Manchurian and Abyssinian Crises

The Manchurian and Abyssinian crises shook people's confidence in the League and proved that the League had no real power or authority over its members.

Two important events

In the early 1930s, two events destroyed people's belief in the ability of the League to stop wars. In both situations, the League did not act quickly enough or made poor decisions about how to suppress the aggressor nation. This served to show that smaller countries could not expect protection from the League and that aggressors (such as Hitler) had nothing to stand in their way.

• By February 1932, Japan (a member of the League's Council) had invaded and conquered Manchuria. It took the League nearly a year to send a commission and declare that Japan ought to leave - whereupon Japan left the League. The League couldn't send an army, and it needed America's support to impose sanctions successfully. In the end, it did nothing.

• In 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia. Although the Abyssinian emperor Haile Selassie went to the League himself to ask for help, all the League did was to ban arms sales, which did Abyssinia more harm than Italy. A League commission offered Italy part of Abyssinia, but Italy invaded anyway. Far from stopping Italy, Britain and France tried to make a secret pact to give Abyssinia to Italy.
Manchurian Crisis 1931-1933

Context

After the Wall Street Crash the US government introduced tariffs to protect her industry from Japanese competition. The tariffs had a huge impact of Japanese industry and led to high unemployment. As the economic situation got worse army leaders voiced their opinion that the only way in which Japan could solve its economic problems and show that it was still a strong nation was through expansion. The Japanese already had a colony on the Asian mainland and were highly influential in several areas, particularly a Chinese province called Manchuria.

Manchuria was the source of much of Japan’s imported raw materials such as coal and iron ore. In September 1931 the Japanese owned railroad from Manchuria to the coast was vandalised at Mukden.

The Mukden Incident and the Invasion of Manchuria

The Japanese Imperial Army had the permission of the Japanese government to launch retaliatory actions if the Chinese attacked any Japanese property in the area. As a result, Japanese troops responded to the explosion at Mukden by attacking the nearby Chinese Garrison, taking and securing it with ease as the Chinese government had ordered troops in the area not to resist any attacks by Japanese troops in this area.

The Incident was a masterstroke by Japanese officers determined to begin the process of territorial expansion. The explosion at Mukden was very probably staged by Japanese troops to enable a retaliatory attack. Following the seizure of Mukden Japanese troops began occupying other towns and cities in the area. Within 5 months the whole of Manchuria was under the control of the Japanese army.
The Chinese Response to the Invasion of Manchuria

The policy of the Chinese Government at the time of the Mukden Incident was one of non-resistance towards Japanese troops in this area. This was primarily because they wanted to concentrate their efforts on defeating Communism in China and securing a strong and stable government. As a consequence the small Japanese force of some 11,000 men were able to take control of much of Manchuria very easily, despite the presence of a quarter of a million Chinese troops in the area.

In order to try and retain control of Manchuria the Chinese appealed to the League of Nations. In October the League of Nations passed a resolution saying that Japanese troops should withdraw and established a commission which would investigate the claims of both sides. The Japanese rejected the League of Nations resolution and insisted on direct negotiations with the Chinese Government. These negotiations failed and the Japanese proceeded, now against some resistance, to take control of the remainder of Manchuria. They then proceeded to launch an attack on the Chinese city of Shanghai which was outside of the area of Japanese economic control.

The League of Nations response to the Manchurian Crisis

The initial response of the League of Nations was to follow its pre-arranged process for arbitration. They listened to the complaints of the Chinese and the Japanese position and then the Council, minus the representatives of China and Japan, discussed the issue before coming up with a Resolution. In this case the resolution called for Japanese withdrawal from Manchuria whilst a Commission investigated the issue.

The Japanese ignored the wishes of the League of Nations and continued to expand whilst negotiations and diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis continued.
When the commission produced its report on Manchuria in October 1932 it stated that Japan should leave Manchuria. A Special Assembly of the League of Nations was then held to vote on the issue in February 1933. When the vote reiterated that Japan should leave Manchuria, the Japanese delegation simply walked out of the League of Nations, never to return.

What happened next?

According to the League of Nations rules the failure of Japan to comply with a resolution should have been followed by economic sanctions and / or collective military action to enforce the resolution. The League in this case however, did neither. Countries could not agree on what economic sanctions should be imposed and the major powers of Britain and France were unwilling to risk their armed forces in a conflict on the other side of the world. Moreover, such action may have placed British and French Colonies in the Far East at risk of attack.

Sources:
http://www.gcsehistory.org.uk/modernworld/appeasement/manchuriancrisis.htm and
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/ir1/manchuriarev1.shtml
Questions

1: Why was the League of Nations unable to stop Japan taking over Manchuria in the 1930s?

The 'Why the League Failed' webpage suggests seven reasons why the League failed:
1. Weak powers
2. America was not a member
3. The League's structure/organisation was inefficient
4. World Depression made nations less cooperative
5. The more the League failed, the less authority it had
6. Its own members betrayed it and let it down
7. The League faced aggressive military fascist powers

(a) How many of these factors can you see at work in the League's failure in the Manchurian crisis - where?

2: Using sources A-E, list all the results of the League's failure in Manchuria?

**Source A**
The invasion of Manchuria had two important side effects - putting aside for a moment its dreadful revelation that the League was powerless in the face a determined aggressor. First, it raised the prestige of the Japanese Army. Second, it made it possible for the Army to pressurise the Japanese government to undertake a policy of armed expansion.
Tony Howarth, Twentieth Century History (1979).
A British secondary school textbook.

**Source B**
America's consistent refusal to use nothing more than words in support of the League had shown just how toothless and helpless the international community was when it came to enforcing and upholding the peace. A dangerous precedent had been set.
A British secondary school textbook.
Source C
I know this sounds all wrong, perhaps immoral, when Japan is flouting the League of Nations, but:
(1) she was greatly provoked,
(2) she must ere long expand somewhere - for goodness sake let (or rather encourage) her to do so there instead of Australia and
(3) her control of Manchuria means a real block against Communist aggression.
A letter from the Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge University, to his friend John Simon, the British Foreign Secretary (1933).

Source D (for interpretation view
http://www.johndclare.net/league_of_nations6.htm)

Source E (for interpretation view
http://www.johndclare.net/league_of_nations6.htm)
The Abyssinia Crisis 1935-1936

Background Information and context:
In the early 1930’s Italy's population was growing steadily. The Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, was eager to increase the size of the Italian empire. He wanted to increase the empire for several reasons. Firstly, an expanded empire would provide much needed raw materials needed to help Italian Industry and military expansion. Secondly an increased empire would send out a clear message of strength and add to national prestige. Thirdly, expansion would provide land for the expanding population to live in.

Italy already held several colonies in Africa. Eritrea on Africa's eastern coast was an Italian colony, as was Libya on the Mediterranean coast. Expansion of the empire would almost certainly be a breach of international agreements: Italy had signed the Kellogg pact which denounced warfare and as a member of the League of Nations was forbidden to act aggressively against another member nation. Legally therefore such expansion could only really be achieved through effectively taking control of an areas economy making it dependant on Italy.

The Abyssinian Crisis
By 1935 Mussolini was eager to go to war. He wanted glory and now needed additional raw materials for Italian Industry. Abyssinia had Raw Materials and was conveniently located next to Eritrea, part of the Italian Empire. Buoyed by the failure of the League of Nations to deal with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and reports that neither France or Britain were wiling to go to war in defence of Abyssinia, he began preparations for an invasion.

The Wal Wal Incident
In 1930 the Italians built a fort at Wal Wal, inside the Abyssinian border. Despite this breaking agreements of friendship with the Abyssinian government both sides maintained that there was no aggression between the nations. Over the coming years the Italians built up their military presence in the area. On November 22nd 1934 an
Ethiopian force of some 1000 men arrived at the fort at Wal Wal and demanded that the fort be handed over to them. The garrison commander refused. The risk of armed conflict seemed to die down when and Anglo-Ethiopian border commission arrived at the fort the following day. Tensions however remained. On December the 5th/6th there was a skirmish between the Abyssinian and Italian forces, both sides blaming the other for the fighting.

**Reactions to the Wal Wal Incident**
Both sides demanded apologies and protested about the actions of the other. The emperor of Ethiopia then appealed to the League of Nations for help. However the League decided that no penalties should be applied to either party at this time. The main reason for this is perhaps because of ongoing diplomacy behind the scenes. The French and British were eager to maintain good relations with Italy and after the Ethiopian appeal to the League had sent their respective foreign Ministers to Rome to meet with Mussolini. At the meeting agreements were made that cemented Italian authority in Tunisia and granted Italy lands previously in French Somaliland. This would hopefully buy Mussolini’s friendship whilst also easing the tension over Wal Wal and Abyssinia.

The hoped for peace did not last long. On January 25th the Ethiopian army killed 5 Italian soldiers near the base at Wal Wal. Mussolini’s response was to mobilise two divisions in the area and preparations began to send a large military force to the area. Ethiopia asked the League of Nations to arbitrate over the issue and noted the large numbers of Italian forces arriving in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. Italy agreed to a neutral area along the border but continued to send more forces to the area. Ethiopia again asked the League of Nations to intervene.

In June Britain sent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden, to try and broker a deal with Mussolini that would prevent war. Mussolini though was not in any mood to back down though. An arms embargo was placed on both Italy and Ethiopia, but Britain also withdrew the Royal Navy from the Mediterranean which effectively enabled Italian ships to supply a war. Through the summer there were discussions at the League of Nations and negotiations that might pacify Mussolini. In September the League of Nations decided that neither side were to blame for the incident at Wal Wal. Sanctions and the arms embargo were now reduced.
**Invasion of Abyssinia**

On October 3rd 1935 Italian troops invaded Abyssinia from Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. The League of Nations stated that Italy were the aggressors and imposed limited sanctions - they failed to place sanctions on Oil which was needed to enable the continuation of war. Sanctions were not increased or universally applied, even after it emerged that Italian forces were making use of Chemical weapons against civilians.

Instead of imposing sanctions the British and French foreign ministers came up with the Hoare-Laval Pact. This pact would end the war but would grant Italy large areas of Abyssinia. When news of the plan was leaked to the press there was a public outcry and both men resigned and it was not implemented. The war continued until May 1936, when Abyssinia became part of the Italian Empire.
On this day, 75 years ago, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, delivered a speech in Geneva, Switzerland before the League of Nations that shall forever go down in history as one of the greatest speeches of the 20th Century.

The June 30, 1936 speech was an appeal to the League of Nations after the Empire of Ethiopia was invaded by the Kingdom of Italy. Emperor Haile Selassie I fled Addis Ababa, his capital city, on May 5, 1936. The Emperor, highly regarded for his international
statesmanship, heavily emphasized one of the core tenants of the League of Nations’ establishment, Article 10, the principle of collective security, saying that:

It is collective security: it is the very existence of the League of Nations. It is the confidence that each State is to place in international treaties. It is the value of promises made to small States that their integrity and their independence shall be respected and ensured.

The Empire of Ethiopia, known as Abyssinia, was modernizing under the Emperor’s leadership. Unfortunately, its military was poorly managed, and aside from the Imperial Guard, poorly trained. The lack of resources, for instance, meant that Ethiopia’s Imperial Air Force in 1936 only had three active warplanes.

In 1934 and 1935, Italy had made various aggressions into Abyssinian territory. Notably, however, was the construction of an Italian fort in Walwal, Ethiopia. This incident in 1930 was a violation of the Treaty of Friendship both Ethiopia and Italy signed in 1928 and began the gradual encroachment into Ethiopian territory that eventually led to the second Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935.

Emperor Haile Selassie’s appeal to the League of Nations was not only a direct message to the United Kingdom and France but also it served as a reminder of the League’s inability to address world conflict as a unified body. Italy, a 1919 founding member of the League, and Ethiopia, joining in 1923, were bound by Article 10 from aggression.

Stressing collective security, the Emperor eluded to Articles 10 and 15 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, sharing that an attack on one League member state meant an attack on all members. The Emperor rightfully asked, “Has each of the States Members, as it was its duty to do in virtue of its signature appended to Article 15 of the Covenant, considered the aggressor as having committed an act of war personally directed against itself?”

Despite the membership of Ethiopia and Italy in the League of Nations and the two 1928 treaties signed, the Treaty of Friendship and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the ultimate invasion of Ethiopia was Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini’s goal. Branded as Africa
Orientale Italiana, the Kingdom of Italy’s possessions included Italian Eritrea and Italian Somaliland with the mission of including Ethiopia.

The Emperor’s speech sent a strong message to the League’s 52 members. Not only did the Emperor focus on the plight of Ethiopia, he also shared the common issue facing small states that were “exposed to the greed of a powerful neighbour [sic].” The Emperor challenged the League of Nations to carry out its Covenant without reservation:

I have heard it asserted that the inadequate sanctions already applied have not achieved their object. At no time, and under no circumstances could sanctions that were intentionally inadequate, intentionally badly applied, stop an aggressor. This is not a case of the impossibility of stopping an aggressor but of the refusal to stop an aggressor.

Emperor Haile Selassie I’s work to secure the necessary support to curb Italian ambitions in Ethiopia ultimately paid off, albeit late. After weighing its own national interests in defeating the unholy alliance between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the United Kingdom worked with Emperor Haile Selassie to form the special military unit, the Gideon Force. The Gideon Force, led by British Major General Orde Charles Wingate, ultimately paved the road for Ethiopia's victory in 1941.

On May 5, 1941, exactly five years to his exile, Emperor Haile Selassie returned to Addis Ababa. Much can be said about the Emperor’s speech on June 30, 1936, appealing for help at Ethiopia’s most vulnerable time. That same year TIME Magazine named Emperor Haile Selassie as “Man of the Year.”

The admonishing words of the King of Kings of Ethiopia will forever dawn over the history of the League of Nations: “God and history will remember your judgment.”


To see clips from the speech view the following clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyX2kXeFUlo
Questions

1: Why was the League of Nations unable to stop Italy taking over Abyssinia in the 1930s?
The 'Why the League Failed' webpage suggests seven reasons why the League failed:

1. Weak powers
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(a) How many of these factors can you see at work in the League's failure in the Abyssinian crisis - where?

2: According to many historians the League of Nations died following the Abyssinian crisis. Read and view the following sources and decide for yourself whether this is a true reflection of the influence of the League of Nations

Source A
The crisis was fatal to the League. Nobody took it seriously again. They got ready for the Second World War.
Written by the historian JR Western (1971)

Source B
The League died in 1935. One day it was a powerful body imposing sanctions, the next day it was a useless fraud, everybody running away from it as quickly as possible. Hitler watched.
Written by the historian AJP Taylor (1966)
I would like to make a few observations upon events of the last twelve months and their effect upon the League of Nations and the policy of collective security to which we have given so whole-hearted support with such disappointing results. The policy of collective security seemed to us, and I think it seemed to the people of the country as a whole, an attractive alternative to the old system of alliances and balance of power which nevertheless was unsuccessful in preventing the greatest war in history.

The circumstances in which the dispute between Italy and Abyssinian began appeared to offer an opportunity for the exercise of that policy which could hardly be more favorable for its success. The aggression was patent and flagrant, and there was hardly any country to which it appeared that a policy of sanctions could be exercised with a greater chance of success than upon Italy.

There is no use for us to shut our eyes to realities ... That policy has been tried out and it has failed to prevent war, failed to stop war, failed to save the victim of the aggression. I am not blaming anyone for the failure. I merely record it now because I think it is time that we reviewed the history of these events and sought to draw what lessons and conclusions we can from those events.

There is no reason why, because the policy of collective security in the circumstances in which it was tried has failed, we should therefore abandon the idea of the League and give up the ideals for which the League stands. But if we have retained any vestige of common sense, surely we must admit that we have tried to impose upon the League a task which it was beyond its powers to fulfil.

Surely it is time that the nations who compose the League should review the situation and if should decide so to limit the functions of the League in future that they may accord with its real powers. If that policy were to be pursued and were to be courageously carried out, I believe that it might go far to restore the prestige of the League and the moral influence which it ought to exert in the world. But if the League be, limited in that sort of way it must be admitted that it could no longer be relied upon by itself to secure the peace of the world.

From a speech by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to the 1900 Club (10 June 1936), reported in *The Times* (11 June 1936)
The 1900 Club is a very prestigious London Club for wealthy and influential people; after the speech, they cheered Chamberlain 'to the echo'.
How well did the League of Nations deal with aggressive actions?

The League of Nations was supposed to deal with armed conflict through the use of sanctions and collective armed response when required. The following is a brief summary of how they dealt with the Manchurian Crisis and the Abyssinian Crisis:

**Manchuria:**
- Initially attempted Arbitration.
- A Commission was established. It took a year to report, during which time the Japanese continued to expand into Manchuria.
- Sanctions were not used.
- A Special Assembly voted that Japan should withdraw from Manchuria.
- When the Japanese refused and left the League of Nations, the League responded by doing nothing.

**Abyssinia:**
- Arbitration and negotiations following the Wal Wal incident.
- Franco-Italian agreement that granted Mussolini some of the things he wanted to achieve.
- League determined that neither side was to blame for the incident at Wal Wal.
- Imposed an arms embargo on Italy and Abyssinia.
- Following the Invasion, limited sanctions were imposed on Italy. However these were not applied by all member nations and did not include some keyproducts such as oil.

Source D
Manchuria demonstrated that the League was toothless. However, the blow to the League was not a mortal one and the decisive test came two years later in the Abyssinian crisis... The Abyssinian crisis delivered a death blow to the League. It was already weakened by the departure of Japan in March 1933 and Germany in October. Italy left in 1937. While Britain and France were distracted, Hitler made his first major territorial move, sending a force of 22,000 men into the demilitarised Rhineland.
Written by the historian AP Adamthwaite (1977)
• The League did not put things in place that would have limited the Italians ability to wage war. For example, the Suez Canal could have been closed to Italian Shipping.
• Britain and France negotiated in secret with Italy and were willing to make large concessions to them, at the expense of the aggrieved member nation.
• Sanctions were dropped following the Italian conquest of Abyssinia.

Source:
http://www.gcsehistory.org.uk/modernworld/appeasement/leagueresponsetoagression.htm

Question
Can one lay the blame for the failure in dealing with the Manchurian and Abyssinian crises solely at the feet of the League of Nations, or was its 'hands tied' by the activities of the more powerful nations within it?

Consequences:
It is as important that you know the effect the two crises had on the League, as it is that you know the story of the events themselves:
1. It became clear that if a strong nation was prepared to ignore the League, the League could do nothing about it.
2. The League's delays and slowness made it look scared.
3. Sanctions were shown to be useless.
4. Everybody realised that Britain and France were not prepared to use force.
5. The four major powers - Japan, Italy, Britain and France - all betrayed the League.
6. Smaller nations realised that the League could not and would not protect them.
7. Britain and France decided that the League was useless to stop war, and followed instead the policy of appeasement.
8. Hitler was encouraged to move ahead with his plans.

Source:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/ir1/manchuriarev4.shtml