germany's lack of enthusiasm for the League, and its eventual disregard for it should have been predictable.

While the League was widely regarded in the U.S. as Wilson's creation, it was not universally embraced.<sup>39</sup> As early as February 1919, when Wilson returned to the U.S. for a brief visit, he encountered harsh opposition to his proposed League. On the Senate floor, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge declared that the proposed Covenant was "incompatible with the sovereignty of the United States, the Monroe Doctrine,<sup>40</sup> and the traditional policy of nonentanglement."<sup>41</sup> Wilson heeded this criticism and dictated three amendments to the Covenant.<sup>42</sup> He believed that with these amendments and the Article 5 provision that League decisions had to be unanimous, the Senate's issues would be

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), xvii, 22, 23.

<sup>40</sup> The Monroe Doctrine was derived from President James Monroe's 1823 message to Congress, which warned European powers not to interfere in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere; John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 241.

<sup>41</sup> Schlesinger, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson's amendments included: every nation would have the right to withdraw from the League, domestic matters would be exempt from League jurisdiction, and the Monroe Doctrine would be preserved; Schlesinger, 22.

addressed.<sup>43</sup> Instead, these provisions failed to quell domestic U.S. resistance, and severely hampered the League's ability to render decisions.<sup>44</sup>

By the time Wilson returned from the Peace Conference, an anti-League campaign had been mobilized.<sup>45</sup> The principal obstacle to the League's acceptance remained Article 10, which obliged member nations to protect the territorial and political integrity of other states against external aggression.<sup>46</sup> Many Senators perceived that this Article would permit the League to commit U.S. forces when neither the U.S. nor its interests were in peril, and concluded that it infringed upon the sovereign right of the U.S.<sup>47</sup> Wilson argued that Article 10 only extracted a moral obligation to protect the general peace, which was not legally binding. He insisted that removing Article 10 would "violate the life-force of the agreement."<sup>48</sup>

Antagonized by "incessant derogation"<sup>49</sup> and concerned that Senate proposed amendments would "destroy the essence of the Covenant," both Schlesinger and Walters conclude that Wilson became obstinate, and stubbornly refused to consider any significant alterations to the Covenant.<sup>50</sup> Wilson pressed his supporters in the Senate to vote against an alternate resolution, which would have ratified the Covenant with several

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<sup>43</sup> Article 5 was intended to quell opposition in the U.S. Senate; Walters, *Volume I*, 46-47; Schlesinger, 22; MacMillan, 94; Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 46-47.

<sup>45</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Schlesinger, 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 70; Schlesinger, 23.

amendments, and it was consequently rejected.<sup>51</sup> Due to nationalistic proclivity and Wilson's obstinate nature, the world's greatest power remained out of the League.

While it could be lamented that U.S. membership might have brought the political, economic, and military power required to anchor the League's effectiveness, this conjecture is tenuous. Led by U.S. President Warren Harding, who openly declared his opposition to the League, three successive U.S. administrations retreated from world affairs commencing in 1921.<sup>52</sup> Schlesinger concludes that the League was "premised on such shaky constitutional grounds that U.S. membership would have been less than a force,"<sup>53</sup> and Thomas Bailey asserts that the League was so counter to America's isolationist predisposition that U.S. membership would have been of little value.<sup>54</sup>

Continuing U.S. distancing from the League, in 1932 President Franklin Roosevelt stated "American participation in the League would not serve the purpose of the prevention of war ... in accordance with fundamental American ideals."<sup>55</sup> Indeed, when Germany began its remilitarization and subsequently went to war in 1939, the U.S. continued its isolationist inclination and refrained from becoming directly involved until it was attacked in December 1941.<sup>56</sup> Northedge ventures that support within the U.S. for involvement in international affairs, as called for by the Covenant, was by no means obvious, and given U.S. domestic politics, "it was quite impossible for the [U.S.], after ... its disillusionment with the peace treaties, to send its forces all over the world in defence

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<sup>51</sup> The Senate rejected the League by seven votes, with twenty-three dissenting votes cast by Wilson supporters; Walters, *Volume I*, 71.

<sup>52</sup> Schlesinger, 25; Northedge, 87.

<sup>53</sup> Schlesinger, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Bailey, 29-30.

<sup>55</sup> Schlesinger, 28.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 30-31, 38.

of those treaties.”<sup>57</sup> While U.S. rejection could be viewed as a significant setback for the League, given the U.S.’s traditional nonentanglement policy and its apathy toward the League, it is likely that U.S. membership would not have altered the League’s history.

During the Covenant-making Committee’s deliberations, Wilson believed that he was representing the world’s peoples and persistently opposed demands from the great powers, which he considered to be nationalistic. According to Bailey, this unwillingness to consider the perspectives of the great powers lost Wilson the friendship of Italy, Japan, and France, and resulted in a questionable League.<sup>58</sup> While acknowledging that the League was imperfect, with the majority of the world’s great powers as members and a workable Covenant, Wilson believed that it possessed the potential to succeed. In Wilson’s words, the League was “a living thing”<sup>59</sup> capable of modifying itself to meet changing world needs.<sup>60</sup>

Ultimately, however, League activities would demonstrate that Wilson’s failure to comprehend the full influence of nationalism and to design a League that leveraged this undeniable force proved insurmountable. With the erroneous premise that the great powers would subordinate certain of their sovereign rights to the League, the Covenant did not provide a workable mechanism to permit the League to generate the forces required to meet the range of challenges that it would encounter.

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<sup>57</sup> Northedge, 285.

<sup>58</sup> Bailey, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Schlesinger, 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

## LEAGUE ACTIVITIES

The League began operations with a series of notable successes. Through investigations and negotiations, it resolved border disputes between Sweden and Finland over ownership of the Aaland Islands, between Lithuania and Poland over the city of Vilna, and between Germany and Poland over Upper Silesia.<sup>61</sup> Using like mechanisms, the League persuaded Greece and Yugoslavia to refrain from invading Albania, successfully acted as a rapporteur between Hungary and Yugoslavia after the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia, convinced Greece to withdraw its forces from Bulgaria, and settled a frontier conflict between Turkey and Iraq over the city of Mosul.<sup>62</sup> The League also formulated a plan to guide Austria's financial revival and reconstruction, which is considered to be one of its most notable achievements.<sup>63</sup> The League enjoyed many early successes, which it achieved through investigations, facilitating dispute resolution discussions, and passing resolutions.<sup>64</sup>

In situations in which force, or the threat of force, was required, the League, however, faltered.<sup>65</sup> As early as the League's First Assembly, a former French Prime Minister quipped that the League Council was "in the ridiculous position of ... considering what steps shall be taken, though it is perfectly [clear] that it is impossible for them to be carried out."<sup>66</sup> Supporting this proclamation, Northedge concludes that due to the great powers' unwillingness to commit forces to League activities, the League lacked

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<sup>61</sup> Northedge, 77-80; Schlesinger, 25.

<sup>62</sup> Schlesinger, 25-26.

<sup>63</sup> Northedge, 81-82.

<sup>64</sup> Schlesinger, 25.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> Northedge, 75.

the resources required to affect its decisions.<sup>67</sup> Walters, concludes that the League's problems were more fundamental. He postulates that the great powers deliberately thwarted the League by knowingly failing to meet Covenant obligations.<sup>68</sup>

Foretelling the League's future difficulties, in contravention of the Covenant, France invaded Germany's Ruhr industrial region in 1923 to affect the extraction of war reparations.<sup>69</sup> Germany sought assistance from Britain and the League, and Britain responded that while it was supportive, "it would leave to others the responsibility of action."<sup>70</sup> France then neutralized League deliberations by declaring that it would invoke Article 5, which necessitated that all League decisions be unanimous, to thwart any proposal to bring the matter forward.<sup>71</sup> This incident confirmed Germany's mistrust of the League, and compelled Germany to adopt "equality in arms [as] the central ... German policy."<sup>72</sup> France's violation of the Covenant demonstrated its willingness to place national interests over those of the League, and the League's lack of action called its legitimacy into question.

Emboldened by France's example, Japan also decided to defy the League. Weary of the western economic system, which it regarded as responsible for its depressed state, Japan sought to create a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere by forging the resources of Japan, China, and Manchuria.<sup>73</sup> As the first phase of this enterprise, Japan occupied

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Walters, *Volume II*, 709.

<sup>69</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 235.

<sup>70</sup> Northedge, 80; Walters, *Volume I*, 235, 236.

<sup>71</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 46, 236.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, *Volume I*, 236-237.

<sup>73</sup> Northedge, 287.

Manchuria in September 1931.<sup>74</sup> China appealed to the League for assistance, which resulted in the dispatch of a Commission of Inquiry. The Commission concluded that Japan was the aggressor, and in 1933 the League demanded that Japan withdraw its forces.<sup>75</sup> Contemptuously, Japan departed the League and continued its occupation of Manchuria. The League subsequently refrained from taking definitive action.<sup>76</sup>

Northedge opines that the great powers assessed that concerning themselves with Japan's aggression in Manchuria was not in their national interests, and as result "collective security was dealt a blow from which it never fully recovered."<sup>77</sup>

Germany finally became a League member in 1926; however, when the 1933 World Disarmament Conference failed to sanction arms parity between Germany and France, Germany withdrew.<sup>78</sup> Germany's new Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, then announced that Germany would disregard the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and began the reconstruction of the German military to place it on an equal footing with other states.<sup>79</sup> Germany's actions resulted in the reversal of Covenant driven national disarmament programs throughout Europe, which inflicted another grave blow to the League's legitimacy.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations: Volume II* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952), 465.

<sup>75</sup> Schlesinger, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Schlesinger, 26; Walters, *Volume II*, 732.

<sup>77</sup> Northedge, 164.

<sup>78</sup> Walters, *Volume I*, 65; Walters, *Volume II*, 711; Northedge, 256.

<sup>79</sup> In direct contravention of the Versailles Treaty, Hitler increased the size of the German Army threefold, created and announced the existence of the *Luftwaffe*, and began secret construction of large warships and submarines; Schlesinger, 26; Northedge, 115; World History Project, "Adolf Hitler: Adolf Hitler First Reveals his Foreign Policy Goal of Conquering the Lebensraum," last accessed 25 May 2015, <http://worldhistoryproject.org/1933/2/3/adolf-hitler-first-reveals-his-foreign-policy-goal-of-conquering-the-lebensraum>.

<sup>80</sup> Northedge, 116.

Following these examples, Italy soon also defied the League.<sup>81</sup> Using a border dispute as pretext, Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935, and by mid-1936 consolidated its hold on the country.<sup>82</sup> Although Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie appealed to Britain, France, and the League for armed support, both Britain and France signaled that they had no intention of using force against Italy.<sup>83</sup> In a rare instance of unity, however, the League imposed sanctions on Italy, which Northedge describes as “unsurprisingly disastrous.”<sup>84</sup>

On 7 March 1936, Germany denounced the Pact of Locarno<sup>85</sup> and marched forces into the Rhineland<sup>86</sup> demilitarized zone. In hope of inducing Italy to join them in opposing Germany’s aggressive behavior, Britain and France abandoned the League’s sanctions against Italy.<sup>87</sup> These actions again underscored the European powers’ subordination of League issues to their national interests.<sup>88</sup> The failure of League’s members to fulfil their Covenant obligations on Ethiopia’s behalf led directly to an elaborate discussion on the reform of the League, which threw the League into a state of relative chaos.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Schlesinger, 26.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>83</sup> Northedge, 243.

<sup>84</sup> Schlesinger, 26; Northedge, 242.

<sup>85</sup> Signed on 1 December 1925, the Pact of Locarno was a series of agreements whereby Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, and Italy mutually guaranteed peace in western Europe; Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Pact of Locarno,” last accessed 25 May 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/345660/Pact-of-Locarno>.

<sup>86</sup> The Rhineland is an area of western Europe lying in western Germany, east of Germany’s border with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands, along both banks of the middle Rhine River; Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Rhineland,” last accessed 25 May 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/501356/Rhineland>.

<sup>87</sup> Walters, *Volume II*, 678; Northedge, 244; Schlesinger, 26.

<sup>88</sup> Walters, *Volume II*, 679; Northedge, 244; Schlesinger, 27.

<sup>89</sup> Walters, *Volume II*, 709.

When Japan's, France's, and Italy's invasions and the expansion of its armed forces led to only mild protests from the League, Germany concluded that the League would not impede its expansionist plans. It annexed Austria on 12 March 1938 and occupied the Sudetenland on 10 October 1938.<sup>90</sup> With the great powers again unwilling to fulfil their Article 10 obligations due to internal political machinations and international manoeuvrings, the League again failed to institute any effectual measures.<sup>91</sup> Following this startling failure, "one League member after another came forward to declare that it was henceforth the sole judge of its own actions."<sup>92</sup> With these declarations, the League had effectively been dealt its death blow. It officially folded in 1946; however, its ability to influence world events ceased after the Sudetenland crisis.<sup>93</sup>

The Paris Peace Talks had bestowed upon the world the League of Nations dedicated to the maintenance of international cooperation and peace. While the League enjoyed many early successes through facilitating discussions and passing resolutions, in every situation in which force, or the threat of force, was required the League faltered.<sup>94</sup> In every instance in which the League faltered, the fault lied with the great powers, which consistently placed their own sovereign interests above the needs of the League. The League failed because the great powers' approach to national governance and international relations was incompatible with the altruistic approach required of the League.

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<sup>90</sup> The Sudetenland is a section of northern and western Bohemia and northern Moravia, within the modern-day Czech Republic, which was predominantly populated by German speaking peoples prior to 1945; Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Sudetenland," last accessed 25 May 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571568/Sudetenland>.

<sup>91</sup> Schlesinger, 26; Walters, *Volume II*, 777-778; Northedge, 256-259.

<sup>92</sup> Walters, *Volume II*, 778.

<sup>93</sup> MacMillan, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Schlesinger, 25.

## CONCLUSION

The enormous death toll and destruction inflicted upon humanity during the Great War was such that as a priority, the Paris Peace Conference created a League of Nations dedicated to the promotion of international cooperation and peace. While drafting the League's Covenant, U.S. President Wilson largely disregarded advice, and instead infused his personal views into the document. The resulting Covenant received unanimous approval by the Paris Peace Conference; however, this apparent universal acceptance belied general unease with the Covenant, and the outright disaffection of Italy, Japan, and France. Wilson's failure to heed advice and to fully appreciate the influence of nationalism resulted in an imperfect and unpopular Covenant, which precluded the League from meeting the full range of challenges that it encountered.

The League enjoyed many early successes; however, it achieved these through conducting investigations, facilitating negotiations, and passing resolutions. In situations in which force, or the threat of force, was required, the great powers placed the exigencies of internal politics, national ambitions, and international relations above the needs of the League, and the League faltered. Ultimately, the League failed because the great powers were unwilling to subordinate their national interests and sovereign rights.

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