

Topic: The Abyssinian Crisis

The committee convenes on October 3rd, 1935.



Short note from your Chairs

Hello everyone!

Normally, there wouldn't be a note for you here. However, since this is a historical committee—an outstanding concept you may not yet be fully familiar with—we felt it was important to leave you a short message. The key to a successful flow and to finding new and interesting solutions in a historical committee is pure imagination. You must imagine that you are not leaders of the future, but of the past. Although today we know how the entire crisis unfolded, the people living through it at the time did not—because they were actively creating what we now call history. Please note that you will have to act as if you do not know what happened after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia on October 3rd, 1935. In just a few weeks, you will have the unique opportunity to rewrite history from your country's perspective!

Ida and Šimon, your Chairs

I. Key questions for understanding the background of this conflict

Where is Abyssinia?

Abyssinia is now called Ethiopia and is located on the north-east coast of Africa. In 1935 it was surrounded by British, French and Italian colonies, but remained independent.

What is the Abyssinian Crisis?

The Abyssinian Crisis occurred from 1935 to 1936, when Italy (under the rule of its leader - Benito Mussolini) invaded the independent country of Abyssinia in East Africa.



What is the League of Nations?

Please note the fact that the committee's session is taking place in 1935.

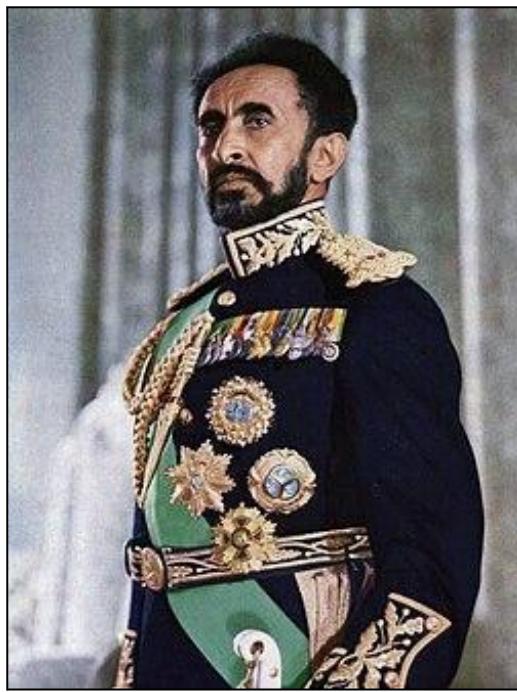
The League of Nations is an international organization created in 1920 after World War I to maintain peace and collective security. Its main aim is to prevent war by encouraging countries to resolve disputes through discussion, negotiation, and sanctions rather than fighting. However, the League has no army and is depending on member states' cooperation, which makes it weak and ultimately ineffective in stopping aggression by powerful countries.

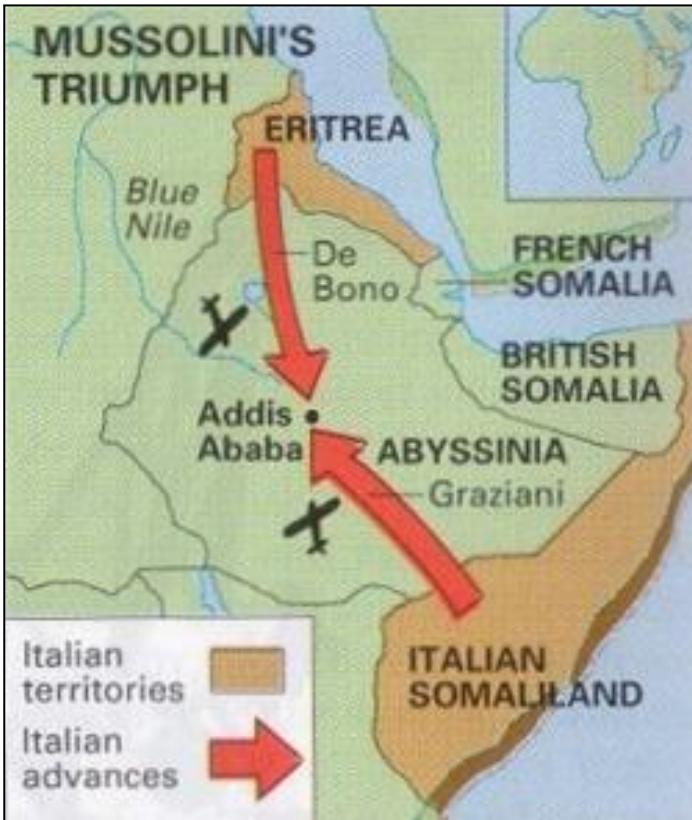
II. Entities represented

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Ethiopian Empire | = Abyssinia . A sovereign African state ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie I, Ethiopia was the victim of Italian aggression in 1935. As a member of the League of Nations, Ethiopia appealed to collective security and international law to defend its independence and territorial integrity. |
| Kingdom of Italy | Under Benito Mussolini, Italy sought to expand its colonial empire and avenge its defeat at Adwa (1896). Italy launched a full-scale invasion of Ethiopia, employing modern weaponry and chemical weapons, directly challenging the League of Nations |
| British Empire | Britain was a leading global power and a key member of the League of Nations. While officially opposing Italian aggression, British policy was cautious, balancing collective security with the desire to keep Italy as a potential ally against Nazi Germany. |
| French Republic | France, another major League power, prioritized European stability over African affairs. It often cooperated with Britain but was reluctant to strongly confront Italy, fearing to push Mussolini closer to Germany. |
| Soviet Union | The USSR officially condemned fascist aggression and supported collective security mechanisms. Though geographically distant, it used the crisis to promote anti-imperialism and position itself as a defender of smaller states. |
| Republic of China | Even though China was fragmented and polarized (between the Communists and Nationalists) in the 20's, the League recognized it as one united state. In the League represented by the Nationalist government. China, facing its own threats from Japanese imperialism, sympathized with Ethiopia's struggle. It supported principles of sovereignty and non-aggression, seeing the crisis as a dangerous precedent. |
| Spanish Republic | The democratic Spanish Republic aligned itself with anti-fascist ideals. Internationally limited in influence, Spain nonetheless supported sanctions and international law before descending into its own civil war. |
| United States | Though not a League member, the U.S. was an influential global actor. Officially neutral, it condemned the use of chemical weapons and aggression but avoided direct involvement, reflecting its isolationist policies. |
| Empire of Japan | Japan observed the crisis closely, as it had withdrawn from the League after its actions in Manchuria. It viewed the weak international response as validation of expansionist policies. |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| German Reich | Nazi Germany, also outside the League, exploited the crisis to weaken collective security. While not openly supporting Italy at first, Germany benefited strategically from the distraction and later aligned with Italy. |
| Kingdom of Yemen | A regional Middle Eastern monarchy with limited global power. Yemen observed the crisis primarily through the lens of anti-colonialism and regional stability. |
| Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | A newly consolidated state under Ibn Saud, Saudi Arabia had minimal direct involvement but shared concerns about imperialism and the treatment of sovereign states. |
| Oromo States | Representing major ethnic groups within Ethiopia, Oromo leaders had complex relationships with the imperial government. Some resisted Italian occupation, while others were targeted by Italian divide-and-rule strategies. |
| People of Tigray | A key northern Ethiopian population directly affected by the invasion. Tigray became a major battleground and symbol of Ethiopian resistance against Italian forces. |
| French Somali Coast | = French Somaliland . A French colony (modern-day Djibouti) strategically located near Ethiopia. It served as a logistical and diplomatic point of interest during the conflict. |
| Somaliland Protectorate | = British Somaliland . A British-controlled territory bordering Ethiopia. It played a strategic role in regional security and was threatened by the potential spread of Italian expansion. |
| Italian Somaliland | An Italian colony used as one of the main launch points for the invasion of Ethiopia. It highlighted Italy's existing colonial presence in East Africa. |
| Italian Eritrea | Italy's long-established colony and primary northern base for military operations against Ethiopia. It was heavily militarized prior to the invasion. |
| Holy See | = Vatican; The Papal State . A moral and diplomatic authority with global influence. The Holy See maintained neutrality but was concerned with humanitarian issues and the role of Catholic Italy in an aggressive war. |
| Pan-African Congress | An international movement advocating African unity and anti-colonialism. The Congress strongly supported Ethiopia as a symbol of African sovereignty and resistance to European imperialism. |

III. Timeline of key events before the October 3rd, 1935

| | |
|---|--|
| 5 December 1934 | <p><u>The Walwal incident</u> Fighting breaks out between Italian and Ethiopian troops at Walwal, on the disputed border between Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Italy uses the incident as a pretext for war.</p>  |
| from January 1935 to August 1935 | <p><u>Diplomatic tensions</u> Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie I appeals to the League of Nations. Britain and France attempt to avoid conflict, partly to keep Italy as an ally against Nazi Germany. Italy continues military build-up in East Africa.</p>  |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 3 October 1935 | <p><u>Italian invasion</u></p> <p>Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, invades Abyssinia from Eritrea and Somaliland. It is a clear violation of League of Nation's rules.</p>  |
|-----------------------|---|

IV. Research materials

- [The Abyssinian Crisis: A Failure of the League of Nations | GCSE History](#)
- [The Abyssinian Crisis | Conflict & Tension | GCSE History](#)
- [GCSE History | Abyssinian Crisis 1935](#)
- [John D Clare | Involvement of the League in Abyssinia](#)
- [History: From One Student to Another | The Abyssinian Crisis](#)
- [Britannica | Italo-Ethiopian War](#)