China, on the other hand, had been suffering internal problems and disintegration for many years. A combination of political instability and social and economic problems led many Chinese to turn to Marxism and follow the Bolshevik example. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) confronted the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) in a civil war that contributed to increase the weakness of the country.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Individually or in pairs, research the political situation in China and Japan in the years before the Manchurian Conflict.

Motives for Japan's aggressive foreign policy

The Great Depression brought the application of protectionist policies worldwide. Japan was at the time the world's largest silk producer, with silk constituting more than one third of her exports. These dropped nearly 40 per cent between 1929 and 1930 alone. The country's economy was also strained by a growing population, which challenged the nation's resources and made Japan dependent on imports it could hardly afford during the Depression. Moreover, Japanese immigrants were being turned away from countries like Australia and the USA as they became targets of anti-immigration laws.

The Depression brought political instability to Japan. The army – a highly prestigious institution in Japanese society – resented the government's decision to cut military spending in favour of disarmament. Right-wing sectors of the military were willing to rule and apply a policy of self-sufficiency to guarantee raw materials and space for their population based on the application of an expansionist policy. Manchuria produced almost half the world's supply of soya beans and had large supplies of coal and iron. These resources made it attractive to Japan for economic as well as strategic reasons.

SOURCE A

Behind Japan's urge to expansion are a number of impelling forces. There is the explosive pressure of rapidly increasing population in a land that is already overcrowded. There is the feeling of being unfairly treated in the world distribution of territory and raw materials. There is the exceptionally strong position of the fighting services vis-à-vis the civil authorities. There is the high-flown sense of nationalism, which for many Japanese has all the force of religious conviction. There is the mystical idea of Japan's Pan-Asian mission, very popular with retired army officers and nationalist theoreticians, which envisages Japan as the leader of an Asia from which 'white imperialism' has been banished.

From W. H. Chamberlin, *Japan over Asia*, 1938. Chamberlin was Tokyo correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and author of books on inter-war Japan.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTION

What, according to Source A, were the reasons for Japanese expansion?

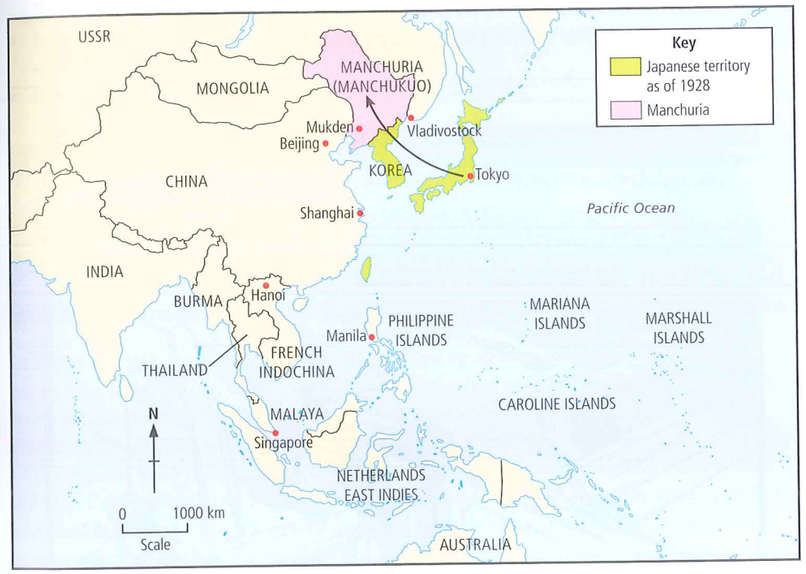
The conflict

The Japanese presence in China was very strong. Victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 had granted Japan the lease of the South Manchurian railway together with the right to protect it with a military force, known as the Kwantung Army. By the time of the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War in 1927, China received nearly 80 per cent of Japanese investment and seven out of 10 foreigners living in China were Japanese.

During the Chinese Civil War, many acts of hostility against foreigners and their interests in China took place. Inspired by Chinese nationalism, strikes and boycotts against Japanese companies and attacks on Japanese citizens in China became frequent and constituted a cause of concern for the Japanese. The Chinese authorities often did not investigate these incidents, which worried the Japanese as they feared for their assets and citizens in China. Other investors in China, like Great Britain, shared these concerns with Japan, which implied that at an international level, there was some sympathy for the need of Japan to protect its citizens and investments in China. Japan was viewed sympathetically also because it was considered a valuable ally against the communist expansion that now threatened China.

The Mukden Incident (1931)

On 18 September 1931, a bomb exploded near Mukden, on the South Manchurian railway. The Japanese accused the Chinese of sabotage. There is evidence to believe, however, that the Japanese planted the bomb themselves to cause friction with the Chinese. As a reprisal for the incidents, Japanese forces quickly advanced into areas of Manchuria beyond the railway. The Manchurian Crisis had begun. As a member state victim of an act of aggression, China appealed to the League of Nations.



Map 5 Japanese invasion of Manchuria, 1931

SOURCE B

Although Japan has undoubtedly acted in a way contrary to the principles of the Covenant by taking the law into their own hands, she has a real grievance against China. This is not a case in which the armed forces of one country have crossed the frontiers of another in circumstances in which they had no previous right to be on the other's soil. Japan owns the South Manchurian railway and has been entitled to have a body of Japanese guards upon the strip of land through which the railway runs. Japan's case is that she was compelled by the failure of China to provide reasonable protection for Japanese lives and property in Manchuria in the face of attacks of Chinese bandits, and of an attack upon the line itself, to move Japanese troops forward and to occupy points in Manchuria which are beyond the line of the railway.

From a memorandum of Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary, to the British Cabinet, 23 November 1931

ToK Time
How can it be determined whether an action that is defined as unjust by the international community is truly unjust? What elements could be considered in order to arrive at a decision?

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTIONS

a) What is the attitude of the British Foreign Secretary towards Japan and China?

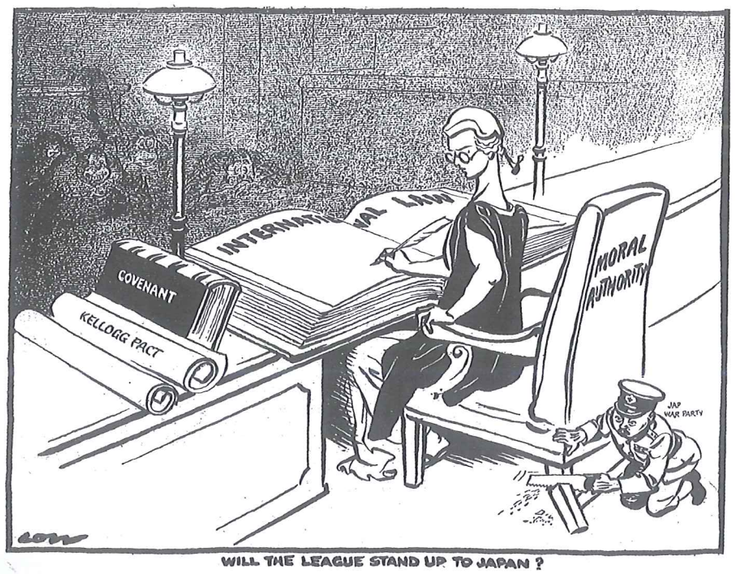
b) With reference to their origin and purpose, discuss the value and limitations of Source A and Source B for an historian studying the causes of the Manchurian Crisis.

The League of Nations and the Lytton Report

The League of Nations was very cautious about developments in Manchuria and held several meetings to try to find a solution that would be fair to both the Chinese and the Japanese. Japan was a permanent member of the Council, while China had recently taken a seat as a non-permanent member. The USA, though not a League member, was invited to send representatives to the Council and attend the sessions, in which Manchuria was discussed.

While the Japanese government seemed willing to cooperate with the League, the Japanese Army continued to move across Manchuria. One thing became clear – the Japanese government no longer controlled its own army. These events prompted the League to send a Commission of Enquiry under the command of Lord Lytton (Great Britain) and formed from representatives of the USA, France, Germany and Italy.

SOURCE C



'Will the League stand up to Japan?' by David Low, first published by the *Evening Standard*, a British newspaper, in November 1931.

● Examiner's hint
To consider all the relevant elements in a cartoon, you can draw arrows identifying them and include brief comments to help you focus your writing about their meaning and significance. This should help you check that you have not left important elements out.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTIONS

a) Why do you think the USA was invited to form part of the Lytton Commission?

b) What is the message conveyed by Source C?

It took months before the Lytton Commission arrived in the area to investigate the Manchurian incident. It then spent several months in the region gathering information and interviewing witnesses. These delays worsened the situation for China. While the Commission was engaged in fact finding, the Japanese Army continued its move across Manchurian territory, arguing that they were acting to protect their property and nationals from revenge by the outraged Chinese. By March 1932, Manchuria had became a Japanese puppet state called Manchukuo, with Pu Yi, the last Chinese Emperor, as ruler by name.

What were the conclusions of the Lytton Report?

The Lytton Report recognized that Japan had special rights in the region. It considered China was responsible for the deterioration of relations with Japan as its internal instability had affected Japanese economic interests. However, it rejected the use of force by the Japanese and refused to see this as part of 'police operations' to protect Japanese in Manchuria. Other conclusions of the Lytton Report were:

- It refused to recognize Manchukuo as an independent state and rejected the Japanese explanation that it was a result of independence movements in the region.
- It recommended that Japan withdraw its troops and recognize China's sovereignty over Manchuria.
- It recommended Manchuria adopt self-government while remaining under Chinese sovereignty.
- It recommended that Japan and China open negotiations.

ToK Time
'In Manchuria alone, we received approximately 1550 letters in Chinese and 400 letters in Russian, without mentioning those written in English, French or Japanese.' (Lytton Report as quoted in Manley O. Hudson, *The Verdict of the League: China and Japan in Manchuria; the Official Documents*, 1932)

- What does this source tell you about the difficulties in deciding 'what really happened' in Manchuria?
- How does this situation help illustrate some of the difficulties historians face in their research?

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

ACTIVITY

In class, discuss to what extent the Lytton Report effectively addressed the causes of the Sino-Japanese conflict. Start by making a list of the causes of the conflict and, using information on the Lytton Report, decide to what extent the causes were addressed.

In February 1933, the Lytton Report was approved by all members of the League except Japan, who claimed that, in the past, many countries had used force against China and none had been condemned for it. In his address, Matsuoka, leader of the Japanese delegation, stated that Manchuria belonged to Japan by right and that Japan had created the prosperity of the region: 'Read your history. We recovered Manchuria from Russia. We made it what it is today.' Compromise over Manchuria – he said – was out of the question. Given that Japan and the League had very different views on the issue, Matsuoka stated that the Japanese government had reached the limit of their efforts to cooperate with the League with regard to Sino-Japanese differences. The Japanese withdrew from the League of Nations Assembly in March 1933.

The impact of the Manchurian Crisis on the League of Nations

- Even when the League of Nations had tried hard to determine fairly what had happened in Manchuria, and had approved the Lytton Commission report with full support from its members as well as US agreement, nothing changed for China. Confrontations with Japan on Chinese territory continued throughout the 1930s, with large-scale fighting breaking out in 1937.

- Failure to prevent Japanese expansion in China improved Japan's economic and strategic position, as Japan gained access to timber, coal and iron resources, as well as suitable land for agriculture.
- Failure to address Manchuria collectively may well have encouraged Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

Why was the League of Nations not effective?

- The Lytton Commission took very long to prepare their report. By the time their findings were presented, Manchuria had been turned into Manchukuo and was firmly under the control of Japan.
- Neither France nor Great Britain, the two most important members of the League, felt they could confront Japan. Any plan to engage in conflict against Japan would have clearly been met with hostile public opinion at home. Both countries were severely affected by the Depression, and either economic sanctions or military intervention would have put a lot of strain on their economies. Also, having interests in the Far East, there was some degree of sympathy with the Japanese, as the situation of chaos and civil war in China affected economic interests at a very sensitive time, due to the Depression.
- Although the USA played some part in the diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis, President Hoover made it clear that the USA would not use economic sanctions against Japan.
- The fear of communism, prompted by civil war in China, was another reason why there was little consensus about going to war against Japan, which was at the time viewed as a strong ally that could help contain the regional expansion of communism.

The Manchurian Crisis, however, also showed the weaknesses of other instruments of international diplomacy. Japan disregarded the Kellogg–Briand Pact and the Nine Power Treaty signed at the Washington Naval Conference in 1922, by which all signatories were bound to respect the integrity of China.

Stresa Front
Britain, France and Italy formed a common front against Nazi Germany following Hitler's announcement of German rearmament.

Anglo-German Naval Agreement
This treaty allowed Germany to build a navy 35 per cent the size of the British navy. The agreement revised the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and was a major triumph for German diplomacy.

Rome–Berlin Axis
An understanding between Hitler and Mussolini on cooperation in foreign policy.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Refer back to the information on the Washington Naval Conference in Chapter 2 and explain why it is claimed that Japan violated the agreements reached at the Conference.

QUESTION

'Too little, too late.' Using these sources and your own knowledge, examine whether this is a fair judgement of the role of the League of Nations in the Manchurian Crisis.

Examiner's hint
Take a few minutes to plan your answer before you start writing. You need to consider two aspects of the League's actions in Manchuria: (a) Why could it be said that the League did too little? (b) Why could it be argued that its eventual actions were 'too late'? Make sure you address both elements in the question and that you provide material from both the sources and your own knowledge for each. Remember to consider exactly what the League could reasonably be expected to do.

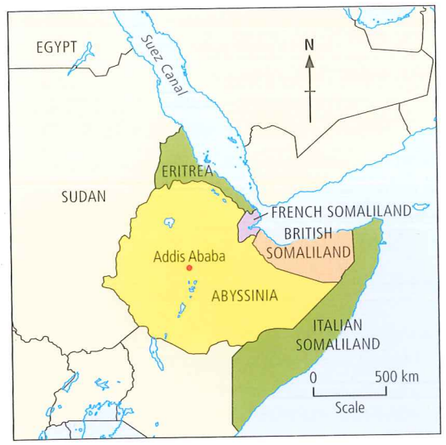
Italian invasion of Abyssinia (1935–36)

Background information

After the Corfu incident (1923), Italian foreign policy under Mussolini underwent a great transformation as the country drew closer to the West. In 1925 Italy played a part in consolidating collective security by guaranteeing the Locarno Pact. In 1928, Mussolini joined the Kellogg–Briand Pact renouncing war, while in 1934 he helped prevent Hitler's expansion into Austria. Perceived as a valuable ally against Nazi Germany, Mussolini was invited by Britain and France to sign the **Stresa Front** in 1935 to contain German expansion. However, Italian foreign policy was about to take another sudden change. Later in 1935, Britain and Germany signed the **Anglo-German Naval Agreement**. Britain had not informed her Stresa allies of this intention. Not long after that, Italy invaded Abyssinia. By the following year, Mussolini had joined Hitler in the **Rome–Berlin Axis**.

Why did Mussolini invade Abyssinia?

Abyssinia (Ethiopia) was an independent country situated between the two Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland and ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie. In 1896 its army defeated an Italian invasion at the battle of Adowa. Mussolini sought to redress this humiliation, obtain overseas territories for Italy and transform it into an imperial power. Under the effects of the Depression in Italy, he developed an aggressive foreign policy aimed at gaining access to raw materials, markets and territory for the growing Italian population.



Map 6
Abyssinia, 1934

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTION

Look at the map above and explain why you think Mussolini had interests in Abyssinia. Explain your answer fully.

In 1934, Italian troops provoked a clash at the Wal Wal oasis near the Abyssinian border with Italian Somaliland. Mussolini demanded from the Abyssinian government both the Wal Wal oasis and compensation for the deaths of 30 Italian soldiers in the incident.

Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Abyssinia, hoped that, should Italy attack, the international community would defend his country, which was a member of the League of Nations. Throughout 1935 he repeatedly asked the League to send neutral observers to arbitrate in the conflict with Italy. Mussolini, however, refused arbitration and began preparations for an invasion of Abyssinia.

In May 1935, an arms embargo was placed on both Italy and Abyssinia, aiming at preventing further escalation of the conflict. However, the arms embargo affected the Abyssinian Army far more than the Italian Army. Abyssinian forces could not obtain weapons, a situation that only served to stress the inferior position of the Abyssinian forces compared to that of the Italians.

Later that year the League declared that any discussion of the conflict would exclude issues of sovereignty over the disputed territories. Reluctance to discuss the issue of sovereignty denied Abyssinia the opportunity to use the instruments of the League of Nations and meant surrender to Mussolini's demands. Britain and France, acting independently, offered Mussolini territorial concessions in the region to prevent a war, but they were rejected. Yet this gesture showed the readiness with which Britain and France were prepared to make concessions to avoid war and probably only contributed to feed Mussolini's ambition.

Benito Mussolini

Haile Selassie