

MUN 2014

Background Guide:

1884 Berlin Conference



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
March 14-16, 2014

Letter from the Director

Dear Delegates,

Greetings and welcome to Model United Nations Illinois Conference of 2013 and more specifically, the Berlin Conference of 1884 which you will be participating in. My name is Pavel Tamas and I will be serving as your Simulation Director for this hopefully exciting committee. My goal is to keep you delegates on your toes, forcing you to constantly brainstorm and negotiate to solve the ever occurring events in this committee.

Although I am entirely sure all delegates will put in the time and effort to properly research this historical committee, I will give you all a taste of what you will be encountering here at the Conference. As Europe and the West begins its second age of imperialism throughout the world, Africa is viewed as an unexplored land, ripe with bountiful resources, untold glories, and incredible challenges. As the European powers move to colonize the continent, they often butt heads with one another and the natives of this land. Your job in this committee is to formally agree upon what belongs to who and why so. This includes the goals of avoiding conflict between the nations at the table with you, while managing to maximize your nation's share of the African continent. Do not take too long, however, as this committee will regularly have twist and turns of events that are characteristic of simulation committee. To achieve your goals, therefore, will take much political maneuvering, creative innovation, and utmost urgency. But that's what makes Model UN so enjoyable.

As your Simulation Director, I invite you to join me on this re-teaching (and possibly reformation) of world history during this year's conference. I look forward to observing how you will grapple with issues and events, and create unique solutions to some of the era's greatest problems. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, let me know via email at tamas2@illinois.edu. I cannot wait to see you all in March.

Best Regards,



Pavel Tamas

Overview

The year is 1884. Europe is near the height of its historical power. It is in a state of entangling treaties as a result of ever shifting and morphing balance of power on the continent ever since before the Napoleonic Wars. And during this period of strained relations between these western powers, a new stage for imperialistic competition is being re-discovered, even though it has been just South of Europe for all of known history.

A new age of imperialism has dawned around the world, with the Western powers leading the charge. Their eyes have now turned to Africa for a multitude of reasons. First, the unexplored continent contains untold riches of rubber, diamonds, minerals, coco, cotton and tea, which the markets of Europe yearned for. Second, the glory to be gained from venturing into Africa fueled nationalist ambitions from imperial players. Third, nearly all nation Europe at this time felt it important to constrain the religion of Islam which they felt threatened the world of Christianity. To do this, missionaries were needed to combat the spread of Islam and Ottoman culture throughout Africa, especially in North Africa where it was only separated from Europe by a sea. Fourth, the treaties and agreements of Europe would force all powers, those willing and unwilling, into the fray of dividing up Africa. Finally, many nations at the time came to understand the strategic importance of locations in Africa, such as the Suez Canal. To allow opponents to gain access to these locations without challenges would simply be militarily unwise. For all these reason, as well as others, Europe's courts and parliaments quickly became concerned with Africa.

As major powers began entering Africa and staked claims within it, conflict arose. One of the first of these would be the debate on who control the region known as the Congo, a vast area in central Africa that was inhabited by the Kongo people and centered around the Congo River. The United Kingdom, Portugal, France and Belgium would all jockey and maneuver to block each other out of the region while expanding their own influence there. And this is only one of the many issues that arose prior to the Conference. This is why Otto von Bismarck of the recently created German state would call major powers of Europe, as well as the US and the Ottoman Empire, to settle these problems in order to avoid violent clashes between these nations that could threaten to tear apart Europe yet again. The nations met in 1884 at the Berlin Conference with a goal of drawing up permanent borders and rules for governance in Africa as well as deciding how trade and communication would be handled within the continent as well.

When considering these issues, there are various factors to keep in mind that will affect the flow of events in the Conference. Here are a few of them. Firstly, Africa is made up various ethnic

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groups, many of which have their own distinct history with each other far before European arrival. Borders drawn across the African continent by Europeans currently often do not align with their native African counterparts, and this Conference is an effective medium to both ignore and address this issue. Likewise, religion varies tremendously in Africa, and is of great importance to many locals as well as the home nations of each delegate. Next, consider the alliances that exist in Europe, and understand they translate onto the global stage with imperialism. Allies must be supported, and shots at known opponents are encouraged when appropriate. Also come to realize that trade access within and across borders can be nearly as important as owning what lies inside of them. Similarly, what waterways and land masses, if any, are open to all foreigners and free of control from one imperial power? These may include coastal waters, rivers or independent nations within Africa. Finally, when a delegation's country claims to "own" land in Africa, what form of relation to that land does it have? Protectorate? Personal property of the nation's regent? Territory controlled by decrees of parliament? A loyal puppet state? Region under martial law? A new district of the empire with its own recognized representatives? Specificity is encouraged. Take all of the issues and others encountered when crafting the resolutions of this Conference.

List of Berlin Conference Participants

1. The United States
2. The Ottoman Empire
3. The United Kingdom
4. Austria-Hungary
5. Belgium
6. France
7. Norway-Sweden
8. Spain
9. Russia
10. Denmark
11. Italy
12. The Netherlands
13. Portugal
14. Germany