



## SECTION 6. COMMITTEES AND TOPICS

### 6.2 LEAGUE OF NATIONS 1938

---

#### League of Nations

*Note: Research for this committee should focus on historical background ONLY leading up to February, 1938.*

#### Introduction

From the start of armistice negotiations, the consequences of the Great War proved to be far more devastating than ever foreseen. Europeans expected the war to last less than a year, but the death toll and damages were beyond any prior conflict. It was obvious to all nations that no war of that magnitude could be repeated. U.S. American President Woodrow Wilson petitioned the emerging international community with his enthusiasm for ideological cooperation laid out in his famous “Fourteen Points”. Taking his heed, forty-two nations formed the international body known as the League of Nations (LN) in late January 1920, but U.S. Congress never ratified the Treaty which established it. Eighteen years later, this body faces challenges with the rise of fascism, communism, and questions of imperialism. Navigating the constraints of the League – the requirement of unanimous votes in the Council and Assembly, the lack of military power, and the withdrawal of vital nations – delegates must adapt to shifts in power and alliances.

Following typical General Assembly rules, this historical council will function under customary Model United Nations proceedings, but will incorporate crisis elements, to enhance the dynamism of the committee. This background guide describes two possible topics to discuss in the committee. That said, the League of Nations Council will run on an Open Agenda beginning in February 1938, meaning that any topics may be discussed, including the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, Global Women’s Suffrage, or any event that is agreed upon, at the dias’ discretion.

#### Topics:

*Open Agenda*

#### German Appeasement

In 1871, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck unified the German Empire into a contiguous nation-state. The new nation industrialized rapidly, surpassing the capabilities of the United Kingdom within twenty-five years of unification, bolstering their military to become the second largest navy, and strengthening their hold on their African colonies bordering British and French possessions. The ascension of Germany threatened France, Russia, and the United Kingdom, who began to strengthen their militaries in response.

At the end of June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian nationalist who wanted independence in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary moved

more troops to the region, to which Russia responded by mobilizing troops to their shared border. Seeing their mobilization, Germany retaliated by invading France, following a military plan made a decade earlier. Defending against the Russian invasion also, Germany found themselves in the midst of the four-year, two-front stalemate known as “The Great War.”

Following the end of the war, the Treaty of Versailles placed the entirety of the blame of the war on Germany. In reparations, Germany was required to pay the allied powers 132 billion marks, equal to 442 billion 2019 US dollars. Germany was also required to cede all colonial possessions and parts of east and south-west Germany, decommission to under 100,000 soldiers, and demilitarize the Rhineland: the area bordering France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was in chaos with war debt crippling the German economy. The mark was inflated over one trillion percent and became more useful as kindling than currency. In November 1923, a group of nationalists, led by a 34 year-old Great War veteran, Adolf Hitler, failed an attempted coup d'état. Hitler was arrested on charges of high treason for five years, during which he wrote his infamous *Mein Kampf*. After his release in 1924, Hitler published the book, selling hundreds of thousands of copies and boosting support for the National Socialist Party to a national scale. The book delineated his ideology and explained his hatred towards Jewish people and called for their extermination.

In 1929, the global economy crashed, and with it fell support for the governing party of Germany, and in 1932, Hitler was elected Chancellor. On February 27, 1933, the famous Reichstag fire allowed the newly-appointed Chancellor to tighten his grip on the country, very soon banning all other parties and appointing himself Führer. Hitler rejected the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, began to rebuild the German military, and terminated Germany's membership in the League. On March 7, 1936, he remilitarized the Rhineland, and the rest of the global community convened in response to his blatant disregard for German punishment. While no punishment was decided upon for the transgression, leaders promised ramifications should more aspects of the treaty be violated.

### ***Questions to consider:***

1. At what point should the Germans be punished for neglecting the treaty? How?
2. Were the terms of the Treaty of Versailles too harsh?
3. Is punishment of the Germans more important than achieving peace for our time?

### ***Sources for Further Research:***

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/paris-peace>

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/02/world-war-ii-appeasement-mistakes-history-repeating-itself/>

<https://time.com/5659728/poland-1939/>

### **The Sino-Japanese War**

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry's squadron landed in the port of Edo, Japan, now Tokyo, aiming to coerce Shogun Yoshinobu into opening to trade with America. Shocked by the rapid technological improvements of the West and the treatment of the Chinese in the Opium wars, the Japanese Empire reformed in 1868 and began a period of rapid industrialization. Since Japan produced few exotic resources sought by Europeans, the Empire was able to develop relatively

free of Western influence, soon becoming a major world power. Emperor Meiji developed his military, which he used to quash rebellion and unrest, and began a period of expansion.

In 1874, Japan invaded Taiwan. In 1895, Japan defeated China in the First Sino-Japanese War, gaining Korea as a tributary and solidifying their position as the dominant regional state. A decade later, the Japanese defeated Russia in the first major defeat of a European power by an Asian power. As a result, Japan gained territory outside of the Korean peninsula. Japan allied with the Entente forces during the Great War, increasing their influence in the Pacific stage, and was granted Germany's colonial possessions in the South Pacific in the Treaty of Versailles. In 1931, Japan successfully invaded Manchuria with very little resistance. When the League of Nations declared the occupation to be illegitimate the following year, Japan responded by leaving the League. Japan then proceeded to occupy Inner Mongolia and the Jehol Province of China. Expansion continued into Northern China just north of the cities of Beijing and Tianjin.

On July 7th, 1937, the Second Sino-Japanese War officially began with the Battle of Lugou Bridge and subsequent total invasion by Japan. By the end of the month, Beijing and Tianjin had fallen to Japanese control with the rest of Northern China. On August 13th, fighting began in Shanghai, where Japanese troops had already been stationed. The Battle of Shanghai led to over a quarter of a million Chinese casualties over three months. After conquering Shanghai, the Japanese army moved west to Nanjing. There, one of the great tragedies of the emerging global conflict occurred: the Rape of Nanjing.

After a two-week-long siege of the city in December, Japanese soldiers looted, raped, and murdered civilians in the city. Over six weeks, an estimated 40,000-300,000 unarmed civilians were murdered, and at least 20,000 women and children raped. Prisoners of war were tortured, thrown onto landmines, and macheted to death. Estimates of the total number killed are difficult to estimate, as most of the bodies were burnt or dumped into bodies of water.

***Questions to consider:***

1. What ramifications should the Japanese face for the Rape of Nanjing?
2. Does the League of Nations have a responsibility to provide aid to China? Military or humanitarian?
3. What reparations ought to be implemented to aid victims in Nanjing?

***Sources for Further Research:***

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Sino-Japanese-War>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/223038.stm>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/pearl-harbor>

***Additional Topics:***

*Italian Occupation of Ethiopia*

*Great Depression*

*Spanish Civil War*

*Global Women's Suffrage Movements*

*Article X*

*Self-Determination*