

# **Arbitrating Peace, or Nurturing War?**

The League of Nations and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict

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## Abstract

As war has once again broken out in Europe in the twenty-first century, it has become ever more apparent that the goal of world peace is ever so far away. Thus, with the United Nations having failed to prevent conflict, many have begun to question this intragovernmental institution. This begs the question: how did we get here, and did we learn from the past? In this thesis I challenge the position of the League of Nations within its own historiography akin to successful scholars like Glenda Sluga and Susan Pedersen, borrowing lines of thought of authors like Maartje Abbenhuis. To do so I have gone back in time to discuss how history finds its way towards the creation of the League of Nations in 1919 after the allied belligerents had successfully defeated the central powers of the First World War. Through analysis of letters by United States' President Woodrow Wilson I discussed how the thoughts of an effective world organization with the primary goal of maintaining peace established itself at the Peace Table of Versailles. Through analysis of the various Articles within the Covenant of the League of Nations, I highlight the important details that were established, through which finally resulted into a case study of the events leading up to the outbreak of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, which once again brought war to the doorstep of the European continent for the first time since the Great War. Through analysis of the Walwal-arbitration and the moments leading up to the Italian invasion, I discuss the role of the League in international conflict resolution, while highlighting the Italian arguments deployed in attempts to justify their aggression upon a fellow League Member, and above all, a sovereign nation.

**KEYWORDS:** *League of Nations, Interwar period, Second Italo-Ethiopian War, Woodrow Wilson, Benito Mussolini, Adowa-complex, Walwal-arbitration*

## Preface

Originally, when I began the work for this thesis, I was interested by the League of Nations because during a previous research project I had researched the origins of *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum* surrounding the utilization of various weapons (mainly sea mines) and blockades, and how (Dutch) neutrality affected trade with the belligerent parties during the First World War. This, of course, all related to the Hague Conferences that were held in 1899 and 1907. Naturally, and as I will discuss in this thesis, this eventually led to the creation of the League of Nations, and thus the League was the next logical step in my research on the topic of international efforts of keeping the peace.

While I was in the process of conducting my research for this thesis, however, the world got thrown into the next state of modern conflict, as Vladimir Putin's Russia invaded the sovereign state of Ukraine on February 24 of 2022.<sup>1</sup> While this is of no importance for my thesis subject in particular, I still found myself drawing many connections between this conflict, and the case that I studied for this thesis, which is food for thought. Of course, it is impossible to compare both cases on a strict one to one basis, yet I asked myself the question: is this the point of failure of the United Nations?

As the successor of the League of Nations, both spiritually and in a lot of aspects physically, this too has to be drawn into the wider context that is the international peacekeeping initiative. Similarly, one can view the Russian aggression in Ukraine within the context of the Italian aggression in Ethiopia. Both employ tactics that degrade their victim, justifying their invasion. Where the Italians marked the Ethiopians as barbaric who they were going to civilise, the Russians commenced a supposed special operation with the primary goal to 'de-nazify' the Ukraine, liberating its Russian-speaking in the Donbass and Luhansk regions.

As this conflict is ongoing, it was of no point to be included into this thesis, yet it is still an interesting development that begs the question: are the international attempts to maintain peace doomed to fail? Can we get closer to this state of utopia in which war is banished to the tales of past? Considering this thesis aimed to place the League of Nations in its wider context, so does the United Nations deserve a similar evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, and Luke Harding, "Ukraine fights for its survival as Putin presses forward," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/24/ukraine-fights-for-its-survival-as-putin-presses-forward>.

and following re-evaluation as the League is currently undergoing, and therefore presents itself as the perfect subject of further research, especially in light of the findings of this thesis.

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## 1.1. Introduction

As war was raging in the late 1910s, the international order was set to change for good. Once the guns finally silenced, the warring parties met, including the so-called Big-Four, which consisted of Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States of America, with at the helm their national leaders David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, and Woodrow Wilson. While Wilson is generally seen as the brain of the Peace of Paris, and with it the development of the League of Nations, the plans were mediated through the Big Four.<sup>2</sup> However, as time has passed, scholars and popular authors alike focused less on the invention of the League, and more so on its supposed failure to prevent the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> In recent times, though, historians have been putting the Paris peace conference back in its broader historical context as both a continuity of nationalist global trends, and the birthplace of the (modern) intergovernmental organization.<sup>4</sup>

For this thesis I want to continue with this trend and place the League of Nations in its rightful place, but also question its success, but not before figuring out how one should measure the successfulness of such an institution that consists of multiple parts that are constantly moving independent of one another, namely the various actors within the League, and those outside of it. Furthermore, I want to understand the historical context in which it was born, because I believe this is important to keep in mind when trying to understand the League itself. As quoted in a 1935 publication by the League of Nations secretariat:

"To understand the League, [he] should begin with the assumption that, here as elsewhere, nature does not make jumps. In considering the League's origin, he should ask himself whether the League idea is not really the crowning achievement of earlier aspirations and even of earlier successes, rudimentary as these may have been."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Groom, Andre Barrinha, and William C. Olson, "The period of first consensus: A quest for peace" in *International Relations Then and Now: Origins and Trends in Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 2019), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *The American Historical Review*, 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091-1092.

<sup>4</sup> Glenda Sluga, "Remembering 1919: international organizations and the future of international order," *International Affairs* 95, no. 1 (2019): 25.

<sup>5</sup> League of Nations Secretariat, *The Aims, Methods and Activity of the League of Nations* (Geneva: Secretariat of the League of Nations, 1935), 9.

## 1.2. Research Question

To achieve my goal of placing the League back into historical context, I will divide this thesis up in three parts, in which I will determine what the international system really was in the aftermath of the Great War and analyse the changing power relations in international order as the Peace at Versailles was signed. Then I will discuss the reconstruction of the international order after the First World War, and how that point was reached by analysing the origins of the League of Nations in its broader context. Finally, I will attempt to analyse in what way the League succeeded in its proposed aims, and managed to uphold its set norms, which will have been determined in the previous sub question. This will be achieved via a case study of one of the earliest conflicts following the First World War, namely the Italo-Ethiopian war. That brings me to the following sub questions:

- What was the international system in the aftermath of the First World War?
- How was the international order restored after the First World War?
- How did the League of Nations manage, and provide resolutions to international conflict?

Finally, these sub questions will aid me in answering my main research question, namely: what role did the League of Nations play in international conflict resolution in the interwar period?

### 1.3. Conceptual Framework

To explain the state of the international system it is important to understand a variety of concepts and theoretical ideas.

#### International system

Utilizing the *Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, the international system is defined as a term which is used to describe patterns of relationships between and amongst states.<sup>6</sup> More simply put, Hedley Bull in *The Anarchical Society* puts it rather more simply, namely that an international system exists when two or more states have sufficient contact with one another as to the degree that they have a specific degree of impact on the decisions of the other.<sup>7</sup> In his 1954 book *Man, the State and War* Kenneth Waltz determines that the past is tied to the present, and parts of the system depend upon each other. In this, he argues a state of anarchy through which all parts of this system would have to act to defend their own interests. An example he gives is that a country may want to remain at peace, but rather to defend its position in the future it may strike while the moment is favourable for themselves before this position of favour shifts.<sup>8</sup>

While I do not necessarily adopt this realist perception of international relations as Waltz does, his ideas of a balance-of-power coming forth from an anarchical system where gains and losses are considered a zero-sum game, where power is not necessarily produced, but rather (re)distributed, are indeed useful as a means of clarifying the behaviour of state actors as well as state representatives throughout this thesis.<sup>9</sup>

#### Triolarity

The first concept I want to discuss is the different modes of explaining the events of the interbellum and the Second World War, and with that more precisely the (supposed) tripolar system in Europe. In his 1993 article “Triolarity and the Second World War,” Randall L. Schweller states that while the systemic constraints and

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<sup>6</sup> Garrett W. Brown, Iain McLean, and Alistair McMillan, “international system,” in *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) <https://www.oxfordreference.com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780199670840.001.0001/acref-9780199670840-e-1685>.

<sup>7</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 1-7.

<sup>9</sup> Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, 202.

potentially failures are widely discussed by historians in the context of the First World War, but these structural factors are often not associated with the Second World War. Many scholars, (partially) endorsed by Kenneth Waltz himself, see a story where Hitler is the villain, and Chamberlain fulfils a role of sinner. This drama, as he calls it, is often used to explain how the war in Europe commenced, but Schweller argues that the problem lies within the system itself. According to Schweller, the interbellum system was tripolar, with which he means there were three powerful nations in Europe kept power in balance.<sup>10</sup> This tripolarity drove European alliance crafting, which eventually culminated in the 1939 'Pact of Steel' between Germany and Italy, he argues. The existence of three superpowers, namely France, Britain, and Germany, combined with the unfolding events of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict and the pursuit of sanctions against Italy by the former two forced Italy to align with Germany, as it would be better to be number two to Germany than a bad third after France and Britain.<sup>11</sup>

### Alliance building

This brings me to a second concept that I deem important for my research, namely the formation of alliances. While we might be easily persuaded to think that the alliances were clear-cut before the outbreak of war in Europe, this is not the case. As previously described by the tripolarity theory of Schweller, the French and the British were quite close, and the Germans were deemed the third pole of the tripolar system in Europe, which I deem plausible and therefore will utilize in my thesis. However, these groupings were not clear cut as such. For Germany, an Anglo-German alliance was a preferred outcome, with Germany closing in their European hegemony, while Britain could maintain their global ambitions – something that would not be the case with an Anglo-French alliance, or an alliance with the United States. Hitler also turned to the Soviet Union, attempting to secure resources for his war machine, while preventing a second Anglo-Franco-Russian coalition, like that of the First World War.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Randall L. Schweller, "Tripolarity and the Second World War," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (March 1993): 73-74.

<sup>11</sup> Schweller, "Tripolarity," 74, 95.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 94.

### Intergovernmental organization

Finally, while it might seem obvious what an intergovernmental organization (IGO) is, I still want to address it because it is my main topic. It also encompasses various other important, but smaller concepts such as sovereignty and global governance. As defined by the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of International Law*, an intergovernmental organization is 'an organization constituted by States to which its Member States have transferred competence over matters governed by this Convention, including the competence to enter into treaties in respect of those matters'.<sup>13</sup>

The creation of the first IGO, which we know as the League of Nations, marked a shift from multilateral politics that involved mere discussions on functional ambitions, to a dynamic principle of cooperation aimed at finding converging goals and shared interests.<sup>14</sup> This is essentially how the League describes itself, with special care for the notion of sovereignty, in one of my primary sources, which states that "the League is not a federation of states, but a free association of states which undertake to pursue certain common aims; the individual states which belong to it do not thereby renounce their national sovereignty, nor, consequently, their *liberum veto*."<sup>15</sup> However, the League was still deemed a separate entity, with its own permanent Secretariat and budget. Furthermore, the Assembly may, in virtue of Article 3, paragraph 3 and 4, paragraph 4, "deal at their meetings with any matter within the sphere action of the League or affecting the peace of the world."<sup>16</sup>

These European power relations are very interesting to my topic and are necessary to fully understand the context in which the League of Nations operated. Simply understanding either is not enough, because they are interwoven. While the League is a separate entity, the wheels of the machine are still driven by individual actor states and are thus influenced by these power-relations.

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<sup>13</sup> "Organizations, international, intergovernmental," in *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of International Law*, edited by Grant, John P., and J. Craig Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) <https://www-oxfordreference-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780195389777.001.0001/acref-9780195389777-e-1683>.

<sup>14</sup> Cédric Groulier, and Simon Tordjman, "Intergovernmental Organizations" in *Global Diplomacy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, ed. Thierry Balzacq, and Frédéric Charillon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 140.

<sup>15</sup> League of Nations Secretariat, *The Aims*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 25.

## 1.4. Methodology

In my approach towards this topic, I have had to make a variety of decisions to limit my research to the level of that of a Master thesis, which I will explicate now. I initially approached the topic of the Peace of Paris and the League of Nations from a revisionist standpoint, in which I wanted to tackle the larger issue of reforging the narrative of the period of World Wars to accommodate for a less Eurocentric history, in which equal parts of the world are represented in a fair manner, as suggested by Andrew Buchanan in *World War II in Global Perspective*.<sup>17</sup> However, as much as this is an interesting topic, at the same time I tried to approach the topic from a structural point of view in which I wanted to tackle the problem of the causality of the outbreak of the Second World War from a revisionist perspective. This obviously does not work well, as it leads to multiple problems that need solving in a single piece of research, as it raises more questions than a fifty page thesis could answer, one of which being “when you end the timeline” as following the arguments held by Buchanan you might be able to keep going until Vietnam, or all the way to the end of the Cold War as this could be deemed a direct consequence of the events of what happened with Berlin after the Second World War in Europe came to a close. Therefore, I opted for the latter, in which I will discuss the narrative of the League of Nations, how it came to be, and whether or not it failed to prevent another World War.

I believe that in the end this is the correct decision because to understand the period of World Wars, you first need to understand the environment in which they arose, in this case the environment being the theatre of international politics: the League of Nations. However, this is also where I had to decide on the scope of my research. This decision was quite easily made, however, as per the earlier quote from the League of Nations secretariat: you need to understand the origins of the League, to understand the League. Therefore, I will also be looking at the origins in the form of the post-war power relations, to try to understand how certain nation actors were feeling, and why they acted the way they did. Furthermore, I will discuss the Hague Conferences, which are often seen as a natural predecessor to the League.

After having decided on which problem to try and solve, I ran into the issue of how I was going to do that precisely. Quite early on in my research I decided I wanted

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew N. Buchanan, *World War II in Global Perspective, 1931-1953: A short history* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 3.

to do a specific case study. I personally was intrigued by the case of the Manchurian invasion, and the Sino-Japanese conflict as a whole, but in early talks with my supervisor I realized I knew awfully little about the Italo-Ethiopian conflict as well. Keeping my first decision in mind, I decided on the Italo-Ethiopian war as my main case study. An important part of this decision was also the availability of sources, and primarily the language they were written in. Considering Japan left the League early, I lack primary source material on later parts of the conflict as my main base for source material is the League of Nations digital archive. While I speak neither Italian nor Japanese or Chinese, the fact that League of Nations source material almost always is accompanied by an English translation, was part of my considerations for this case study. Granted, for this thesis I ended up focussing more on the ‘path’ to conflict rather than the conflict in Ethiopia itself, at the time of writing the research proposal this was a significant problem.

Finally, for the thesis itself I opted to divide the chapters into a somewhat chronological order, through which I first discuss the ‘path’ towards an organisation of nations in the form of the League, after which I discuss both the League and the interwar period from an Italo-Ethiopian perspective in a way that it serves my final chapter – the case study. For the case study itself, I concluded during the primary source research that I realized a concise study of such a significant historical event was impossible within this Master’s Thesis, and thus in a way that it would complement my other sub-questions, I decided it would be the best approach for the narrative of my thesis to only discuss the attempts by the League to prevent war, rather than their attempts to stop it through the use of the provided tools, such as sanctions, though I do touch upon it at the very end.

## 1.5. Primary Sources

For my primary sources I am using the LONTAD<sup>18</sup> digital archive's collection, which provides me with the documents of the League of Nations relating to its conducts surrounding the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Before I discuss which sources I found, and why I opted to use them for this thesis, I wanted to give a brief overview of what this digital archive entails. The project launched back in 2017 after the United Nations Library in Geneva had received a grant from a private organization, and intended to collect and digitalize and publicize all archival material within the League of Nations archive.<sup>19</sup> At the time of conducting my research, the website was continuously being worked on, and was incomplete. However, since I concluded my research and finished up writing my thesis, the website has officially launched as part of the United Nations digital archive. Consequently, throughout my research certain documents might not have yet been published or were simply looked over as a result of the crudeness of the original search engine, which I am glad to conclude has since been improved significantly with means to narrow search results by language or collection.

Another digital archive which I have used is the Avalon Project, which is a digital library managed by the Yale Law School, and aims to publicize digital documents relevant to the fields of Law, History, Economics, Politics, Government and Diplomacy, while providing these static documents with relevant documents to support it. Furthermore, they state to provide a full account of sources, including those which might be controversial.<sup>20</sup> This is very important to me as a historian, as the inclusivity of sources is something that can discredit any form of archive, as it could leave out important information. While in some cases, like the LONTAD archive, this is unavoidable due to the nature of the archive, the active exclusion of documents would be a reason for me to avoid such an archive, and therefore I am glad they reassured this in their mission statement. This archive, then, I used to support my thesis in the form of finding historical documents such as the Covenant of the League, as well as documents regarding the Hague Conferences.

In addition, I used the 1935 publication by the Secretariat of the League of Nations, titled *The Aims, Methods and Activity of the League of Nations*. Besides the

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<sup>18</sup> LONTAD stands for "Total Digital Access to the League of Nations Archives Project."

<sup>19</sup> "About the project," LONTAD: Total Digital Access Project League of Nations, accessed June 8, 2022, <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lontad>.

<sup>20</sup> "Statement of Purpose," The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/about/purpose.asp>.

contents which the title already implied, it provides me with a collection of annexes, among which the covenant itself, and a list of members at the time of writing, which is December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1935.<sup>21</sup> Other primary sources originate from a variety of web sources which through one way or another I have verified for accuracy, such as the Treaty of London of 1915, as well as a variety of historical documents relating to the Hague Conferences and the League of Nations. Finally, I utilized a collection of primary sources consisting of both minutes of meetings, as well as letters sent by him, with editorial context by John Whiteclay Chambers II, of and by President Woodrow Wilson, titled *The Eagle and the Dove*, with which I contextualize the emergence of the League of Nations as a gradual movement of peacekeeping originating from the Hague Conferences.<sup>22</sup>

Within the LONTAD collection then, I have selected the Walwal arbitration that occurred on September 3, 1935, as one of the sources for my main body of argumentation. This collection provides me of evidence of the findings of the League on the incident that took place a year before, and the decision the commission of conciliation and arbitration awarded.<sup>23</sup> To provide context, I have also obtained the 1938 publication “The Wal Wal Arbitration” by Pitman B. Potter, published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. This book provides a 33 page account of the event and the proceedings, which I will use as secondary literature. The rest of the book consists of a set of annexes that include various primary sources, such as an article of the 1928 Italo-Ethiopian treaty, correspondence, and various commission proceedings, such as that of the 1935 Scheveningen meeting.<sup>24</sup> Other sources I have collected from LONTAD are related to the Italian movement towards war against Ethiopia, including a memorandum through which the Italian government attempted to sway the League into supporting their invasion, and a general report on the situation between both countries which was started before the invasion, yet only got published a few days after. Both these collections give me great

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<sup>21</sup> League of Nations Secretariat, *The Aims*, 196-220.

<sup>22</sup> John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> “Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Walwal and other frontier incidents: Decision of the arbitral board,” Scanned Manuscript, Geneva: League of Nations, 1935, R3654/1/15227/19702, LONTAD, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/ethiopian-italian-relations-walwal-and-other-frontier-incidents-decision-of-the-arbitral-board>.

<sup>24</sup> Pitman B. Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for international peace, 1938).

insight on the inner workings of the League, and the measures they used to try to prevent conflict.

## 1.6. Historiography

As described by Michael Smith in 1976 in “The League of Nations and international politics,” writing on the League of Nations until then could be divided in three subgroups of basic characteristics, namely that which is historical and institutional, that which is impressionistic and journalistic, and that which is prescriptive and normative, and he claims that even within those set limits, the best academic use of the historical precedent the League set had yet to be found, and that a thorough survey of the League’s activities had still to be written at that time.<sup>25</sup> However, in more recent times the League has become a more favoured subject for academic research in a variety of fields. At the time, the contemporary events took precedent and pushed the League into the shadow of the newly formed United Nations, and the League was simply seen as its sickly predecessor: most post-war accounts were that of a decline-and-fall narrative, or post-mortems intended to reinforce realist analyses and theories of international relations.<sup>26</sup> This was essentially a repeat of what had happened to the Hague Conferences that came before the League.

### 1.6.1. The Hague Conferences: 1899-1915

First, I want to look at what came before the League, which was not only the First World War, but even before that the initial attempts at international diplomacy and peacekeeping. This was done through the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, which are described by the League of Nations Secretariat themselves a sign that in the twenty years before the signing of the League Covenant, the world was slowly working towards it.<sup>27</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, a renowned historian specializing in war, peace, neutrality and internationalism – particularly interested in Europe between 1815 and 1919, wrote in “This is an account of failure” about how the Hague Conferences of 1899, 1907 and the planned conference of 1915 (which inevitably did not take place due to the outbreak of war) are currently occupying an uncomfortable place in history.<sup>28</sup> When historians of various sub-disciplines write about the conferences, they write an

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Smith, “The League of Nations and International Politics,” *British Journal of International Studies* 2, no. 2 (July 1976): 311.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 2007): 1091.

<sup>27</sup> League Secretariat, *The Aims*, 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> “Professor Maartje Abbenhuis,” University of Auckland, accessed December 27, 2021, <https://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/people/m-abbenhuis>.

account of failure: a 1994 chapter on the history of international law describes how despite supposed ‘steady progress’ the Hague Conferences failed to withhold the advance of barbarism with the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>29</sup> She concludes that in this vast body of history written on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scholars seemingly focus solely on the path to war, and rather forget about the conferences, and when they do, they are simply sidenotes.<sup>30</sup> As Daniel Hacker wrote in 2019: “Our expectations were perhaps too high.”<sup>31</sup> When assessing the Conferences, people seemingly expected the outcome to be a form of disarmament. Ahead of the 1907 Hague Conference, peace activists had high hopes in this regard, as it appeared as if diplomats were more willing to follow the path so desperate sought after by these activists. Hacker concludes that this was not exactly the case, as while diplomats present at the 1907 Conference were generally more progressive in regard to sharing the ideals of peace activists at the time, there was still a significant gap to bridge. He claims that if the expectations of the performance of the Hague Conferences were overall lower, it might not have completely satisfied most activists, or even most diplomats, but it would have potentially lessened the historical verdict of the second Conference and have resulted in more attention towards the achievements of the Peace Conferences, such as the establishment of a Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). Or has his articles title suggests: expectations were too high to be met.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the years the editorial stance has shifted. Initially opinions were quite neutral, and the conferences were discussed from a political and ideological perspective. During the war the Hague concepts and laws had a significant impact in the ways people from both neutral and belligerent countries viewed the reporting on the war. Violations were embedded in propaganda, and when ultimately the United States got involved in 1917, one of the main justifications was the German violations of the norms of civilization.<sup>33</sup> After the war people attempted to assign blame through the conferences’ diplomatic history. This politicized debate essentially continued the war on a diplomatic battlefield, where the Weimar Republic portrayed Britain as the imperial power that used the conferences to advance their own agendas at the

<sup>29</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, “This is an account of failure: the contested historiography of the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899, 1907 and 1915,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 32, no. 1 (April 2021): 1.

<sup>30</sup> Abbenhuis, “This is an account of failure,” 2.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Hacker, ““Our Expectations Were Perhaps Too High”: Disarmament, Citizen Activism, and the 1907 Hague Peace Conference,” *Peace & Change* 44, no. 1 (January 2019): 8.

<sup>32</sup> Hacker, ““Our Expectations Were Perhaps Too,” 6-7; Abbenhuis, “This is an account of failure,” 2.

<sup>33</sup> Abbenhuis, “This is an account of failure,” 3.

expense of the needs of the international system. On the eastern front, the newly formed Soviet Union advanced an anti-tsarist narrative, degrading Nicholas II's role in initiating the 1899 conference as a means of proffering an imperial advantage to Russia.<sup>34</sup> In 1935, American historian William Langer went on to suggest that the Hague conferences were of "little political importance that did not affect the relations of the powers to each other," once again creating a shift in the debate of the Hague Peace Conferences, further neglecting their accomplishments. British naval historian Arthur Marder described them as a fiasco, whereas Merze Tate went another step further, nicknaming them "The Disarmament Illusion" in her 1942 monograph.<sup>35</sup>

Following the end of the Second World War, Abbenhuis identifies a continuity, or even a cyclical nature, where just like the Hague Conferences, the League was identified as a failure. She borrows the thoughts of Patricia Clavin's 2013 *Securing the World Economy* here, stating that historical analyses based on a 'then what' model historicise institutional histories incorrectly, and divert attention away from the context and contemporary expectations and choices by focussing almost solely on that which came before and after, but not why, and more importantly ignoring any significant achievements by such an institution which carried over to the successor.<sup>36</sup> It is an easy mistake to make, as I have experienced myself, but indeed an important one to correct if you wish to properly analyse an institution. Moving forward, the Cold War era mimics the inter-war narratives of irrelevance, as the histories written once again emphasize the failures of the 1899 and 1907 conferences. However, there have been legal scholars and legal historians that have used 1899 and 1907 as a 'point of origin' for their narratives of legal history. While there is not necessarily a turning point for scholarship on the matter, it is important to note that not everyone writes off the conferences as a failure, but instead focuses on the establishment of the PCA, but this narrative of success is equally blinding by cherry-picking long-term achievements and once again ignoring context.<sup>37</sup> Abbenhuis concludes her account on a positive note: recently there has been a significant influx of authors such as Isabel Hull and Daniel Segesser, who in *A scrap of paper* write about key concepts such as 'law' and 'neutrality,' and 'war crimes' respectively in their studies on the conferences, finally

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<sup>34</sup> Abbenhuis, "This is an account of failure," 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 10-13.

acknowledging this essential context to the achievements of the Hague Conferences.<sup>38</sup> She concludes that she hopes that such studies finally put an end to the history of entrenched assessments of 'success' and 'failure'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War* (London: Cornell University Press, 2014): 1-15.

<sup>39</sup> Abbenhuis, "This is an account of failure," 14-16.

### 1.6.2. The League of Nations

Like the Hague Conferences, the League of Nations was a favoured subject of academics in the wake of its emergence, but after its demise it was swiftly followed by decades of neglect. It was picked up again in the late 1980s due to the inevitable collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it the bipolar system, and the revival of the interwar debate on bringing stability back into the world.<sup>40</sup> As previously mentioned in the introduction to this literature review, Michael Smith writes about the theoretical approaches towards the League of Nations in his 1976 literature review. He sets out a general framework used by theorists that approach international organizations in a systemic way, who address four central questions, namely the features which are relevant to the operation of international bodies, the status of international organization within relationships, the impact of change on a systemic level and finally how such change impinge upon the role of international bodies.<sup>41</sup> Other writers, Smith states, give more importance to the role of actors within an intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as aspects as regime and development in the approach of an actor – in this case a state – towards an IGO. The reality is that a systemic approach and actor approach overlap.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, there is the confusion surrounding the true purpose of the League, as it was created by a victorious alliance that was limited by the absence of the Bolshevik Russians, surrounded by the defeated central powers. This is reflected in the interwar national views on the League among the big four, where the French saw it as an enforcer of peace, the British as a moderator of influence, the Germans as a tool of revision, and the Soviets as an organization to oppose fascism.<sup>43</sup> Especially Germany's position in this is interesting, as they are one of the primary 'losers' of the 1919 Peace of Paris. After entering the League in 1926, Germany was allowed to fill a number of positions within the Secretariat. By 1929, however, many Germans were dissatisfied with the German participation within the League as German initiatives in disarmament and security talks were frustrated. A general feeling of 'lateness' among Germans fuelled their drive towards revision within the League, and in the grander international system itself, which they deemed stacked against them by the Anglo-

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<sup>40</sup> Pedersen, "Back to the League," 1091.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, "The League," 313.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 314-315.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 322-323.

French coalition that had a hold over League policymaking.<sup>44</sup> In reality, these various ideals coexisted while none became especially dominant, which Smith states resulted in the League being an ‘arena’ in which that inevitably caused it to fail as a moderating agent. On the other hand, while none of the Great Powers became overly dominant within the League, though it was deemed the British and French had a significant hold on the system, smaller nations did find themselves with a voice in this system, which allows us to determine the League to have changed the forms of international communication.<sup>45</sup>

While Smith focusses more on the theoretical side of the inner workings of the League, Susan Pedersen approaches it from a more practical perspective in “Back to the League of Nations.” After the revival of League-studies in the early to mid-1990s new historical research was under way on various policies of the League, such as the mandate system which was now relevant due to the abundance of failed states that the United Nations was forced to contend with. The 2007 account by Pedersen echoes the previously mentioned work by Abbenhuis, in that the League was deemed a failure, but should instead be reviewed based on its achievements. Pedersen rather focuses on the question of what it achieved in its twenty-five-year lifespan and bases her account primarily on twenty-first century publications.<sup>46</sup> To answer this revised historical question, she divides the League’s activities up into three areas, of which the first is security. A simple conclusion here is that a revisionist standpoint does not stand well, as the League succeeded in driving aggressor states out of the League, as was the case with Italy and Japan, but failed to maintain peace.<sup>47</sup> “The Geneva System” of the twentieth century was not a substitute for Great Power Politics, but rather a mechanism for conducting multinational diplomacy. Pedersen shares this attitude towards the League, as instead of deeming the League impotent from the start, she rather looks at it from a half-full perspective, where the League managed to bring Germany back into the “Concert” and managed to “keep more doors open than shut.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Marshall M. Lee, “The German Attempt to Reform the League: The Failure of German League of Nations Policy, 1930-1932,” *Francia* 5 (1977): 475-477.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, “The German Attempt,” 478-480; Smith, “The League,” 316-323.

<sup>46</sup> Pedersen, “Back to the League,” 1092.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 1092-1093.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1095-1096.

A second area of League activities as explored by Pedersen is the reconciliation of an ideal world composed of formally equal sovereign states. These words of Wilson proved unwise, as the reality was that partly due to the absence of the United States in the League itself, and the imperial interests of France and England, Japanese expansionism, the Turkish Revolution, far from all states gained true sovereignty, as the likes of Egypt, Armenia and Korea remained under foreign rule. Similarly, the League was entrusted with direct administration over various areas under the minority-protection and mandate systems.<sup>49</sup> The third and final area of League activity was their task of fostering international cooperation, primarily surrounding humanitarian concerns. During the founding of the League, this was expected to be a minor activity, but by the late 1930s it accounted for over fifty percent of the League's budget.<sup>50</sup> While these two sub-areas are interesting to read about, my research is primarily interested in the security-aspect, so I will leave it at that for now.

Pedersen concludes by suggesting a turning point in the research on the League of Nations, stating that to further our understanding of the innerworkings of the League, we must look more intensively at the personnel, mechanisms and general culture within the so-called Geneva-world, where current historiography mainly focus on national interests.<sup>51</sup> In her 2019 article "Remembering 1919," Glenda Sluga takes up this thought and makes it her own, stating that in recent times, historians have started to place '1919' in a longer, deeper history of thinking on national and international politics, and places the main emphasis on the people involved, their expectations and the social context that brought them into favour.<sup>52</sup> She concludes that, while the League ultimately failed "to prevent the depression, the rise of fascism, or yet another war," the idea of necessity of international organizations was not diminished. Better yet, citizen groups from the late 1930s advocated for new conceptions of 'world government'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Pedersen, "Back to the League," 1099.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 1108.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 1113.

<sup>52</sup> Sluga, "Remembering 1919," 25.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 36-40.

### 1.6.3. Case study: The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict

It has been a struggle to find a variety of authors writing about the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, especially of recent times. As described by W. B. Stern in “The Treaty Background of the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute,” Ethiopia was unique in Africa due to their position as a relatively independent country, having gained admission to the League in 1923, after decades of friendliness with Italy and Great Britain.<sup>54</sup> This friendliness did however not last. When Benito Mussolini came to power, Italy was in economic recession like most of the world, and General Emilio de Bono was entrusted with “securing Italy’s place in the sun,” as described in the 1965 title *The Ethiopian War* by Angelo del Boca.<sup>55</sup> Quincy Wright, a contemporary expert on the study of wars, wrote about the “Test of Aggression” in 1936, in which he primarily describes the events as they were taking place, including actions carried out by the League against aggressors.<sup>56</sup> Wright concludes his article by assessing the actions of the League, stating that where the League should have invited both parties to a ceasefire, this was not considered feasible because of the sheer aggression of the Italian invasion.<sup>57</sup> Cherri Wemlinger in her 2015 publication “Collective Security and the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute” took a step back, and assessed why the League Secretariat ultimately decided against this, stating that the testing of the League by the Italo-Ethiopian dispute elicited a strong public response: the use of poison gas by the Italian Air Force was deemed an unjust and inhumane action.<sup>58</sup>

While plenty has been written and researched about the international law and military aspects surrounding the Italo-Ethiopian conflicts, little has been written about the attitudes within Italy itself. In 1963, Robert L. Hess writes about Italian colonial ambitions during the First World War in his article “Italy and Africa,” which while not entirely related to my case study does provide me with necessary context and background knowledge. Italy joined the First World War in 1915 in accordance with the secret Treaty of London, in which Great Britain and France made certain promises, such as concessions of Austro-Hungarian territories for Italy in Europe, as well as

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<sup>54</sup> W. B. Stern, “The Treaty Background of the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute,” *American Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (April 1936): 190-201.

<sup>55</sup> Angelo del Boca, *The Ethiopian War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 4-5.

<sup>56</sup> Quincy Wright, “The Test of Aggression in the Italo-Ethiopian War,” *American Journal of International Law* 30, no. 1 (January 1936): 45-53.

<sup>57</sup> Wright, “The Test of Aggression,” 53.

<sup>58</sup> Cherri Wemlinger, “Collective Security and the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute Before the League of Nations,” *Peace & Change* 40, no. 2 (April 2015): 143; Buchanan, *World War II*, 30.

territories within the Mediterranean, Asia and Africa, among which extensions of her African colonial territories in Libya, Eritrea and Somaliland.<sup>59</sup> However, in the end Italy received little to no concessions, as per the Wilsonian solution in the form of a League of Nations mandate system, which left them feeling cheated, which inevitably fuelled Mussolini's rise to power.<sup>60</sup>

The 1976 article by Alberto Sbacchi "The Italians and the Italo-Ethiopian War" is a turning point in the historiography as it reviews an entirely new aspect of the subject, namely the attitudes towards the war of Italian civilians. He claims that the primary cause for lack of research is the simple lack of information and interest, as the fascist regime withheld as much as they could to prevent opposition.<sup>61</sup> The main point he makes is that initially, Italians simply did not care for colonial expansion, as domestic, more mundane problems like hunger and lack of work were more prevalent. While many enlisted and volunteered into the army to secure an income, most refused to go to war. However, the primary turning point in the Italian people's standpoint changed in November 1935, when the League imposed its economic sanctions that not only threatened the nation, but their own livelihood, resulting in Mussolini being their only way out. Thus, the League ironically united the Italians under Mussolini to go and conquer Ethiopia, although this is simply a part of the story, as typical fascist rhetoric played a significant role, considering previous "Ethiopian humiliation" of the Italians in the nineteenth century in Adowa, which Del Boca refers to as the Italian "Adowa complex", which is comparable to the more well-known rhetoric of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which Adolf Hitler referred to as "Das Diktat."<sup>62</sup>

While this work of Sbacchi's is very relevant, it is not very recent which is a problem for my research, considering the basis of my thesis, namely an analysis of the League of Nations, is based on twenty-first century academics. Therefore, I have selected the 2015 book by Robert Mallett titled *Mussolini in Ethiopia* as an updated history of the lead-up to *Il Duce* his invasion of Ethiopia, and the Italian diplomacy and military strategy involved. The book provides me with insights in the post-war Italian experience, namely the atmosphere of national resentment and frustrated great power

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<sup>59</sup> Robert L. Hess, "Italy and Africa: Colonial Ambitions in the First World War," *Journal of African History* 4, no. 1 (1963): 105.

<sup>60</sup> Hess, "Italy and Africa," 120.

<sup>61</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, "The Italians and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1936," *Transafrican Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (1976): 123.

<sup>62</sup> Sbacchi, "The Italians," 124-131; Wemlinger, "Collective Security," 144-145; Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, 7-10.

ambitions created by the post-war peace, which made the rise of Mussolini's *fascismo* possible.<sup>63</sup>

Similar to viewing the events of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict from Italian perspective, I want to pay attention to the Ethiopian perspective as well. While literature might be less abundant, as is to be expected considering the Eurocentric state of many fields of historic research, it is still important, considering Ethiopia was a member of the League as well, and thus their view on the war is equally important. In a fairly dated, but nevertheless important publication, Aregawi Berhe writes on the war from Ethiopian perspective in "Revisiting resistance in Italian-occupied Ethiopia," and then primarily the so-called 'Patriots' Movement', a resistance movement that flourished in the predominantly feudal polity after the invasion by the industrialized Italians, who were determined to make Ethiopia their colony, and make the country pay for their humiliating defeat at the Battle of Adowa of 1896.<sup>64</sup> To finalize this historiography, and my literature on the Ethiopian perspective, I have a 2020 article by Megan Donaldson, in which she takes Ethiopia as a case study of how the League refracted approaches to statehood and belonging for polities on the margins of the so-called "family of nations." Initially Ethiopia was not considered to join the League, with even some British officials wanting to place it under the protectorate system, however in 1923 Ethiopia was unanimously voted into the League as a member.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Robert Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia, 1919-1935: The Origins of Fascist Italy's African War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Aregawi Berhe, "Revisiting resistance in Italian-occupied Ethiopia: The Patriots' Movement (1936-1941) and the redefinition of post-war Ethiopia" in *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, ed. Jon Abbink, Klaas Walraven, and Mirjam Bruijn (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2003), 87-88.

<sup>65</sup> Megan Donaldson, "The League of Nations, Ethiopia, and the making of States," *Humanity* 11, no. 1 (May 2020): 6-7.

## 2.1. The International (dis)order post Great War – Moving to a League of Nations

In this first chapter I shall explore in what international political climate the League of Nations came to be. The multi-layered aspects of the First World War, namely the causality of this conflict as well as the battlefields on which it was acted out, across colonial empires, had thrown the world order into crisis. One of the main questions I shall explore is simply why an international organization such as the League was invented. After the inevitable conflict that we now know as the First World War it was clear the first attempts at peacekeeping through the Hague Conferences had failed, something drastic had to be invented. However, it was not as simple as it sounds.

### 2.1.1. The Origins of the League

While in popular historiographical account American President Woodrow Wilson is often accredited with the invention of the League of Nations, ‘international government’ instead arose as a topic of discussion rather than an instantaneous emergence. In essence, the idea of international government arose on the back of decades of multilateral conferences on a variety of topics, such as with discussions of international law surrounding territorial disputes between states.<sup>66</sup> Sluga acknowledges that, while historical research surrounding these questions are ongoing and partly unanswered, these developments have been ongoing for decades prior, and across a significant geographical extent. An example she offers are the existence of transnational organizations that coordinated issues such as women suffrage and other such issue-based social movements.<sup>67</sup>

In the broadest narrative, the oldest forebear of the League can be found back in 1648, when the Thirty Years war was ended with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia and birthed the notion of sovereignty. However, little else can be traced back, as Westphalia represented nothing of an intergovernmental body, or provide a foundation for the formation of a (new) international order.<sup>68</sup> The events of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution had however changed the pace of

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<sup>66</sup> Glenda Sluga, “Remembering 1919: international organizations and the future of international order,” *International Affairs* 95, no. 1 (2019): 26.

<sup>67</sup> Sluga, “Remembering 1919,” 26-27.

<sup>68</sup> Patrick Cottrell, “The League of Nations in time,” in *The League of Nations: Enduring Legacies of the First Experiment at World Organization* (London: Routledge, 2018), 27-28.

development of these ideas, as the world became smaller and revolutionize visions of order.<sup>69</sup>

This development of intergovernmental, or rather more broadly international cooperation culminated in the invitation by Russian Tsar Nicholas II on August 24, 1898. The Rescript of the Russian Emperor, which was handed to diplomatic representatives at the Russian Foreign Office on the aforementioned date, starts off proclaiming a need for maintenance of general peace, and a possible reduction of excessive armaments.<sup>70</sup> The Tsar thus supported this view, he concluded that while the maintenance of peace had been seen as the primary objective of international policy, such as through the creation of “powerful alliances”, this had not yet resulted in a fruitful result of pacification.<sup>71</sup> This general idea that ‘all civilized nations pursue peace’ is repeated often within the rescript, and according to Nicholas – or rather according to his interpretation of contemporary events, the ongoing arms race did not support this idea.<sup>72</sup> He concludes in the strongest words, that the system of armaments, as he calls it, has led to a continued danger of escalation that are “transforming the armed peace of our days into a crushing burden, which the peoples have more and more difficulty bearing.” He finalizes that this would inevitably lead to “the very cataclysm” that they have attempted to avert, and that the conference, to which this was an invitation, would aim to “focus the efforts of all states which are sincerely seeking to make the great idea of universal peace triumph over the elements of trouble and discord.”<sup>73</sup>

While before the outbreak of the Great War people were positive about the state of international politics and the discussion surrounding the Hague Conferences, the reality is that “The Hague” had offered nothing substantial in the ways of providing international stability. It lacked the backbone to maintain peace, as unlike in the cases of the League of Nations or its successor, there was no institutional backing. If anything it helped create more instability as the conferences were used to assign blame onto one another, as is evident by the works published during the 1920s, among which an

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<sup>69</sup> Cottrell, “The League of Nations in time,” 28.

<sup>70</sup> “Peace Conference at the Hague 1899: Rescript of the Russian Emperor, August 24, 1898,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/hag99-01.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hag99-01.asp).

<sup>71</sup> “Peace Conference at the Hague 1899.”

<sup>72</sup> John Mack, “Nicholas II and the Rescript for Peace of 1898: Apostle of peace or shrewd politician?” *Russian History* 31, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2004): 83-84.

<sup>73</sup> “Peace Conference at the Hague 1899.”

assignment of blame onto Britain by the Weimar Republic, in which Britain is presented as the imperial power preventing progress during The Hague.<sup>74</sup>

This is not to say that the Hague Conferences were entirely meaningless. The 1899 Hague Conference is often seen as the first attempt at international organization to promote and maintain peace. Among its major achievements are the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which as per Articles 20 and 21 of the 1899 Conference established a means to “facilitate an immediate recourse for arbitration of international differences,” that was to be “competent for all arbitration cases,” and was to be seated permanently in The Hague.<sup>75</sup> Other achievements of The Hague, specifically tied to the waging of war, are limitation of armaments, though solely qualitatively rather than quantitatively, treatment of civilians and prisoners, and specific roles of neutral states.<sup>76</sup> Specific emphasis must be put on the limitation of “barbaric” weapons, such as poisonous gasses, munitions intend on greatening human suffering and the use of new inventions of war, such as projectiles and explosives launches from balloons, which were individually prohibited in separate declarations within the Laws of War agreements of the 1899 conference.<sup>77</sup>

Baron Egor de Staal, conference president and Russian diplomat, further noted in the closing address of the 1899 conference that the conference’s significance was not simply the results of the conference, or the failure of the First Commission, which was tasked with finding an acceptable convention on arms reductions and had failed to do so. Instead he labelled it the “First International Code of Peace”, with which he put special emphasis on the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The general consensus of contemporaries and Staal himself alike tend to be that while the

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<sup>74</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, “This is an account of Failure: The contested historiography of the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899, 1907 and 1915,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 32, no. 1 (2021): 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> “Laws of War: Pacific Settlement of International Disputes (Hague I); July 29, 1899,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/hague01.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague01.asp).

<sup>76</sup> “Laws of War: Pacific Settlement of International Disputes (Hague II); July 29, 1899,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/hague02.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague02.asp).

<sup>77</sup> “Laws of War: Declaration on the Launching of Projectiles and Explosives from Balloons; July 29, 1899,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/dec99-01.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/dec99-01.asp); “Laws of War: Declaration on the use of Projectiles the Object of Which is the Diffusion of Asphyxiation or Deleterious Gases; July 29, 1899,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/dec99-02.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/dec99-02.asp); “Laws of War: Declaration on the Use of Bullets Which Expand or Flatten Easily in the Human Body; July 29, 1899,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed June 20, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/dec99-03.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/dec99-03.asp).

goals set beforehand were generally not reached in a conclusive manner, the conference instead steered everyone and everything in the correct direction, viewing the 1899 conference as the first step. In his final statement, he ends: “The good seed is sown. Let the harvest come.”<sup>78</sup>

The emphasis on this Third Commission, which was tasked with, and succeeded at formulating a Convention for the Pacific Settlement of Disputes and the subsequent establishment of a court of arbitration must in turn be understood in its historical context. In the late-nineteenth century, conflicts were instead answered with *ius ad bellum*: the right to go to war. Only after the impactful *Alabama* arbitration of 1872, where the United States government sought damages from the United Kingdom for attacks on Union-aligned merchant ships by Confederate ships built by British shipyards throughout the American Civil War, arbitration became a meaningful topic of political agendas in many countries.<sup>79</sup> A specially formed arbitration movement subsequently made it their mission to offer an alternative method of settling disputes within international politics. They sought to force states to attempt to resolve conflicts before resorting to declarations of war. This movement is generally emphasized under the contradiction of the right-to-war tradition: *ius contra bellum*, or right to prevent war.<sup>80</sup>

All the more hopeful civilians and peace activists alike looked forward to a second meeting of the world leaders in their quest for international cooperation at The Hague in 1907. However, issues were double sided, as on the one hand the British officials entertained the wish to push for disarmament to please public opinion, but on the other hand the harsh reality of European diplomatic affairs made this an impossible goal to achieve, as the First Moroccan Crisis of 1906 had made France suspicious of Germany, and their supposed longing for peace in Europe, and only helped to accelerate the path to war through national outrage, further bolstering the alliance

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<sup>78</sup> Randall Lesaffer, “Peace through law: The Hague Peace Conferences and the rise of the *ius contra bellum*,” in *War, Peace and International Order? The Legacies of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907*, ed. Maartje Abbenhuis, Christopher Ernest Barber, and Annalise Higgins (London: Routledge, 2017), 31.

<sup>79</sup> “Alabama claims of the United States of America against Great Britain: Award rendered on 14 September 1872 by the tribunal of arbitration established by Article I of the Treaty of Washington of 8 May 1871,” September 14, 1872, “Reports of International Arbitral Awards,” Digital Reproduction, Geneva: United Nations, 2012, [https://legal-un-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/riaa/cases/vol\\_XXIX/125-134.pdf](https://legal-un-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/riaa/cases/vol_XXIX/125-134.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> Lesaffer, “Peace through law,” 33-38.

system of the 1900s.<sup>81</sup> Britain likewise doubted the German ability to shed its “military crust.”<sup>82</sup> The realization of any meaningful disarmament was therefore rather far away, as the only nations looking to raise the question at The Hague were the United States, Great Britain and Spain. France was happy to allow for discussions to take place, but only to satisfy demands raised by public opinion. Italy was willing to enter discussions on the condition that realistic solutions were to be proposed. Finally, Russia was not looking forward to disarmament, as they had suffered heavy losses during the Russo-Japanese war – which itself was the cause for the Second Hague Conference delay, as it was originally planned to take place three years prior. Therefore, they were instead looking to build bridges with Berlin and Vienna in specific, rather than burning any.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> William Mulligan, “Justifying international action: International law, The Hague and diplomacy before 1914,” in *War, Peace and International Order? The Legacies of the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907*, ed. Maartje Abbenhuis, Christopher Ernest Barber, and Annalise Higgins (London: Routledge, 2017), 17-22.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel Hucker, “Our Expectations Were Perhaps Too High”: Disarmament, Citizen Activism and the 1907 Hague Peace Conference,” *Peace & Change* 44, no. 1 (January 2019): 10-11.

<sup>83</sup> Hucker, “Our Expectations,” 13.

### 2.1.2. New world order

Back in 2018 on the eve of Donald Trump's inauguration as United States' President, the international community looked on fearing what was to come. Joseph Nye feared the negative impact Trump would have on the continued domination of the western liberal order, even more so than the rise of China, while John Ikenberry foresaw the end of the seven decades this order has stood firmly.<sup>84</sup> While many international relations scholars and political scientists identify the birth of our current liberal order in the 1940s, or more precisely 1945, I believe it is fair to presume there is no set date for this event. As acknowledged by Sluga, the idea of international government arose on the back of decades of other forms of international cooperation, and likewise the idea of a liberal order emerged as a result of this, and the birth of the League is merely a reflection of this.<sup>85</sup> Ikenberry too acknowledges the relevance of the 1919 attempt at a liberal order, though portraying it as a 'simple vision' birthed by Wilson, that attempted to uphold a rule-based order simply on the existence of free-trade, national self-determination, and a continuing spread of liberal democracy.<sup>86</sup>

Some might refer to the League as merely an experiment that eventually led to the formation of the United Nations, I believe this view too is erroneous. The current-day consensus of the liberal order is, in fact, that is the principal cause for a so-called "long peace" among great powers, which I agree is ludicrous. Graham Allison rightly acknowledges that there has been no "long peace", and nor was it the result of the liberal order, but merely a result of the Cold War, or rather a need to unite against a greater threat to world peace, which when the dust has settled is just another balance of power between the largest nations. U.S. foreign policy was driven by the prospect of a Europe that fell to the Soviet-threat.<sup>87</sup> While this is not the principal question of my thesis, it is interesting – and equally important to keep in mind when considering the creation of this liberal order, and with it the League of Nations and its legacy. The question that does remain, however, is how this first attempt at a liberal international order came to be.

With the end of the Great War, a first truly global war, it became clear the old interpretation of the balance of power mechanisms had become largely invalid. While

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<sup>84</sup> Graham Allison, "The Myth of the Liberal Order: From Historical Accident to Conventional Wisdom," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (Summer 2018): 124.

<sup>85</sup> Sluga, "Remembering 1919," 26.

<sup>86</sup> John Ikenberry, "The end of liberal international order?" *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 14.

<sup>87</sup> Allison, "The Myth," 124-129.

before Britain ruled the world through its *Pax Britannica* combination of diplomatic and military power, and soft power influences of free trade and liberal democracy, its hegemony had begun to crumble.<sup>88</sup> Instead, the victors of the Great War sought to restore the international order – a liberal order under an organization of the nations of the world. This idea of order being synonymous to a rule-based society bound to international organizations is not universally applicable, it is in the case of the post-Great War liberal international order. To define what an ‘order’ can be understood as I turn to Henry Kissinger, who in turn determined a political order, of sorts, rests on two main points, namely “a set of commonly accepted rules that define the limits of permissible action” and “a balance of power that enforces restraint when rules break down, preventing one political unit from subjugating all others.”<sup>89</sup> Put in the words of Georg Sorensen: world order is simply a “governing arrangement among states.”<sup>90</sup>

As a realist, Kissinger swiftly turns to the exercise of power to maintain a stable order, which is applicable to a certain point even in an order based around a world organization such as the League. While there are rules to which every individual actor is bound, those with the most power will still thrive within it, as they have natural advantages over others. Agreements without the backing of a significant form of power may be slacked upon, or simply ‘forgotten’, while those with a high ratio of power are able to enforce their agreements, and not solely militarily.<sup>91</sup> Simply put, while liberalists might argue that a liberal order might thrive on its own due to interwoven interests, realists such as Kissinger tend to consider individual aims and goals that nations might want to achieve.

However, it is also true that order cannot be maintained with the backing of power alone. An order was to be based on a common set of ideals and values. Through this common set of rules, norms and practices a political order could therefore maintain its stability. However, it is important to note that the realist-perspective holds ground as well, as at times it might be necessary to summon the necessary amount of power to maintain the stability in a coercive manner, would the common social grounds fail

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<sup>88</sup> Buchanan, *World War II*, 7-13; Patrick O’Brien, and Geoffrey Allen Pigman, “Free trade, British hegemony and the international economic order in the nineteenth century,” *Review of International Studies* 18 (1992): 106-107, 110-112.

<sup>89</sup> M. Patrick Cottrell, “The League of Nations Experiment and the quest for world order,” in *The League of Nations: Enduring Legacies of the First Experiment at World Organization* (London: Routledge, 2018), 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> Cottrell, “The League of Nations Experiment,” 10.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 10.

within the order.<sup>92</sup> While it is clear what an order is, a liberal order is another beast entirely. In the broadest sense, a liberal order is based on the tenets of liberals such as Immanuel Kant, that sought a broader vision of world governance with an open economic system, based on international laws and institutions with cooperative – maybe even collective security.<sup>93</sup> The League of Nations was just that, as it aimed to govern the world on the basis of a liberal order on a never-before witnessed global scale – something even the Hague Conferences failed to achieve.

Woodrow Wilson realized a political order based on a balance of power was unfeasible. He foresaw a post-Great War order based on “peace without victory”, that is an order based on a community of power instead, as he claimed a new order based on balance of power would only be a struggle for a new balance of power, a new equilibrium – something that has not particularly worked out well in the past, and he sought to break the cycle: organized peace instead of organized rivalries.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Cottrell, “The League of Nations Experiment,” 11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

## 2.2. Woodrow Wilson, advocate of peace

In the previous chapter I have concluded that, while the Democratic President Woodrow Wilson is often regarded as the father of the League of Nations, he cannot be accredited all the progress made. What I do not intend is to give a full account and analysis of the person of Woodrow Wilson, rather I want to address his ambitions and intentions, as they did have a significant influence on the peace movement, and the American absence in the League is certain to provide further grounds for an explanatory discussion on the deemed failure of the League. However, with this it must be noted that in fact it was a wider movement, and not a single American policymaker that provided this shift. Therefore, I shall explore Wilson's intentions with the idea of a League of Nations, and with it his thoughts that led to the writing of his Fourteen Points and the Covenant of the League of Nations.

### 2.2.1. Wilson and the Great War

For this analysis I will start with one of the first challenges to the maintenance of Wilson's pacifist policy through which he continuously attempted to keep the United States out of international conflict: the sinking of *RMS Lusitania*, a British passenger liner, on May 7, 1915. The ship was attacked by German U-boats with torpedoes and consequently sank off the coast of Ireland. While arguably the Germans had a point in attacking the ship, as it has been proven the ship carried millions of rounds of munitions, and the means to produce other forms of explosives, the ship was also carrying 1200 passengers and crew to the European continent, among whom were 128 United States' citizens.<sup>95</sup>

Former President Theodore Roosevelt immediately took on the opportunity to exclaim his outrage of the German attacks, firstly on American vessels, declaring them "pure piracy."<sup>96</sup> "Centuries have passed since any war vessel of a civilized power has shown such ruthless brutality towards non-combatants," he responded to the attack on Lusitania.<sup>97</sup> Roosevelt responded frustratedly to the lack of direct action by the President, claiming that unless Wilson would act with immediate decision and vigour,

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<sup>95</sup> "Roosevelt and Wilson differ over *Lusitania*," in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 59.

<sup>96</sup> "Roosevelt and Wilson," 59-60.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

he would have failed in the duty demanded by humanity, and the self-respect of the American Republic specifically.<sup>98</sup> He followed this up a day later with a suggested plan of response, with which he intended to take possession of interned German ships, forbid trading with Germany, and all trade between the ‘civilized world’ and the allied belligerents be permitted and encouraged.<sup>99</sup>

To this, Wilson responded as was to be expected in a very pacifist manner, emphasizing its special position in the world, as he deemed they “touched elbows and hearts with all the nations of mankind.”<sup>100</sup> He wanted the United States to set a special example, namely “be the example of peace because peace is healing and elevating influence in the world, and strife is not [peace].”<sup>101</sup> Through these passages it is clear that Wilson intended to return the world through a state of peace not by forcing itself into a conflict, but attempting to resolve the conflict of the First World War through a peaceful manner. This very much carries the notion brought forth in the previous chapter that Wilson wanted a ‘Peace without Victory’, an establishment of order that did not rest upon ‘yet another balance of power that was doomed to collapse’. On the same topic, Wilson shared his insights at a later date, stating his wish for the continued right of American citizens to travel on belligerent ships: “To forbid our people to exercise their rights for fear we might be called upon to vindicate them would be a deep humiliation indeed.”<sup>102</sup>

In a meeting at the White House on May 8, 1916, Wilson met with the leader of Peace and Antimilitarism Movements. Wilson’s policy had shifted slightly to a state of preparedness for war, as Republican backed lobbyists and wealthy corporate sponsors aimed at greatly increasing the size of the military and navy in the spring of 1915.<sup>103</sup> Wilson however opted for a less extreme version of these plans, though Congress opposed either suggestion.<sup>104</sup> To concerns by citizen-led movements, Wilson responded that he does indeed not wish to militarize the country, instead opting to

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<sup>98</sup> “Roosevelt and Wilson,” 60-61.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 61-62.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>102</sup> “The Gore-McLemore Resolution Against American Traveling on Armed Belligerent Ships, and Wilson’s Reply,” in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 68-69.

<sup>103</sup> “A Discussion Between President Wilson and Leader of the Peace and Antimilitarism Movements (1916),” in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 69-70.

<sup>104</sup> “A Discussion,” 70.

meet an equilibrium of reasonable preparedness. He believed that his actions did not bring the country in disservice regarding its traditions, as it was never before truly militarily helpless. He expresses his intention to establish the foundations for peace but acknowledges that if he goes to such a conference, he has to go on a basis that is "intelligible to the people you are conferring with."<sup>105</sup> These expressions by Wilson again acknowledge his intent of maintaining peace, but he is not blind to the realist ideals of power. For his words to have any meaning on the international theatre of politics, he would require the means to back those words up with action, or the potential of it anyway.

Wilson had his first interaction with the ideas of an organization intended to maintain peace with the organization of The League to Enforce Peace in the summer of 1915. While Wilson initially kept his distance from the association, fearing his own political position, and that of his Republican opponents, the need arose to address them in 1916. He declared that willingly or not the world was intertwined, and the acts of another inevitably would affect the United States as well. It is at this moment Wilson for the first time acknowledges and endorses the ideals of a "more wholesome diplomacy."<sup>106</sup> He echoed the ideals of the movement, and proclaimed the United States' support for such an organization, and states his fundamental beliefs that firstly, all people have the right to sovereignty, secondly that small states should enjoy the same privileges of sovereignty as the Great Powers, and thirdly that the world has the right to be free from disturbances caused by aggressive behaviour of others. "So sincerely do we believe in these things that I am sure that I speak the mind and wish of the people of America when I say that the United States is willing to become a partner in any feasible association of nations formed in order to realize these objects and make them secure against violation."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> "A Discussion," 72-73.

<sup>106</sup> "President Wilson's First Endorsement of a Postwar League of Nations (1916)," in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 74-75.

<sup>107</sup> "President Wilson's First Endorsement," 74-76.

### 2.2.2. Peace without victory

After having been re-elected in 1916, Wilson planned to mediate with the belligerents to bring the war to a peaceful conclusion. He asked each of them to state their war aims as a means to begin negotiating peaceful solution. However, partly due to the French and British's unwillingness to come to a compromise peace, but also due to the interference of Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who sympathized with the allied belligerents in Europe and went behind Wilson's back, this planned mediation failed to come to fruition.<sup>108</sup> It is with the following address Wilson has set the first steps towards the United States entering the war, which it would then do a few months later. He assures the nations that he still believes in the possibility for "a post-war settlement which would guarantee peace and justice" but he feels the need to state the conditions under which this would have to become reality. He acknowledges the need for the current war to end first, though putting extra emphasis on how it would end, as "it makes a great deal of difference in what way [...] it is ended."<sup>109</sup>

While Wilson was aware of the intensity of the violence between the belligerents, he was seemingly not aware of the true war aims of the allies. He wanted them to accept a peace without victory, as a peace *with* victory would inevitably leave a grudge and lead to future conflict, something he foresaw rather accurately – and not just in the case of the main antagonist of the Great War, Germany, but also then-allies Italy as will be further discussed in the third chapter. As tensions rose to a new level after Germany had announced its unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson was forced to cut ties with Berlin, and decided to ask Congress for the authority to arm merchant ships under the American flag, ushering in a time of war crisis.<sup>110</sup>

On February 28, 1917, when Wilson met with well-known American pacifists such as Jane Addams and Joseph Cannon, it became clear that war had become inevitable. While his fellow pacifists were still in favour of submitting the case of the attacks on American shipping to a tribunal in The Hague, or request of the American people their opinion on joining the war through a referendum, Wilson's mind was set.

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<sup>108</sup> "President Wilson's "Peace without Victory" Speech (1917)," in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 96-97.

<sup>109</sup> "President Wilson's "Peace without Victory" Speech," 97-99.

<sup>110</sup> "Peace Movement Leaders Meet with President Wilson During the War Crisis (1917)," in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 104-106.

This is not to say that Wilson had abandoned his pacifist ideals, however.<sup>111</sup> While it must be acknowledged these events were viewed through the eyes of Adams, as this specific letter is from her post-war memoirs, thus rendering these views potentially biased, Wilson's plans made sense. Wilson expressed his wish to take a seat at the 'Peace Table' to enforce his pacifist agenda, and with it his wish for a post-war League. However, from a position of neutrality, this would have been significantly harder or near impossible, considering he would then be at best in the position to "call through a crack in the door."<sup>112</sup>

However, while a large portion of the country wanted to prevent joining the war at any cost – according to the peace movement representatives anyway, Wilson's hand was eventually forced as on March 18, 1917, when three American merchant ships were attacked and sunk by U-boats, taking fifteen American citizens to their sea graves.<sup>113</sup> He addressed Congress on April 2, in which he expressed his 'wish' to formally enter the war, though emphasizing his reluctance in doing so, and his continued support of the German people who, according to him, had no part in this war. He proclaimed to wish for a post-war League without any such autocratic government, as they could never be trusted to keep faith to it and its covenant. He further reiterates his wish to liberate "the people" from conflict, to fight for "the ultimate peace," to "make the world safe for democracy." By the end of the address, he emphasized why they would go to war, namely for democracy, sovereignty, the rights and liberties of small nations, and to bring peace and safety to all nations, "and [to] make the world itself at last free."<sup>114</sup>

As a belligerent, Wilson gained access to previously withheld information, including the plans formulated at the Treaty of London, where the allied powers divided the territories gained from the Central Powers, thus learning of their goal of 'complete victory'. After the Russian Revolution, and the seizing of power by Vladimir Lenin and the subsequent signing of an armistice with the Central Powers and a call for a peace conference, Wilson had to publicly express his views, and distance himself from the

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<sup>111</sup> "Jane Addam's Recollection of the February 28, 1917, Meeting with Wilson (1922)," in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 107.

<sup>112</sup> "Jane Addam's Recollection," 107-108.

<sup>113</sup> "Peace Movement Leaders," 106; "President Wilson's War Message (1917)," in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 111.

<sup>114</sup> "President Wilson's War Message," 111-114.

war aims maintained by his fellow allies. He did this through his so-called Fourteen Points, which he presented through a Presidential Address on January 8, 1918.<sup>115</sup> He once again reemphasized why the United States had joined the war, stating they sought no gains for themselves but international stability and peace: a world that was “safe to live in.”<sup>116</sup> The Fourteen Points emphasized a quest for an open covenant of peace, absolute freedom of navigation of the seas both in peace and war, equality in trade by the removal of trade barriers, and guarantees for the reduction of armaments. Besides these rather universal goals held by Wilson, he also stated his wish for an adjustment of colonial claims, and the fair and equal adjustment of territories in a post-war world, including the evacuation of German forces from occupied territories, the formation of a Polish state, territorial integrity for Balkan states and the securing of sovereignty for the Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire, all under the general conceptualization of sovereignty and self-determination, the latter term which would become rather important as he first uttered it in his address to the Senate on February 1918. In this address he emphasized that “self-determination is not a mere phrase but an imperative principle of action,” showing his intent to ‘liberate’ the now-oppressed world in a sense, stating his wish that people would only be governed by their own consent.<sup>117</sup> Finally, he once again stated his wish for a general association of nations, for great and small states alike.<sup>118</sup>

This is one of the first times Wilson had made such direct demands, but nevertheless it reflected well upon his earlier held views, a so-called Peace without Victory through which little territory was won, and that which was won would be either on historical claim or on the basis of the people who lived in it. His worldview was sturdy, and even the effects of the Great War did not sway him. It is therefore ever the more interesting what could have been had the United States actually joined the League, though it must also be acknowledged that Wilson would not have held office forever, and rivals such as Roosevelt certainly maintained a different view of the world. Nevertheless, this analysis of the United States’ foreign policy under President Wilson gives an interesting view in the evolution of pacifism and the idea of a League up until

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<sup>115</sup> “Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’ Speech,” in *The Eagle and the Dove: The American peace movement and United States foreign policy, 1900-1922*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 129-130.

<sup>116</sup> “Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’ Speech,” 130-131.

<sup>117</sup> Adom Getachew, “The Counterrevolutionary Moment,” in *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 39.

<sup>118</sup> “Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’ Speech,” 131-132.

its very creation, which in turn gives much food for thought to reflect upon at a later stage of this thesis.

### 2.2.3. Wilson and the fable of Self-Determination

While thus far throughout this chapter, President Wilson has been portrayed as the advocate of peace, it must be acknowledged that, as before hinted at, this process did not come to be solely within the United States. Throughout the last two decades the concept of self-determination has become increasingly important in historical research and authors like Adom Getachew in *Worldmaking after Empire* have begun to question the role of Wilson in bringing it to the League of Nations. This is not to say the previous contents of this chapter are of no relevance, but rather that it has to be presented with the right context. While the United States was an important pawn for the allied movement against the central powers in the last years of the Great War, it must be acknowledged that another force had left the coalition at the same time. Leader of the Bolshevik movement in the Russian Empire, Vladimir Lenin, had begun to question the role of Russia within the Great War, and in the world as a whole. After his return from exile on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1917, Lenin delivered his April theses in which he proclaimed that the First World War was merely “an imperialist war” driven by capitalism, and that he envisioned a peace which would bring an end to both imperialism and capitalism.<sup>119</sup>

To reflect on Wilson’s ‘true’ post-war aims, it is thus necessary to look eastward as well. In the wake of the signing of the armistice agreement at Brest-Litovsk, which included the principle of self-determination, through which Lenin called for “a democratic peace between the nations, without annexation and indemnities and on the basis of the free self-determination of nations.”<sup>120</sup> By late 1917 Wilson had taken note of the potential danger which the seizing of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia would form, fearing that the movement for peace and with it pacifism would be captured by the Communist movement. To combat this threat of revolution, Wilson thus opted to take the ‘moral high ground’ in the war aims debate with his previously discussed Fourteen Points, which included the concept of self-determination.<sup>121</sup> His adoption of the concept of self-determination solely as a means to combat the threat of communism is made clear solely on the basis of his use and application of the term. As Allen Lynch rightly pointed out in his 2002 article ‘Woodrow Wilson and the principle of ‘national self-determination’,’ Wilson lacked the knowledge on European society to properly support his utilization of the concept, as he utilized self-determination more

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<sup>119</sup> Getachew, “The Counterrevolutionary,” 37.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>121</sup> “Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’ Speech,” 130; Getachew, “The Counterrevolutionary,” 39.

as an attribute to his attitude rather than a concrete policy which was thoroughly considered before joining the war. Even worse, it shows in the President's hesitance in declaring war upon Vienna, or his promise to Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando of the Brenner frontier, blaming it on "the basis of insufficient study."<sup>122</sup> Simply put: Wilson did not understand European nationalism, as he tried to apply it as he knew the concept in the context of the American revolution and civic nationalism, rather than European ethnic nationalism.<sup>123</sup>

Self-determination then appeared in Wilson's vocabulary as a direct response to the application of the concept by the Bolsheviks, or Lenin in particular. As Lenin had promised all non-Russian nationals within Russia their "full freedom", while a week later Leon Trotsky had announced the intention to negotiate a peace based on self-determination of nations, Wilson saw an opportunity. With the fear of revolution followed by the inevitable political and maybe even societal collapse, the allied leaders would have no option but to join together under Wilson, perhaps even drawing the Russians back into it with nowhere else to go, and especially moving the war-weary Germans to seize control of their affairs: while the Bolshevik's plan did not contain any ideals of a "supranational entity" like the one envisioned and championed by Wilson since 1916, it did support one, though it could be neither a power-pact between the great imperial powers of the world, nor whatever he considered the Communist 'free-for-all' alternative to be.<sup>124</sup>

In theory then, Wilsonism and Bolshevism are seemingly interchangeable. In reality however this is far from the truth. In reality, the United States in a sense feared the revolutionary movement – or at the very least Wilson utilized the potential for it to their advantage, and perhaps not because of the revolution itself, but rather because of the foreseen instability that such revolution could cause throughout the world – something that would inevitably put the Wilsonian vision at risk. Furthermore, in reality also Wilsonism did not fully embrace self-determination as such, as the League of Nations failed to implement these ideals almost entirely. Colonies remained a thing of the present, and only few non-Western nations got the chance to become a part of this

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<sup>122</sup> Allen Lynch, "Woodrow Wilson and the principle of 'national self-determination': a reconsideration," *Review of International Studies* 28 (2002): 427.

<sup>123</sup> Lynch, "Woodrow Wilson and the principle of 'national self-determination', 422-428.

<sup>124</sup> Trygve Throntveit, "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (June 2011): 457-459.

international community, and not always successfully, as will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

### 3.1. The League of Nations

Throughout his presidency and the developments of the Great War, President Woodrow Wilson had been in strong support of a post-war international organization with the principal mission of maintaining peace for all in the world, big and small nations alike. As previously discovered in the first chapter of this thesis, Wilson first endorsed the idea of the League in 1916, and while joining the war on the side of the allies in 1917, he remained in full support of this ideal. Better yet, one of his main arguments given in his speech to the Senate was that the United States, and thus Wilson's foreign policy, would be of greater influence if they were a belligerent, as they would have a seat at the peace-table. However, a detailed plan of what this post-war League would be was yet to be uncovered, as it took Wilson until 1918 to reveal the first draft of the Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>125</sup>

#### 3.1.1. The Covenant of the League of Nations

For this initial analysis of the Covenant of the League of Nations I shall discuss each article which I deem relevant for my research question posed above, and give a short explanation why it is relevant, and how it helps in assessing the effectiveness of the League. A proper review of effectiveness is near impossible to formulate, as it is not as simple as giving it a number grade from 1 to 10, but to evaluate the efforts of the League in their attempts to, as my third sub question inquires, manage international conflict, I would need to formulate what the goals of the League were, which I believe can be extracted from the Covenant.

The Covenant starts with a brief oath of sorts, in which the parties who sign the covenant agree to it and what it stands for, which already gives me an initial insight in the aims of the League.

In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security

by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war,  
by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations,  
by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and

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<sup>125</sup> Chambers II, ed., *The Eagle and the Dove*, 135.

by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another,  
Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>126</sup>

To dissect this passage: they aim to promote international co-operation and aim to achieve international peace and security. Their method is contained in the second part, most notably the obligation to not resort to war and maintaining justice and respect for all treaty obligations, which are most relevant for my thesis subject, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

The first Article, which states that non-members can become members after the original signing of this covenant with two-thirds agreement of the Assembly, is relevant for my case study as well, considering Ethiopia did become a member through this procedure, which I will aim to briefly discuss as well. Furthermore, the final part of this Article also applies, as it states that any Member of the League may, after two years' notice, withdraw from the League. However I will elaborate further on this in the appropriate chapter.<sup>127</sup>

The following six Articles, namely Articles 2 through 7, concern the means of arbitration, as this is through an organization based on both a general Assembly, and the Council, as well as a permanent Secretariat. Article 8 concerns something very significant, namely the means to maintain peace: reduction of national armaments.<sup>128</sup> These Articles can be viewed as means of succeeding in the main goal of the League as visioned by Wilson: to keep and maintain peace.

Articles 10 and 11 concern the role of the League when any Member of the League becomes involved in an act of aggression, war, or a threat of war. This is obviously the main interest of my thesis and my case study, as it involves not only one Member, but two Members being aggressive against one another, and later one of the members waging war against the other. These Articles state that, in this case, these matters shall be declared a concern of the League no matter what. The League shall therefore "take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the

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<sup>126</sup> "The Covenant of the League of Nations," The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, accessed May 15, 2022, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp).

<sup>127</sup> "The Covenant of the League of Nations."

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

peace of nations.” This passage also introduces the aims of the League, namely safeguarding the peace of nations.<sup>129</sup>

Articles 12 and 13 more so concerns a dispute that is specific between two nations, and the problem solving surrounding such disputes or conflicts, which is again most relevant to my case. This Article states that any dispute arising that would lead to a rupture, this would be submitted for arbitration or judicial settlement or to enquiry by the Council, to which they agree “in no case to resort to war until three months after the award by the arbitrators or judicial decision, or the report by the council.”<sup>130</sup> This last part is especially interesting to my case, considering the Italo-Ethiopian war did in fact commence soon after the awarding of the arbitral decision to clear both Ethiopia and Italy of any fault during the Walwal conflict.

In my case, Articles 14 and 15 are irrelevant as my specific case does not concern the establishment of a Permanent Court of International Justice, however Article 16 is again one of the more important Articles in this Covenant, as it describes the consequences of the breach of Articles 12 and/or 13 which is the case for my case study subject. It states the following: “Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13 or 15, it shall ipso facto<sup>131</sup> be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a Member of the League or not.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> *Ipsa facto* meaning ‘by the very fact’.

<sup>132</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

### 3.1.2. The aims of the League

The covenant originated from the end of the First World War and aimed to prevent war in the future, the author states. While this all lines up to what I know, I would like to take the statement of 'preventing war' with a grain of salt, as nothing is as simple as that. The main authors of this charter were the allies who won the war in Europe, namely the United States, France, and Great Britain, the latter two of course having its influence spread over multiple dominions, its colonial territories.<sup>133</sup> The first outline of the supposed goals of this newly formed international body can be traced back to President Woodrow Wilson's so-called Fourteen-point plan: "A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike."<sup>134</sup>

To further explore what the authors of the covenant precisely intended with their aim of 'preventing war', I turned to a 1933 publication of the *Cambridge Law Journal* in which Sir John Fischer Williams asks the same question: what do the authors mean with "the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war," as is written in the opening paragraph and so-called operative part of the covenant of the League of Nations. Williams acknowledges that, at the time of writing, no formal definition of the word 'war' existed, nor the conditions for an international war. This is, according to him, because historically the context in which 'war happens' is clouded by statesmen not formally declaring war, or recognizing a state of war.<sup>135</sup> While this is quite a large and significant question to answer in this thesis, it is important to acknowledge the discourse on war throughout time, for which I shall highlight a few in an attempt to explain the meaning of the covenant in this regard.

Throughout the 1930s there was an evident increase of interest in the finding of a legal definition for war, as throughout this time period not only war was becoming a problem again with the occurrences of my case study, the Italo-Ethiopian war which itself challenged the goals set by the League, as well as other events in Asia, as well as the threat of war within Europe increasing with the rise of Adolf Hitler.<sup>136</sup> While of

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<sup>133</sup> *The Aims, goals and methods of the League of Nations*, 18.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>135</sup> John Fischer Williams, "The Covenant of the League of Nations and War," *Cambridge Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (1933): 1-2.

<sup>136</sup> William J. Ronan, "English and American Courts and the Definition of War," *American Journal of International Law* 31, no. 4 (October 1937): 658.

course the definition of war seems evident enough: two powers engaging one another, the legal definition appears to be more of a challenge. While it evidently clearly defined as to when a 'war' is ended, as war never just ceases to exist but rather ends, in most cases anyway, with either the signing of a treaty, as the First World War gave plenty to analyze in this regard throughout this time period, or the total annihilation and following subjugation of at least one of the warring parties (assuming war is between multiple parties, as this question – especially in light of the covenant, does not concern itself with internal matters like civil war).<sup>137</sup> The only problem that remains, then, is when 'war' begins.

Through a study of past events, William J. Ronan in "English and American Courts and the Definition of War" finds that both American and English courts in the past concluded that only two possible relationships between states could exist, namely those of peace, and those of war. This would make the question of when war commences quite easy, as when two states are evidently not in a state of peace – which is seemingly more easily defined as no hostilities would exist between them, they are by legal definition at war. However, like in my case study, which is to follow, this does not explain all possible events, as the case of the English courts – which utilized the seizing of a Dutch ship by English forces in 1795, preceded the official declaration of war, upon which the court stated that "subsequent events have retroactively determined that the character of Holland during the whole of that doubtful state of affairs, is to be considered as hostile."<sup>138</sup> While in the twenty-first century, with the events of the Cold War behind us and the War on Terror on the horizon, the Geneva Conventions had added the distinction of 'armed conflict' to the definition of war, however while this definition of war might be applicable to my case, this is obviously not retroactively applicable to the definition used by the League of Nations.<sup>139</sup>

I think the findings by Ronan then are quite sufficient for explaining the intentions of the authors of the covenant as to what constitutes a state of war. According to Ronan, the cases he studies for his research assert that material war is implied by the existence of organized hostilities between actors, states.<sup>140</sup> Now it must be made clear this is not a widely utilized definition of war within the legal system at this time, though

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<sup>137</sup> Ronan, "English and American Courts," 642.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 642-644.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Ellen O'Connell, "When Is a War Not a War - The Myth of the Global War on Terror," *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 537.

<sup>140</sup> Ronan, "English and American Courts," 658.

considering the author used cases from two of the most powerful nations at this time, the United Kingdom and the United States – both whom were important actors within the creation of the League itself, and the writing of both the Peace of Versailles as well as the covenant.

### 3.1.3. The nature of the League

The formation of the League happened during the Peace Conference, more precisely the second plenary meeting held on January 25<sup>th</sup>, where a committee led by Wilson drafted the covenant, with the final text being approved on April 28<sup>th</sup> and later incorporated into the Peace of Paris on June 28<sup>th</sup>. By nature, the League is an association of States that pursue certain common goals, which therefore maintain their national sovereignty after having joined. This is evident through many means, one of which is the emphasis of sovereignty in the Covenant, both directly and indirectly. The League cannot force their members to do anything, only recommend or propose actions, or formulate plans with one another.<sup>141</sup>

However, by joining the League, members also accept certain limitations. In its historical context, the writers of the Covenant have just suffered great losses in defending sovereign countries against aggressor states in the Great War, as is obvious by the aforementioned Articles regarding armaments and the general goal of maintaining peace. Therefore, for the League to work efficiently, certain limitations had to be put in place on national sovereignty. Furthermore, certain rights of sovereignty are reverted to the body of the League through means of voting. Examples are admission of new members, specified under Article 1, which require a two thirds approval, and Article 11 which allows for the League to declare any war, or threat of war is declared a concern for the whole League.<sup>142</sup>

Finally, the League is besides a congregation of States, a separate entity. Besides having its own separate secretariat with its own budget, as specified in Articles 2, 6 and 7, the League was the strongest constituted body yet, which is what made it as revolutionary as it was. Furthermore, as specified in Articles 3 and 4, the Council had the right to deal with any matter within the sphere of the League, or any case that affected the maintenance of world peace. This was outside direct influence of the Members of the League, as specified in Article 23 and 24, as the Members signed to entrust the League with specified matters, including “international bureaux already established by general treaties if the parties to such treaties consent.”<sup>143</sup> This truly emphasizes the independence the League has as an international body, signifying it being its own separate entity, with its own rights and duties.

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<sup>141</sup> *The Aims*, 23.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 24-25; “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

<sup>143</sup> *The Aims*, 25; “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

### 3.1.4. The methods of the League

In essential terms, through which the League often communicates their goals, the organization pursues the prevention of war while simultaneously organizing the world on so-called “peace lines”. Articles 8 through 19 concern the aim to prevent war, however something which is often forgotten is their efforts to create a platform for international cooperation regarding topics such as labor conditions, human trafficking, drug trade, armament trade, and the prevention and control of disease – which has been a prevalent topic of discussion in recent years surrounding the role of the WHO, to which the League was also a predecessor. These roles the League took upon itself as is noted in Articles 23 through 25, besides peacekeeping, are often referred to under one term, namely ‘World Organization’, and is something one should consider if they are to fully evaluate the effectiveness for the League.<sup>144</sup> However, for this thesis I will have to limit myself to their primary mission statement.

To execute their plans, and achieve their aims, the authors of the Covenant have set up such a structure to, in their minds, allow this to come to fruition. “From the earliest of times, men have waged war on each other, and the world has always lived under the anarchic rule of force.”<sup>145</sup> The structure they created comes down to the aforementioned organization of the world, split into three main bodies. As per Article 2, “the action of the League [...] shall be affected through the instrumentality of an Assembly and of a Council, with a permanent secretariat.”<sup>146</sup>

The Assembly is the constitutional body of the League, in which all members are represented by three delegates. Each member is equal to another, and has equal rights in voting on matters presented to them. This notion of equality through this one vote per member system perfectly represents Wilson’s vision of equality among nations, small and large alike. In turn, this makes the Assembly to be the “supreme organ” of the League of Nations, allowing it to decide in which direction the League moves, deciding its general policy.<sup>147</sup> In turn then, the Council forms the executive body of the League, and consists of less members than the Assembly, as it would be simply impractical to have an executive body consist of all members who retain their equal voting rights. The Council furthermore consists of both permanent and non-permanent

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<sup>144</sup> *The Aims*, 26-31; “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>146</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations”; *The Aims*, 31.

<sup>147</sup> *The Aims*, 32.

members, with the permanent seats being filled by the Great Powers – which in turn fluctuated often as some would join, whilst others would again leave, among which Germany and Japan. In turn the temporary members of the Council consisted of smaller member states, which were elected by the Assembly, thus allowing the Assembly, through these smaller nations, to have their influence within this executive body of the League. Like the structure of the Assembly, this ‘power to all’ mentality brought forth through the structure of the Council assists in the further abandonment of the old ways of the ‘Concert of Europe’ in which all power was held by the nation, or alliance, with the most power, thus spreading the ideals of democratization around the world that Wilson held dear.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, the Secretariat was installed so that the work of the League could be carried on in a continuous manner, thus making this third organ of the League the only fully permanent one. The main job of this body was to, essentially, assist the Assembly and the Council in their work by providing and preparing materials ahead of proceedings, and carrying out that which had been decided upon. Another typical job was the management of publications, as is evident by the authorship of some of my sources being directly accredited toward the Secretariat. Essentially, the Secretariat functioned in a similar relation within the League as Ministerial departments functioned in relation to their government. They had no executive or decision-making power in the League but were essentially bureaucratic in their nature.<sup>149</sup> While the structure in itself is not subject to my further analysis at this time, it is still relevant information to keep in mind when analysing the sources in the chapters to come, as the hierarchical structure is essential to be understood to fully understand the sources, as the nature of the League is one of moving jobs up and down the ladder, sending reports off to Committees and back to the Council, and in turn back to the Assembly – or the other way around entirely.

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<sup>148</sup> *The Aims*, 32-33.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35.

### 3.2. Italy in search for its place in the sun

On the eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the second day of October in 1935, Mussolini held a speech that was broadcasted all across Italy. In this speech he called upon all Italians in Italy, and “beyond the mountains and the seas,” and declared a “solemn hour was about to strike.”<sup>150</sup> With this speech, Mussolini announced, arguably, the end of the interwar period and the beginning of not only the Second World War, but the end of the League of Nations.

#### 3.2.1. Italy's Adowa-complex

While at least in my experience the Second Italo-Ethiopian war is more known and talked about, especially in the larger scope of the Italian Africa Campaign of the Second World War, with famous battles such as the Siege of Tobruk, the events of the First Italo-Ethiopian War are often forgotten or neglected from the European perspective, and are almost exclusively referred to in narratives of African victory over the European imperialist. The nineteenth century is often viewed as the peak of European imperialism with the (almost) complete conquest of Africa. However, to paraphrase the comics of Asterix and Obelix: one small part of country withheld the invaders. From an African perspective, the Battle of Adowa of 1896, in which the Italian invader was ultimately defeated by the Ethiopian armies, is often recalled as a “resounding protest against colonialism,” and was extensively covered in so-called black press.<sup>151</sup>

But the Battle of Adowa<sup>152</sup>, from an Italian perspective, left a bitter taste. It was not a simple defeat, but a humiliation of an ambitious European nation. During the initial years of Mussolini's reign, the emphasis was on revenge, righting a wrong. Among the Italian people the memory was alive as ever.<sup>153</sup> However, while the general tendency of the Adowa-complex is accurate – the defeat at Adowa was deemed a national

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<sup>150</sup> “Mussolini's Speech-Broadcast, October 2, 1935,” Historical Documents, History Central, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.historycentral.com/HistoricalDocuments/Mussolini'sSpeech.html>; “Benito Mussolini: I Discorsi dell' Impero, 1935-1936,” Imperial War Museums, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80033686>.

<sup>151</sup> Oni Esther Oluwafisayomi, “The Battle of Adwa: How Africa Defeated Europe and its Lessons for Africa Security Strategy” (Essay, Lagos State University, 2019), 1-2; James Quirin, “W.E.B. Du Bois, Ethiopianism and Ethiopia, 1890-1955,” *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 5, no. 2 (2010/2011): 3.

<sup>152</sup> Depending on the literature accessed, ‘Adowa’ is spelled interchangeably as ‘Adowa’ or ‘Adwa’. Considering my main source on this conflict utilized the ‘Adowa’ spelling, and also adopted the term ‘Adowa-complex’ as such, I too opted for this spelling, though both are accepted ways of spelling the name of the Ethiopian town, which itself is also known as ‘Aduwa’, or ‘Adua’ in Italian.

<sup>153</sup> Sbacchi, “The Italians,” 124.

shame, it must also be considered as propaganda. Angelo Del Boca names two important factors as to why Italians were relatively willing to go to Ethiopia, as Ethiopia was deemed the beginning of adventure into a thrilling escape from their mundane lives in their homeland.<sup>154</sup> Italy suffered from economic hardship in the early 1930s, and thus this search for adventure was further supplemented by a search for a stable income, which they found in the Italian armed forces.<sup>155</sup>

Then returning to the aspect of propaganda, and rather the question when Mussolini had set his eyes upon Ethiopia. At the signing of the peace treaty that followed the Battle of Adowa, Alfredo Oriani, one of the forefathers of Italian Fascism, wrote the following: "We have signed a peace, but there will be no peace. We will never give up Africa – the war will be resumed."<sup>156</sup> Through this rhetoric, which was adopted by Mussolini, the way had been paved for Mussolini to resume what his predecessors had begun at the end of the previous century. Del Boca therefore believes the 1935 invasion had been long before decided upon by the Italian military, and Fascist leadership. He acknowledges that many close to the *Duce* believed it was no earlier than 1932, however Del Boca pinpoints it as early as 1925 based on a testimony by the Ethiopian Emperor, who caught wind of a supposed project of invasion as well as the possible fronts emerging from Eritrea or Italian Somaliland during his visit to Italy when he met Mussolini in 1924. "Four years after my meeting with Mussolini, a Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration was signed between Italy and Ethiopia; at the same time, however, Fascist Italy embarked on her lengthy program of preparation for the invasion of our country. Italy had never relinquished her dream of reconquest." He continued to underline that any friendly overtures towards Ethiopia were in turn to intended to mask the true, aggressive intentions of the Italian dictator.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*, trans. P.D. Cummins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 3-6.

<sup>155</sup> Sbacchi, "The Italians," 126-127.

<sup>156</sup> Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, 8-9.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

### 3.2.2. Mussolini's rise to power

While this chapter aims to uncover the causes of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict of the 1930s, the importance of individual actors cannot be understated, especially in the Italian case. This leads me to the person of Benito Mussolini, whose inevitable role has been hinted at previously in this chapter. As per previous sub-chapter, the importance of the First Italo-Ethiopian war has been underlined, but the experiences of Mussolini can be similarly viewed as key in explaining the causality of the conflict that is to follow. Simply put, and underlined by Del Boca, the transformation of Mussolini to the *Duce* can be viewed as an important, if not the most important cause of Italian expansionism in the twentieth century. Nationalists were uncertain of Italy's place in the world after Adowa, on the one hand ashamed of their defeat, but on the other unaccepting of the fact that the Italian army, a European army, had been annihilated as such by "barbarous hordes."<sup>158</sup> Thus they flocked to the Fascist party, to exert their influential doctrine, which later shows to have influenced Mussolini in both his mannerisms but especially his rhetoric of restoring the Roman Empire.<sup>159</sup>

Post-war Italy in general offered the perfect field for the Fascists to sow their seed. The Great War had a significant impact on Italy and Italian society as a whole, with the Peace of Versailles ultimately creating an atmosphere of Great Power resentment. Italy had fallen victim to post-war economic recession and Italy's geopolitical ambitions had been frustrated by Woodrow Wilson's quest for universal peace as the 1915 Treaty of London imploded after the American's 1918 entrance into the war. As a result, Italy was as divided as ever.<sup>160</sup>

Italy was lured into the war by the Treaty of London where the allies promised Italy important territorial concessions. This Treaty determined that Italy was to use her resources to combat the enemies of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, where the British and French fleet would offer their support to the Italian navy. In turn, Italy was promised concessions in the shape of the territory of Trento and Tyrol from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the counties of Gorizia and Gradisca, as well as a variety of neighbouring islands. Further concessions, which would prove troublesome later, included part of the Austro-Hungarian empire which we now know as the Balkan,

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<sup>158</sup> Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, 9.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 9-12.

<sup>160</sup> Robert Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia, 1919-1935: The Origins of Fascist Italy's African War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

and after the war would become the newly formed state Yugoslavia as per Wilson's principle of self-determination and sovereignty.<sup>161</sup>

After the Peace of Versailles, Italian Nationalists criticized the leadership's inability to secure the full concessions of the agreement which had been made four years prior. This resulted in the following political campaigns and premierships to be dominated by the narrative of a mutilated victory in which Nationalists and left-wing interventionists alike condemned and protested Wilson's supposed attitude towards Italy – which was has been previously discussed and was not aimed at Italy in specific, yet was experienced as such by the Italian people.<sup>162</sup> Besides Wilson, who appears to be the main antagonist in Italy's narrative of the Peace of Versailles, they expressed their regret of siding with France and Britain, who in their view utilized the Versailles conference to strengthen their own geopolitical position, in similar fashion to their domination of the newly formed League of Nations. Among the most vocal of these critics was the extreme Nationalist Benito Mussolini.<sup>163</sup> Most striking of his critique on the supposed failure to secure these concessions to the fullest extend possible, was a passage in Mussolini's biography. Within the Fascist movement, which consisted for a large part of Great War veterans, there was this idea that the movement had to "defend the victory at any price, to keep intact the sacred memory of the dead."<sup>164</sup>

Realistically, Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando and Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino had received a fair share of the promised concessions, primarily from the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire as had been expected. The Italians managed to add the mostly German speaking Southern Tyrol, Trentino, the Istrian peninsula, and the city of Trieste to their nation's territory.<sup>165</sup> It is interesting to note that the current borders of Italy still maintain large portions of these territories, only having conceded the Istrian peninsula since. This was however not enough for the ever so vocal Mussolini, as he declared that eventually the world would be met with an significantly more militant Italy, which to say was not an unpopular opinion in the ever so desperate post-war Italy.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> "The Treaty of London (1915)," WW1 Document Archive, accessed May 15, 2022, [https://ww1.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The\\_Treaty\\_of\\_London\\_\(1915\)](https://ww1.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_(1915)); Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 1-3.

<sup>162</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 1-7.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>164</sup> Benito Mussolini, *My Rise and Fall*, ed. Richard Lamb and Max Ascoli (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1998), 71.

<sup>165</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 2.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

For these ambitions to become reality, Italy had a massive metamorphosis ahead of themselves, as after the Great War, Italy held a budget deficit of over 23 billion lire, which had increased tenfold since the Treaty of London. The immediate result, especially from Nationalist and Industrialist corners, was to maintain the protectionist economic policies that had emerged during wartime, as the Italian economy simply would not be able to compete in a free market economy. The policy makers, however, disagreed and removed the wartime regulations, opening up the Italian economy to the volatility of the international market, resulting in the ever so predictable downfall of Italian companies and banks, with unemployment reaching two million by the early 1920s. These conditions were perfect for the right-wing nationalist revolution that was to come.<sup>167</sup>

This crisis allowed for Mussolini's *Fasci di Combattimento* expand across Italy in a rapid manner. Originally a predominantly urban organization, which resulted in a poor performance at the 1921 elections, the movement birthed rural forms of Fascism, that eventually merged into Mussolini's *Partito Nazionale Fascista*.<sup>168</sup> Without delving too much into the structure of Mussolini's Fascism, as only the basics are needed to understand the Italian motives for commencing their invasion of Ethiopia when, and how they did, his rise to power was relatively smooth when compared to that of Adolf Hitler's. The PNF essentially acted as a lawless paramilitary force with the goal of stopping the 'internal warring' that was going on in Italy in this period after Versailles, and to – as Mussolini put it, "focus the mind of the Italian people on those evolving events that are destined once again to transform the map of Europe."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 8-9.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 9-11.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 10.

### 3.2.3. Italian encirclement

While it is clear now in hindsight that there would indeed be an eventual outbreak of conflict, Mussolini believed there would either be a new war, or a – as he put it, treaty revision. It was the intention of Mussolini and his Fascist party to free Italy from the bounds that had been put on them by Versailles; they had been wronged by the great powers. On the other hand, without making this a cross-section of the mind and person of Mussolini, it seems he did in fact anticipate the events that were to come, or rather view the newly formed status quo as unstable, which in hindsight he was right about – even if he was one of the causes for this instability.

Mussolini did not believe in the ideals and principles of the League of Nations, which is logical considering his ideology finds its origin in this mutilated peace. He and other Fascists alike believed the League did not follow Wilson's ideals of equality among nations, and that it was yet another balance of power that favoured the few, rather than the many. In the Fascist programme, which was revealed by late December 1921, Mussolini declared that Italy would lay claim upon its historical and geographical unity that finds its basis in the Roman Empire of old. A second prominent goal the Fascists sought to achieve was the previously mentioned treaty revision, which would have to lead to fairer trade and a greater share of raw resources for the Italian economy to utilize. Inevitable due to the great crisis Italy found itself in, this radical opposition to the liberal regime became popular quickly, as merely two and a half years after its inception, Mussolini would effectively march on Rome and get appointed by King Victor Emmanuel III as prime minister of Italy.<sup>170</sup>

One of these goals Mussolini held and was seamlessly connected to the restoration of the Roman Empire was the conquest of the Mediterranean. Italy was surrounded and landlocked, he claimed, and thus he had to 'beat out' the 'foreigners' and take back what was rightfully theirs. Mussolini, after all, believed that while public opinion at the time was against him, conquest imperial expansion was key for the betterment of the wellbeing of the Italian people.<sup>171</sup> In reality, this was near impossible in the 1920s: Britain and France not only dominated the Mediterranean but in turn also had significant influence within the League, which complicated matters for Mussolini. The French government had great interests in the Mediterranean, which was vital for its North African colonial control. It had significant control over the sea itself, having

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<sup>170</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 10-11.

<sup>171</sup> Sbacchi, "The Italians," 130.

important naval bases located in Marseille and Toulon, and colonial territories with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, whilst on the other hand having received mandates in Lebanon and Syria through the Versailles Peace Treaty after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. Complete encirclement of Italian naval interests was achieved via treaties and agreements with Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.<sup>172</sup>

Britain in turn exerted their power within the 'Italian lake' more directly. When Italian naval forces led by General Enrico Tellini were on a demarcation mission in the waters bordering Greece and Albania, the four-man group was ambushed and killed. Mussolini, in his typical fashion, exploded in anger and demanded for the unknown assailants to be brought to him and executed. Besides this, as they were murdered on Greek soil, he demanded fifty million lire in damages from the Greeks. In turn, the Greeks were still recovering from a defeat suffered recently at the hands of the Turks, denied any involvement. Mussolini reacted by bombarding and occupying the island of Corfu, killing a number of civilians. The Conference of Ambassadors, an *entente* organization succeeding the Supreme War Council formed during the war, convened and forced Greece's hand to pay the requested damages, while hinting at British naval force being utilized would Mussolini not give up the occupation of Corfu.<sup>173</sup>

While this intervention by Mussolini can only be viewed as an attempt to exert his supposed claim to the Mediterranean, it clearly exploded in his face, as only the threat of British use of force was enough to send his Fascist forces back home with their tails tucked between their legs. So, while France had Italy in a stranglehold through utilization of their empire and geopolitical prowess, the British navy was enough of a deterrent. In turn, Britain had no interest to gratify the *Duce* and rather relied on the relationship it had developed with France, especially with the ever-growing distrust of the true intentions of the Soviets, and the threat of German revenge for the humiliation of Versailles.<sup>174</sup> In turn, however, it may be noted that at the time Britain seemed ignorant of the threat that would then become Italy, considering the similar feelings of humiliation the Fascists had towards Versailles. This attitude of Britain would change throughout the interwar years, as the following chapter will find. It was not until 1932 then that Mussolini shifted his vision to the Horn of Africa. The prospects of a European war were painted in a significantly negative light by the Italian

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<sup>172</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 10-13.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 16.

military high command, ruling out a war against the Yugoslavs or French, making it so Mussolini dropped the plans he had considered. While Mussolini realized an aggressive pursuit of his fascist-ideals would be unwise, as such actions would be opposed by other nations via the League of Nations, his ideas were first formulated through the *Doctrine of Fascism*, consolidating the plans for imperial expansion.<sup>175</sup> While he believed such expansion would solve the Italian nation's economic problems, and as mentioned would eventually benefit the Italian people, he found little support among the Italian people, though he would end up shrugging this critique off, concluding that the Italian people simply lacked the political education, and were thus not interested in imperial business.<sup>176</sup>

The question of Italian imperial expansion was never going to be simple, and while Mussolini commenced with a new programme of propaganda to remedy the aforementioned issue with the image of colonial expansion within Italy, the future of Mussolini's new empire became questionable as the anticipated victim of colonisation had applied for membership to the League almost as soon as Mussolini came to power, further problematizing Mussolini's vision for Italy's place under the sun.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 63-65.

<sup>176</sup> Sbacchi, "The Italians," 130.

<sup>177</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia*, 65-66.

## 4.1. Walwal-incident and the League of Nations

For this chapter I will take one of the initial points of conflict that can be linked to the Second Italo-Ethiopian war. While the origins for the conflict can be found back way further, as the Italian intentions for conquest were clear, this is the first moment where Italians and Ethiopians engaged in a period that can be presumed as the Second Italo-Ethiopian war. To reiterate my approach to this subject, I will primarily rely on primary sources for the contents of the arbitration, which then shall be supplemented with secondary source material to provide context to the conflict and why it occurred. Pitman B. Potter has authored a marvellous account of the arbitration, of which he took part himself, which was published in 1938 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. While parts of this book are written as a secondary source it has provided me with the necessary primary sources to dissect the events. Other sources include archival material from the League of Nations archive, provided by LONTAD.

### 4.1.1. Engagement at Walwal

The origin of this arbitration finds itself at the Oasis of Walwal, which itself is located in the Ogaden province of Ethiopia. The conflict consisted of two parties, though the Ethiopian side at times during this period accounted some British nationals as well, which were presumably gone when the shooting began. Similarly, in his personal account of the arbitration Potter recounts the uncertainty of state control over both the Ethiopian and Italian parties, with even the chance of Italian forces consisting of locally recruited Ethiopian citizens. Before this period, Italian nationals who were based in Italian Somaliland had moved through supposed Ethiopian territories before, which only helped fuel the incident, as borders were uncertain in these roughly chartered frontiers.<sup>178</sup> As explored in previous chapters, this can be read in context of Italian wishes to eventually ‘continue’ their war with Ethiopia after their humiliating defeat at Adowa in 1896.

As mentioned, the conflict of December 5, 1934, inevitably arose out of the situation where Ethiopian troops accompanied by British soldiers as part of an Anglo-Ethiopian Commission that had set out to delineate the Ethiopian frontier, and had commenced a survey of the grazing grounds, and thus sought out the Walwal oasis for

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<sup>178</sup> Pitman B. Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1938), 1-2.

their watering facilities.<sup>179</sup> Various accounts and possible explanations for the conflict were heard throughout the arbitration, as Potter recalls them. One of these was that the Italians would have threatened to attack the Anglo-Ethiopian coalition, which climaxed with an Italian show of force through the use of an airplane. This rhetoric was however mirrored by the opposing faction, stating that the Ethiopians were overly aggressive. Potter concludes, however, that whatever the complete and true story may be, the facts state that both parties were stationary at Walwal for a few days, with reinforcements constantly arriving which led to the Italian side eventually counting around five hundred, whereas the Ethiopians supposedly numbered around fifteen hundred.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> "Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Report of the Council," October 7, 1935, "Italo-Ethiopian Relations – Reports and resolutions by the various Committees of the Council – (Committee of Five – Committee of Thirteen)," Scanned Manuscript, Geneva: League of Nations, 1935-1936, R3654/1/15227/20044, LONTAD, <https://archives.unigeveva.org/ethiopian-italian-relations-reports-and-resolutions-of-the-various-committees-of-the-council-committee-of-five-committee-of-thirteen>.

<sup>180</sup> Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration*, 2-3.

#### 4.1.2. The Arbitration

Italy and Ethiopia had a past of mutual conflict, specifically along the border of the Italian Somaliland colony. Due to the nature of the area, being inhabited by tribes, some of which were of a nomadic nature, this often led to territorial conflicts. Basing themselves on previous treaties, the Ethiopian government claimed the Walwal oasis was located within the so-called Ogaden province and was therefore illegally occupied by Italian forces. This ultimately led to an engagement taking place on December 5<sup>th</sup>, after the Commission had withdrawn itself on November 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>181</sup> The Ethiopian government moved to request the application of the arbitration procedure provided for in the 1928 Treaty of Amity as well as the Covenant, while Italy instead moved to demand reparations due to the fact that the incident occurred “in such clear and manifest circumstances that there could be no doubts as to its nature.”<sup>182</sup> As Potter put it: Ethiopia wanted clarity on the situation where they thought to have claim to the territory, where Italy immediately wanted monetary reparations and – especially, from my own findings which I will expand upon later, moral satisfaction.<sup>183</sup>

This was followed with mutual accusations regarding governmental policy, where the Italians portrayed its history with the Ethiopian government as a ‘series of attacks in the frontier zone by which they would want to dispute the legality of Italian presence.’<sup>184</sup> The Ethiopian government, however, responded to this, claiming that the Walwal-incident was the direct consequence of a so-called ‘Italian policy of gradual encroachment.’<sup>185</sup> Both parties thus attempted to pin responsibility on the other.<sup>186</sup>

Inevitable due to the stance of the Italian government, both parties failed to come to a satisfying conclusion as Italy refused to acknowledge Ethiopia’s request to submit to arbitration on the basis of the 1928 treaty, claiming there was no question to be answered as it was clearly the victim of Ethiopian aggression, and submitting to such arbitration would be a humiliation on par with that of Adowa. Ethiopia was thus ‘forced’ to appeal to the League of Nations for intervention on the basis of Article 11, removing itself from bilateral diplomacy with Italy as it was deemed unfruitful, instead

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<sup>181</sup> League of Nations Secretariat, *The League from Year to Year (1935)* (Geneva: Secretariat of the League of Nations, 1935), 54-55.

<sup>182</sup> League of Nations, *The League (1935)*, 54; “Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Report of the Council.”

<sup>183</sup> Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration*, 3.

<sup>184</sup> League of Nations, *The League (1935)*, 55.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>186</sup> Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration*, 3.

making it a concern for the League.<sup>187</sup> They specifically considered paragraph 2 of Article 11 of the Covenant, which states that it was to be the right of every Member of the League to bring to the attention of the Assembly or Council any situation that affected international relations, and which would threaten to disturb the international peace, or the relations between nations.<sup>188</sup>

Italy maintained its position and attempted to prevent the addition of Ethiopia's request to the agenda, but as per the Covenant, for such a point of order to be added to the agenda of the Council, a majority vote was necessary, which was achieved. Not without struggle, it must be noted, as at first the English and French sided with Italy, as Italy threatened with war if Ethiopia were to continue its pursuit of arbitration. However, as the rest of the Council were favourable towards Ethiopia, and Ethiopia itself continued its quest for justice while presuming the Italian threats to be nothing more than bluff, the Anglo-French coalition were swayed to favour Ethiopia, and swayed Italy to submit.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, on January 19 the Council had successfully adopted a Resolution which concluded that both governments had agreed to a settlement of the incident via a Commission of Arbitration, which was followed by the establishment of a neutral zone by the two governments in the Walwal-territory in March 1935, that was intended to prevent any more conflicts, such as that of December 1934.<sup>190</sup> While any conclusions on the matter at this point are premature, this can be viewed as a victory for world organising, all be it a small one, considering through the apparatus of the League Ethiopia had avoided escalation of the conflict for the time being.

In the award of arbitration, which I have analysed for this case study, one can firstly denote the continued workings, and thus successful adoption of previously made agreements and existing treaties, in accordance with Article 24 of the Covenant. The author of the document specifically states that a procedure of conciliation and arbitration had been agreed upon, dated May 15 and 16, under Article 5 of the Treaty of Amity between Italy and Ethiopia, referring to the 1908 convention that marked the end of negotiations and established the frontier between Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland.<sup>191</sup> This frontier ran from Dolo towards the sources of the Maidabu and

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<sup>187</sup> Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration*, 4-5.

<sup>188</sup> "The Covenant of the League of Nations."

<sup>189</sup> Potter, *The Wal Wal Arbitration*, 4-5.

<sup>190</sup> "Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Report of the Council."

<sup>191</sup> "Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Walwal and other frontier incidents: Decision of the arbitral board."

Webbi Shebbeli rivers, essentially (re-)establishing the agreed upon borders from 1897, with the exception of the Ogaden territory – a relatively large territory inhabited by nomadic tribes and home to the Walwal oasis – which were to remain Ethiopian.<sup>192</sup> Further, the two governments had also agreed ten days after the initial agreement, to commence the same procedure for “incidents which have taken place on the Italo-Ethiopian frontier since December 5, 1934.”<sup>193</sup>

The Commission consisted of a variety of nationalities among which the already mentioned Potter who himself was an American national, but also two Italian nationals close to the Italian government, namely Count Luigi Aldrovandi and Signor Raffaela Montagna, and French jurists Albert and Raymond de Geouffre de la Pradelle. The first of these sessions took place in Milan on June 6 and 7, after which the second session set to take place in Scheveningen was postponed until June 25, as in the official document unspecified new claims and evidence had arisen which the members had to acknowledge and consider.<sup>194</sup> What stands out here to me is the fact that the Italian government has two direct representatives in this commission, while Ethiopia has none. It must however be acknowledged that both governments had appointed this commission themselves. Furthermore, it is noteworthy the care that goes into the matter considering the process of arbitration, namely that new claims and evidence are duly processed as evidenced in the delay of the Scheveningen meeting. Finally, one fact that stands out to me is the choice of location for the commission meetings which I therefore would want to highlight. While Geneva itself, to this day, is recognized as the most neutral ground within the world, considering Switzerland’s position in world politics, and Scheveningen being a location chosen – I presume – for its close proximity to The Hague, where the League’s Permanent Court of International Justice was established, the choice for the first meeting of this commission stands out.

After this short delay, the commission eventually met at Scheveningen on the newly determined date, during which the question of ownership of the territory in which Walwal is situated arose. More specifically, Ethiopia claimed ownership on the basis of the frontier defining Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1908, while Italian forces had occupied the fortress for some years now.<sup>195</sup> In their turn, the Italian representative

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<sup>192</sup> W.B. Stern, “Treaty Background of the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute,” *American Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (1936): 194-195; League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 54-55.

<sup>193</sup> “Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Walwal and other frontier incidents: Decision of the arbitral board.”

<sup>194</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>195</sup> League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 55.

claimed the commission would lack the competence to examine this question of ownership, which led to the inevitable suspension of the commission's proceedings a week later, further delaying the conclusion of this incident.<sup>196</sup> Regarding my question of the inner workings of the League of Nations, this is a sign of incompetence, for the Italian government is essentially able to delay a potentially negative verdict by forcing the Council to consider such claims, even if it lacked any backing to sustain such claims. This is, however, not to say they were not in their right to put forth such a question, but that would still be considered as a structural problem within the League.

For this problem to be resolved, the question was then submitted to the League Council after the July 9 suspension of the Arbitration Commission proceedings. The Council, on their part, were of the opinion that the Commission was in fact capable of considering either side's claims of sovereignty regarding the territories, without needing to examine them, rendering any claims of competence regarding the matter irrelevant. However, the Council was also of the opinion that the primary mission of the Commission was to evaluate solely "the other elements in the dispute relating to the Walwal incident."<sup>197</sup> Another issue which the Council had to concern itself with at this time, was that of a potential fifth arbitrator. Originally, the Commission comprised of four arbitrators, but the 1928 Treaty allowed for the possibility of a fifth arbitrator to be appointed to resolve disputes between the two nations in cases such as this or required such actions in a case where no resolution was found before a pre-determined deadline. For this fifth arbitrator, Greek Minister at Paris and former Greek League representative Nikolaos Politis was selected unanimously by the Commission at a meeting in Paris on August 20.<sup>198</sup>

During the following days the Commission continued its work and heard both the Ethiopian agent and a number of depositions from a number of persons called upon by the Italian Government, followed by final statements of each party. Inevitably, the Commission consisting of the four arbitrators met a final time on August 26, concluding they were unable to agree to the circumstances and responsibilities of the Walwal incident, necessitating the fifth arbitrator, Nikolaos Politis, which took place three days later. After consideration, the Commission found that neither the Italian side, nor the Ethiopian Government could be held responsible. While it was deemed proven the

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<sup>196</sup> "Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Walwal and other frontier incidents: Decision of the arbitral board."

<sup>197</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>198</sup> *Idem.*

Italians took all possible precautions necessary to prevent conflict, and the Ethiopian local authorities could be deemed of an aggressive nature due to their attitude and number of troops concentrated at the Walwal-territory, the Commission concluded it had not been proven either that they could be held responsible.<sup>199</sup>

While with this arbitration award, the dispute of the Walwal incident had officially been settled, as well as any incidents that occurred subsequently on May 25<sup>th</sup> of the following year, the Council realized tensions existed, and were steadily escalating, between the Italian and Ethiopian government to a point of military preparation.<sup>200</sup> The first thing that comes to mind here is the question of effectiveness: what was the point of this commission of reconciliation? While the arbitration aspect of this endeavour is clear but found no evident aggressor and victim in the matter, the point – as brought forth in the initial meetings and the Covenant itself is to prevent conflict from escalating further. To re-emphasize Article 12 of the Covenant: “[...] if there should arise between them any dispute likely to lead to rupture, they will submit the matter [...] to arbitration.”<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> “Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Walwal and other frontier incidents: Decision of the arbitral board.”; League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 62-63.

<sup>200</sup> League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 63.

<sup>201</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

## 4.2. Equal footing post-Walwal – Italy and Ethiopian relations

After the finalisation of the arbitration award by the Commission of Conciliation and Arbitration with the help of the fifth arbitrator, Nikolaos Politis, and the subsequent pronunciation of the award on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1935, one would assume all would be well and the incident would be deemed settled by all parties, as per the agreement and the procedure set forth in the Covenant. The League of Nations Council was, however, quick to recognize the persisting, and ever growing tensions between the Italian and Ethiopian governments.<sup>202</sup> From within and without the League, France and the United Kingdom aimed to resolve the ongoing dispute in the most peaceful of possibilities. Both nations bordered Ethiopia with their colonies but had larger interests at play in this conflict: they aimed to maintain their good relations with the Italian government as not to sway them into a Italo-German alliance, yet they also valued their obligation to the Covenant, and with it the League.<sup>203</sup> On the other hand, they had to consider their imperial interests, as the backlash they received from within their respective colonies as a result of their failure to keep the Italian aggression in check, as the narrative of failure deployed by anti-colonial nationalists became based on the suggestion that the imperial powers were unwilling to act against a fellow imperialist, emphasizing the conflict as one between the white and black races.<sup>204</sup> Italy and Ethiopia were increasing their activities in the border territories where the initial Walwal-incident had occurred, which led to an initial decision from the Council to undertake a general examination of the relations between Italy and Ethiopia on September 4.<sup>205</sup>

### 4.2.1. Memorandum on the Situation in Ethiopia

At this meeting, Italy then submitted a report with which the representative intended to remind the Council of the, as they called it, "situation in Ethiopia." This was followed up by a general statement that "Italy's dignity as a civilised nation would be deeply wounded were she to continue a discussion in the League on a footing of equality with Ethiopia."<sup>206</sup> This is a significant move from the Italian government, as per the

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<sup>202</sup> League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 63.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 64; S.K.B. Asante, "The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict: A Case Study in British West African Response to Crisis Diplomacy in the 1930s," *The Journal of African History* 15, no. 2 (1974): 291.

<sup>204</sup> Asante, "The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict," 291-292.

<sup>205</sup> "Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Report of the Council."

<sup>206</sup> League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 65; "Dispute Between Ethiopia and Italy. Memorandum by the Italian Government on the Situation in Ethiopia," September 11, 1935, "Ethiopian-Italian Relations – Correspondence with the Italian Government," Scanned Manuscript, Geneva: League of Nations, 1935, R3652/1/15227/15266/J2,

Covenant all member states are on equal footing, however the Italians deemed this justified, as according to them “the fundamental principle of the Covenant is that a state cannot be admitted to membership of the League if it does not fulfil certain fundamental conditions.” Subsequently Italy denounced the Treaty of Friendship, dated 1928, and “ceased to place any confidence in Ethiopia, reserving full liberty to adopt any measures that might become necessary to ensure the safety of its colonies and to safeguard its own interests.”<sup>207</sup>

The Ethiopian representative in turn reacted rather shocked and pronounced the wish to defend themselves and their interests from any such claims as laid forth by the Italian government and expressed the fear for “a war of extermination”, and further expressed the need for the Council to enact upon Article 15, paragraph 3, as to avoid any further escalation. In response the Council appointed a Committee of five members, namely Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Poland, and Turkey, to report on the Italo-Ethiopian relations.<sup>208</sup>

In accordance with the appointment of this Committee, and further with the Covenant and paragraph 4 of the aforementioned fifteenth Article, this was followed by a general report on the situation between both countries. However, as diplomatic approaches had sadly failed at this point and Benito Mussolini had announced his invasion of Ethiopia, which had then commenced a day later on October 3, the report arrived too late to prevent conflict, however since I am analysing the process of reconciliation from the perspective of the League of Nations, this document is still interesting to analyse.

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LONTAD, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/ethiopian-italian-relations-correspondence-with-the-italian-government-2>.

<sup>207</sup> League of Nations, *The League (1935)*, 65.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 66.

#### 4.2.2. October 7 report on Italo-Ethiopian relations: too little too late

As concluded earlier in this thesis, Article 15 existed to prevent rupture between Members of the League. While the specific article states that this would only be relevant in a case where arbitration had not been submitted, all parties involved argued this was not the case, with which I agree.<sup>209</sup> The League evidently viewed the various Ethiopian conflicts as disconnected from each other. The Walwal engagement had been settled as its own, separate dispute as per Article 13, which I believe might have been influenced by the involvement of the British within the Anglo-Ethiopian Committee that was conducting its delineation-survey of the grazing grounds. Reports state that from November 23 onward, incidents along the border near the Walwal-area – which contained a variety of wells. Because the Anglo-Ethiopian groups presence in the area during the start of these incidents, and the aforementioned caution of the British and French in anything regarding imperial incidents, I think this is a plausible explanation.<sup>210</sup>

Besides this, it is rather easy to look back on this time period and condemn the League for not viewing these events as one and the same, but in reality, there were countless similar disputes ongoing throughout this time period between various other actors within and without the League. Regardless of whether or not the League could have handled this situation in a different, more effective manner, I do not believe that arbitration could have convinced Mussolini to withheld his invasion, considering he had already threatened to leave the League for his disagreement with the Walwal dispute arbitration.

The report provided by Article 15 of the Covenant was brought out in the Council meeting of October 7, a mere four days after the invasion had commenced, by the Committee of Thirteen, consisting of thirteen members among which were France, Great-Britain, Italy, and consisted of a narratological account of the events that had led to this point of escalation.<sup>211</sup> It recounts the events of the Walwal conflicts and the arbitration process that followed, the establishment of a neutral zone and the supposed acts of aggression from Italy, which consisted of the moving of troops to various locations in East Africa.<sup>212</sup> The efforts of the League in producing this report did little to prevent conflict, and keep peace, however, as Mussolini had no intention of waiting

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<sup>209</sup> "The Covenant of the League of Nations."

<sup>210</sup> League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 54; Asante, "The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict," 291-292.

<sup>211</sup> League of Nations, *The League* (1935), 50, 77.

<sup>212</sup> "Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Report of the Council."

for such evaluation of the situation between the two countries, and for it to be resolved in a peaceful manner. Mussolini's demands were clear, and were unable to be fulfilled by the League, as it would mean giving over the sovereignty of one of its fellow member states. Mussolini wanted his Roman Empire, and thus he shall have it.

On October 2, 1935, the Italian people gathered to witness a momentous moment in not only Italian history, but the history of the world in general. While previously between now and the end of the first truly global war other conflicts had occurred, this would be the first occasion since the silencing of the guns that a European nation would once again wage war, in this case with what they assumed to be a barbarous country unwilling to join the civilized world, but assumed by most of the rest of the world as one that ranked among them. On this day, Mussolini announced that as "the wheel of destiny" was nearing its destination, the tie between Italy and Fascism had become perfect, and that forty-four million Italians were united in their suffering which was brought upon them by their Allies. He emphasizes how they threw in their fate with them in 1915, referring to the London treaty, but after all that was promised of them, they were merely left to pick up the scraps, having suffered as they did.<sup>213</sup>

After having exclaimed his disappointment with his former allies, Mussolini turns to Ethiopia, exclaiming that Italy has been patient with Ethiopia for long enough, referring not only to the humiliating defeat at Adowa, but also directly referring to the ongoing crisis between the two nations and their frontier conflicts in the east of Africa. For this, he also scalds the League of Nations, as "instead of recognizing the rights of Italy" they opted to side with the Ethiopians. Furthermore, he scalds France and Britain for joining in this tirade against the Italian people, risking continental conflict "for the sake of a barbarian country."<sup>214</sup>

In the end, this speech makes clear Italy's true intentions. Where Wilson had wanted for a League of Nations with a sturdy backbone, the League's only weapon for preventing war was the threat of sanctions – which they had used in this case. But Mussolini simply did not care for it, as it clear by this speech. "To economic sanctions,

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<sup>213</sup> "Mussolini's Speech-Broadcast, October 2, 1935," Historical Documents, History Central, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.historycentral.com/HistoricalDocuments/Mussolini'sSpeech.html>; "Benito Mussolini: I Discorsi dell' Impero, 1935-1936," Imperial War Museums, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80033686>.

<sup>214</sup> "Mussolini's Speech-Broadcast, October 2, 1935."

we shall answer with our discipline, our spirit of sacrifice, our obedience.”<sup>215</sup> Simply put, Italy had already been forced into a corner, at least when viewing these events from their perspective. The First World War had cost Italy dearly, economically, but also socially and culturally. Their trust in their allies had been shattered, their spirit dented and their pride wounded. While it might not truly reflect reality, through Mussolini’s fascist rhetoric, Italy had been backed into a corner and had no choice but to move to as drastic a measure as war, for both economic resurgence, restoration of pride, and their place in the sun. And there was nothing the League, in its existing structure, could have done about it to prevent it.

While the League had thus indeed failed to prevent the outbreak of war, it must be noted that while this thesis is about the so-called path to war rather than the war itself, the League did have its necessary tools in place in case this were to happen. During the aforementioned Council meeting of October 7, where the report of the Committee of Thirteen was presented, a vote took place upon which all members, except for Italy, declared to agree with the findings of the report. What this meant, was that the fourteen members of the Council – thus excluding Italy, were thus required by their obligation to the Covenant commence with measures under Article 16 of the Covenant.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> “Mussolini’s Speech-Broadcast, October 2, 1935.”

<sup>216</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations.”

## 5. Conclusion

To finalize this thesis and answer my sub- and research questions which were introduced at the beginning of this thesis, I would first like to reiterate some of the core research findings presented. This thesis began with the conclusion that historically the League of Nations had been deemed a failure simply because it had failed to prevent the Second World War from occurring. Rather than exploring the causality of this failure, contemporary scholars instead utilized this failure to further their own political agenda, and later to promote the new and improved League: the United Nations. However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars like Susan Pedersen, Glenda Sluga, and Maartje Abbenhuis et. al. have suggested to return to the beginning of the twentieth century and place the League in historical context, rather than viewing it as a completely separate event that is locked between the World Wars.

The first sub question related to the historical context surrounding the origins of the Great War on a geopolitical or rather diplomatic level. As I utilized sources related to the United States President at the time, I viewed the events of the First World War primarily through Americanized glasses. In hindsight, I believe this was the correct decision, as while the European continent was engaged in their wartime efforts, the ideals of a League of Nations prospered in the non-belligerent United States, among activists and the Oval Office alike. As a result, I got a clear view of how the idea for a post-war League flourished with Wilson, who in turn declared to have eventually joined the Allies not only to, in a way, seek revenge for the sinking of civilian cruise liners among which were United States citizens who found their watery graves along the British coast, but also to push his pacifist ideology into the Peace-making room at Versailles in 1919.

I did however introduce some context to the role that Wilson played in the creation of the League, as authors like Adom Getachew and Allen Lynch have begun to question the role of the United States' President in recent times. From this, I found that especially the deployment of the term of self-determination found its origin in Russia, where Vladimir Lenin was the first to introduce this concept into the war-aims debate. With a stroke of opportunism, however, Wilson adopted the term rather quickly, though this has been acknowledged to have left its mark, as the cultural difference between the American and European continents regarding different trends of nationalism – namely civic versus ethnic nationalism, leaving Wilson's use of the term

rather unconvincing, and inevitably leading to the unsuccessful adoption of the concept within the League of Nations.

Furthermore, this first sub question demanded a relation to my thesis' main case study, as the Italo-Ethiopian conflict did not arise out of thin air, therefore requiring me to look at the role of Italy within the international system in the aftermath of the First World War. The main points of argument in this case are that Italy suffered greatly in the war, losing thousands of its soldiers to the fighting against the Austro-Hungarian empire. And in the end, these Italian losses were – from an Italian perspective – in vain, as the Allies neglected to fulfil all that was promised to the Italians within the London Treaty of 1915, which was intended to persuade Italy into relieving the Allies in the first place. This, and the economic effects of the war, allowed the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini to effectively march on Rome in 1922.

The second sub question intended to explore the creation of the League, by inquiring on the question how the international order had been restored after the silencing of the guns. While it was originally the intention to solely focus this chapter on the creation of the League of Nations by analysing the Covenant, and further sources on the structure and goals of the League, I also included the necessary historical context surrounding the rise of Fascism in Italy, and the origins of the Second Italo-Ethiopian war, as this topic finds overlap between the first and second sub question, as international order was not universally restored, this thesis concluded, especially in relation to the Italo-Ethiopian state of relations that emerged after the end of the 1896 war.

The result of this sub question is an analysis of the Covenant, explicating the goals of the League, which can be summarized quite simply as maintaining peace, as envisioned by Wilson. However, it must be noted that the Covenant did account for multiple and varied threats to the maintenance of peace, as it included mechanisms for the prevention of rupture within the League if conflict were ever to arise between fellow members. Conflicts between members would then be submitted to the Council to commence a process of arbitration and reconciliation. This aspect of the Covenant is important for this thesis, as it was one of the major sparks that lit the fuse of the 1935 invasion of Ethiopia.

The third sub question then concerned itself with the case study of the conflict between Italy and Ethiopia, and especially in what way, and to what extent the League involved itself with this conflict, or rather: how it (attempted to) solve this conflict. During

my research I however shifted my research from a question of solving conflict, to a question of preventing conflict, as my findings on sub questions one and two pushed the case study in this direction. For this case study I firstly focused on the arbitration of the Walwal conflict of December 1934, which was met with a neutral verdict by the League's appointed arbitrators, in turn angering the Italian delegation who found Ethiopia deserved all the blame, and Italy was the victim of Ethiopian aggression.

Both during, and in the month following the arbitration, the Italian government utilized the structure of the League to push a narrative painting Ethiopia as a barbaric country which was unworthy to stand among their fellow League-members. While the memorandum, which in great detail explained the barbaric state of Ethiopia, presented by the Italian representative did not contain just fiction, it may be concluded that those facts were pulled out of context, or portrayed in the worst possible way to justify Italian aggression which at that point had become inevitable. While the Council had decided to appoint a Committee consisting of five members to review the situation of the Italo-Ethiopian relations, the report failed to prevent conflict, as a week prior to its publication, Mussolini had announced the invasion of the sovereign country, marking the beginning of the end of the League of Nations.

About the general role of the League, then, in conflict resolution during the interwar period, this conclusion can be brief, as its general performance has already been highlighted in the final sub question. While the mark of failure in regard to the ability of the League to manage international conflict is unwarranted, it can be stated that the structure of the League, and the means to provide resolution as a whole were lacking for the demands of the twentieth century. While it is common knowledge that technological innovations and the general metamorphosis of warfare as a whole had changed the waging of war significantly when compared to those of the nineteenth century, or those dating beyond that, the League was simply not a match for it. While it managed to provide resolution for the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, there was nothing it could do to prevent war from inevitably breaking out, as Italian aggression pushed beyond the boundaries of the League of Nations peace.

A general conclusion for the causes of this inevitable failure can be found within the sub questions of this thesis as well. On the one hand, one of the principal advocates of the League of Nations standard of peace, the United States led by President Wilson, ended up not joining the League, therefore removing one of the biggest advocates of peace, leaving the United Kingdom and France as the Greatest Powers among its

ranks. While both of these powers had a significant backbone within the League, they were hesitant to utilize it, with the one of the few exceptions being the threat of force being used by the British during the short-lived occupation of Corfu.

Another cause can then be found in the nature of the Italian threat. Extreme nationalist ideologies were on the rise in this time period, to which Mussolini's Fascist party was no different. And while the reality might have been different to the perception of the Italians, they were desperate in their attempts to restore their place in history and thought to have little to lose in their desperation. Therefore, threats of sanctions – and the eventual implementation of said sanctions, could not prevent or stop their aggression. In the end, the League of Nations could not answer the aggressive and reckless nature of fascism, and perhaps we – once again, expected too much.

At the beginning of this thesis, one of my main outspoken goals was that I wanted to replace the League of Nations in its proper historical context, and I believe I have sufficiently done so. As preluded by Glenda Sluga, historians have begun to place the events of 1919, the Peace of Versailles and the creation of the League of Nations, in its broader historical context and with this thesis, by discussing and analysing the Hague Conferences from its earliest starting point – namely the invitation by Tsar Nicholas II, all the way to one of the largest problems the League had to face: the threat of European conflict – as early as 1934 with the Walwal-conflict, and the corresponding role the British played in this. With this thesis, I did not change the historical verdict of the League, but I believe I have showcased that the League – while not flawless, made significant progress when compared to the events of the First World War which were preceded by the 'first modern attempts' at multinational diplomacy in the form of the Hague Conferences. This in itself is a rather significant achievement, especially in light of the current events in Ukraine, as introduced at the start of this thesis, as even today the United Nations that succeeded the League are undergoing similar struggles.

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