Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

International organisations: the League and the UN, 1919–c2011

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Start here: the League of Nations, 1919–29

- The League of Nations was US President Woodrow Wilson's idea. Its **Covenant** (rules) was part of the peace treaties of 1919, and its headquarters were in Geneva.
- The Assembly included every member, met once a year and needed unanimous votes. The Council (Britain, France, Italy and Japan as permanent members, plus others) met more often to deal with crises. The Secretariat ran the League, and agencies and commissions dealt with health, refugees, slavery, drugs, workers (the International Labour Organization) and the mandates.
- Weaknesses: the USA never joined, Germany and the USSR were not members at first, decisions had to be unanimous, and the League had no army; it relied on **sanctions** and on Britain and France.
- Successes in the 1920s: the Åland Islands (Sweden and Finland accepted the League's decision), Upper Silesia (a vote was held and it was divided between Germany and Poland in 1921), the Greek–Bulgarian War of 1925 (Greece was told to withdraw and did), and the agencies, which helped refugees and prisoners of war return home and fought diseases and the drug trade.

The League challenged, 1930–39

- The Great Depression made countries less willing to act together, and dictators were ready to use force.
- Manchuria (1931–33): Japan invaded. The League's Lytton Report took a year and condemned Japan, which simply left the League in 1933.
- Abyssinia (1935–36): Italy invaded. **Sanctions** were weak, leaving out oil, and the Suez Canal stayed open. Britain and France made a secret deal, the Hoare–Laval Pact, to give Italy much of Abyssinia. Italy conquered it and left the League in 1937.

- These failures showed the League could not stop great powers. The agencies, such as the Slavery Commission and the Child Welfare Committee, kept up useful work.

Setting up the United Nations, 1945–64

- The UN was set up in 1945 to replace the League. All members sit in the General Assembly. The **Security Council** has five permanent members (the USA, the USSR, Britain, France and China), each with a **veto**. The Secretariat is led by the Secretary-General. Agencies include the WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the FAO, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was agreed in 1948.
- Unlike the League, the UN could send armed forces, including peacekeepers.
- Palestine (1947–49): the UN planned to divide Palestine; war followed when Israel was created in 1948, and UN mediators arranged an armistice in 1949.
- Korea (1950–53): the **Security Council** sent a UN force, led by the USA, after North Korea invaded the South. The USSR was boycotting the Council, so it couldn't use its **veto**.
- Congo (1960–64): UN peacekeepers helped hold the country together; Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash there in 1961.

The UN challenged, 1967–c2011

- In the Cold War the **veto** often stopped the **Security Council** acting. In the Middle East, Resolution 242 (1967) called for Israel to withdraw from land it took in the Six-Day War in return for peace, and Resolution 338 (1973) repeated it, but neither was fully carried out. UN peacekeepers in Lebanon (from 1978) couldn't stop the fighting there.
- A success: in 1989 the UN oversaw Namibia's move to independence.
- After the Cold War, the UN approved the Gulf War to free Kuwait (1991), but failed to stop genocide in Rwanda (1994) and the massacre at Srebrenica in Bosnia (1995). The USA and Britain invaded Iraq in 2003 without a new UN resolution.

Key terms

Covenant	The rules of the League of Nations.
Sanctions	Penalties, such as trade bans, used to make a country change what it is doing.
Security Council	The UN body responsible for peace, with five permanent members who each have a veto.
Veto	The power of one member to block a decision.
Peacekeeping	Sending neutral troops to keep the peace between sides that have agreed to stop fighting.
Specialised agencies	Bodies that deal with problems such as health, refugees and workers' rights.

Your notes

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Whose idea was the League of Nations?
2. Which major country never joined the League?
3. Why did the League find it hard to act quickly?
4. Which dispute did the League settle successfully in 1925?
5. What happened after the Lytton Report condemned Japan?
6. Why did sanctions against Italy over Abyssinia fail?
7. How many permanent members does the UN Security Council have?
8. Why could the UN act in Korea in 1950?

Answers

1. Woodrow Wilson
2. The USA
3. Decisions had to be unanimous
4. The Greek–Bulgarian War
5. Japan left the League
6. They left out oil and the Suez Canal stayed open
7. Five
8. The USSR was boycotting the Security Council

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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