

Option B: 20th Century topic

HOW FAR WAS THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS A FAILURE?

Study the Background Information and the sources carefully, and then answer **all** the questions.

Background Information

The League of Nations faced many difficult problems after its establishment in 1919. Its critics claim that it achieved little and point to the fact that another world war broke out in 1939. Its defenders argue that although it did eventually fail to prevent another world war, it had several successes. Overall, how far was the League of Nations a failure?

SOURCE A

It became clear very quickly that the League would be just an addition to existing international relations mechanisms and often one to be kept at arm's length; Britain and France had no intention of allowing the Treaty's enforcement to become a League responsibility. It is also not clear whether the 'new diplomacy' achieved different results than the 'old' diplomacy might have done in similar circumstances.

The League, however, did have its uses. Handing over the government of Danzig and the Saar to the League solved tricky problems. The League's beneficial role in inhibiting slavery, international prostitution and the trading of drugs, in promoting the protection of refugees, and preventing and controlling disease, was acknowledged. It enjoyed successes in the Swedish-Finnish quarrel over the Åland Islands in 1920 and in the Greece-Bulgaria dispute of 1925, but significantly, both were in accessible parts of Europe, were between minor states, and did not involve the direct interests of a great power.

The League was much less effective where any of these criteria did not apply. It was in Abyssinia in 1935 that the demands of the old and new diplomacies came into sharpest conflict. The circumstances meant that the credibility of the League and the 'new' diplomacy became linked with the response to this problem. The lessons were painful. The League had ended in failure. It had been based on too many paradoxes: the attempt to create collective security in a world of sovereign national states and the hope of international democracy in a world dominated by great powers. After Abyssinia the League became an increasing irrelevance.

From a history book published in 2010.

SOURCE B

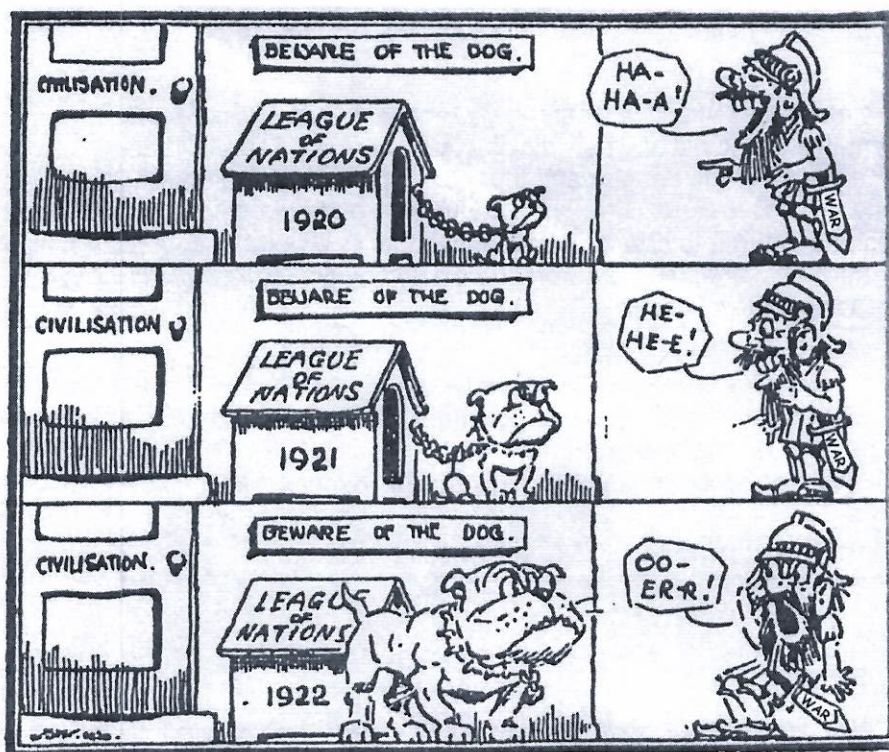
The League appeared to many to offer the best alternative to the balance-of-power approach that had failed so badly in 1914. But it was not the League that Wilson had planned. It was not a substitute for great-power politics, as he had intended, but rather just additional to it. It always operated within prescribed limits and its success depended on the willingness of the powerful states to use it.

The League moved quickly after it was established. The first dispute successfully resolved was between Finland and Sweden. It also speedily resolved the conflict between Bulgaria and Greece. If most of the League's successes involved small states, the clash between Britain and Turkey over oil-rich Mosul in 1924 suggested that the Council's procedures could be used to keep the peace in matters involving a great power. The failure over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia was due to Britain and France, rather than the League.

Nor was the failure of various international conferences such as the World Economic Conference of London in 1933 the fault of the League of Nations. The framework for international cooperation was still fragile but the activities of the League appeared with the passage of time to be a contribution to the shaping of the contemporary world. The League was a forerunner of a new world order based on international cooperation. It embodied the new ideas that characterised the twentieth century. It is hoped the ideal of world peace – the ideal of the League – will become the dominant feature of the twenty-first century.

From a history book published in 2011.

SOURCE C



A British cartoon published in 1920.

SOURCE E



A British cartoon published in December 1931.

SOURCE F

I would like to speak about the League and the policy of collective security which we have whole-heartedly supported with such disappointing results. The dispute between Italy and Abyssinia was a perfect opportunity for the exercise of that policy. It has been tried based on sanctions and it has failed to prevent war, failed to save the victim from the aggressor.

The other day the President of the League of Nations said that if we were to pursue the policy of sanctions it was still possible to preserve the independence of Abyssinia. That seems to me to be madness. We must admit we have tried to impose upon the League a task which was beyond its powers to fulfill. It is time to limit the functions of the League so that they match with its real powers. But if the League is to be limited in that way it must be admitted that it could no longer be relied upon to secure the peace of the world.

From a speech by Neville Chamberlain, a leading member of the British government, June 1936.

SOURCE D



"JUST THEN CAME DOWN A MONSTROUS DOVE
WHOSE FORCE WAS PURELY MORAL,
WHICH TURNED THE HEROES' HEARTS TO LOVE
AND MADE THEM DROP THEIR QUARREL."

A British cartoon published in November 1925.

SOURCE G

There exist inside the League two ideas about how best to preserve peace. There is the idea that when a state announces a foreign policy based on aggression and invading other countries' frontiers, the League has the duty of declaring that it will fight such a policy with every means at its disposal.

There is, however, another idea that the aggressor should be treated with consideration and that negotiations should be carried out with the assurance that no collective action will be carried out. Unfortunately, this is the policy that has so far been followed and it has as its consequences three wars and threatens to bring us a fourth.

*Maxim Litvinov speaking at the League of Nations Assembly, September 1938.
Litvinov was in charge of Soviet foreign policy.*

SOURCE H

It is common to speak of the failure of the League. Is it true that all our efforts for those twenty years have been thrown away? The work of the League is unmistakably printed on the social, economic and humanitarian life of the world. But above all that, a great advance was made in the international organisation of peace. For the first time an organisation was constructed to abolish war. An Assembly representing some fifty peace-loving nations.

For ten years the League advanced. Our balance-sheet is not altogether unfavourable. In the essential task of maintaining peace it succeeded during a number of years. It succeeded as long as the governments of the Great Powers supported it and as long as, in the background, there was the possibility that their force would be put at the service of its decisions. During a number of years the League of Nations settled various grave disputes such as the Aaland Islands, all of them involving areas which might have become battlefields if the League had not settled them.

From a speech by Seán Lester, Secretary-General of the League of Nations. He was speaking to the Assembly during the last session of the League in 1946, when it dissolved itself.

Now answer **all** the following questions. You may use any of the sources to help you answer the questions, in addition to those sources which you are told to use. In answering the questions you should use your knowledge of the topic to help you interpret and evaluate the sources.

1 Study Sources A and B.

How far do these two sources agree? Explain your answer using details of the sources. [7]

2 Study Sources C and D.

How similar are these two cartoons? Explain your answer using details of the sources and your knowledge. [8]

3 Study Source E.

What is the cartoonist's message? Explain your answer using details of the source and your knowledge. [8]

4 Study Source F.

Are you surprised by this source? Explain your answer using details of the source and your knowledge. [8]

5 Study Sources G and H.

How far does Source G prove that Source H is wrong? Explain your answer using details of the sources and your knowledge. [7]

6 Study **all** the sources.

How far do these sources provide convincing evidence that the League of Nations was a failure? Use the sources to explain your answer. [12]