

League of Nations Security Council

Research Reports



Forum: League Of Nations Security Council

Issue: The Japanese annexation of Manchuria

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Introduction

The Japanese annexation of Manchuria in 1931 signaled the start of Japan's aggressive imperial expansion in East Asia. This action was prompted by the Mukden Incident, a planned explosion on a Japanese railway in Manchuria that served as a pretext for the Japanese troops to invade and conquer the region. Manchuria, which was rich in natural resources such as coal and iron, was regarded by Japan as critical to its expanding industrial requirements and military objectives. The occupation resulted in the foundation of the puppet state of Manchukuo, which remained under Japanese rule until the conclusion of WWII.

The annexation presented significant obstacles at both the regional and international levels. For China, it was a serious blow to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, deepening internal unrest and weakening the regime. For the world community, it demonstrated the League of Nations' inability to respond effectively to Japanese aggression. This failure not only harmed the League's legitimacy, but also encouraged other expansionist nations, contributing to the growth of militarism and the eventual onset of World War II.

Japan, China, the League of Nations, and other major nations, including the United States and the Soviet Union, were all key parties in this problem. Japan's actions strained relations with these countries, laying the groundwork for future confrontations in the Pacific. The annexation of Manchuria remains a critical case study in international relations,

demonstrating the repercussions of unbridled aggression and the difficulties of sustaining global peace and security.

Definition of Key Terms

Annexation: The forcible acquisition of one state's territory by another state.

Manchuria: A historical region in Northeast Asia, primarily located in what is now Northeastern China.

Mukden Incident: A staged event on September 18, 1931, engineered by Japanese military personnel as a pretext for Japan's invasion of Manchuria.

Manchukuo: A puppet state established by Japan in 1932 in the occupied region of Manchuria, with Puyi, the last Qing emperor, as its nominal head.

Lytton Report: A report produced by the League of Nations' Lytton Commission, which investigated the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and recommended the withdrawal of Japanese forces.

Imperialism: A policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force.

Sino-Japanese Relations: The historical and political relationship between China and Japan, significantly impacted by Japan's invasion of Manchuria.

Stimson Doctrine: A policy declared by U.S. Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson in 1932, stating that the United States would not recognize any territorial acquisitions achieved by force.

Second Sino-Japanese War: A major conflict between China and Japan from 1937 to 1945, which was partly rooted in the earlier invasion of Manchuria.

Puppet State: A government that is under the control of a foreign power.

Natural Resources: Raw materials such as coal, iron, and timber, which were abundant in Manchuria and a major factor in Japan's interest in the region.

Collective Security: A system in which a group of nations acts together to maintain peace and security.

Economic Sanctions: Penalties applied by one country or group of countries on another, often in the form of trade restrictions, to influence its behavior.

Non-Recognition: A principle in international law whereby states do not recognize territorial changes executed by force.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

JAPAN: The aggressor state that invaded and annexed Manchuria, seeking to expand its empire and secure essential natural resources for its industrial and military needs.

CHINA: The victim of the annexation, suffering a severe blow to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, which further destabilized the country.

LEAGUE OF NATIONS: The international organization that attempted to mediate the conflict but ultimately failed to enforce its resolutions against Japan.

UNITED STATES: Initially adopted a policy of non-intervention, later became involved in opposing Japanese expansionism in the Pacific through diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions.

SOVIET UNION: Had strategic interests in the region and was concerned about Japanese expansion threatening its borders and influence in Northeast Asia.

MANCHUKUO: The puppet state established by Japan to legitimize its control over Manchuria, under the nominal leadership of Puyi.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of the Event
September 18, 1931	The Mukden Incident occurs, with an explosion on the South Manchurian Railway, blamed on Chinese dissidents by the Japanese military.
September 19, 1931:	Japanese troops invade Manchuria, rapidly occupying key cities and regions, facing minimal resistance from Chinese forces.
January 7, 1932:	The Stimson Doctrine is issued by the United States, declaring non-recognition of any territorial changes executed by force.
March 1, 1932:	Japan establishes the puppet state of Manchukuo, with Puyi, the

last Qing emperor, as its nominal head of state.

- September 1932: The League of Nations sends the Lytton Commission to investigate the situation in Manchuria.
- October 1932: The Lytton Report is published, condemning Japan's actions and recommending the withdrawal of Japanese troops and the restoration of Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria.
- February 24, 1933: The League of Nations adopts the Lytton Report and calls for Japan to return Manchuria to China, leading to a vote condemning Japan's actions.
- March 27, 1933: Japan withdraws from the League of Nations in response to the adoption of the Lytton Report and the international condemnation of its actions.
- 1937-1945: The Second Sino-Japanese War ensues, further escalating tensions and leading to significant military conflicts in East Asia.
- 1945: Japan loses control of Manchukuo following its defeat in World War II, and the region is returned to Chinese control.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- **Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928):** An international agreement that condemned war as a means of resolving disputes and sought to promote peaceful conflict resolution.
- **League of Nations (1920):** Established after World War I as part of the Treaty of Versailles, the League aimed to maintain peace and prevent future conflicts through collective security and diplomacy. However, its effectiveness was often undermined by the absence of key powers, such as the United States, and its inability to enforce its resolutions. The League's response to Japan's aggression in Manchuria, including the establishment of the Lytton Commission, highlighted its limitations in dealing with member states that engaged in military aggression.
- **Locarno Treaties (1925):** These agreements aimed to secure post-World War I territorial settlements and promote peace in Western Europe. While they were significant in stabilizing relations between Germany, France, and Belgium, they did not extend to the

Far East and did not address the growing militarism in Asia, particularly Japan's ambitions.

- **Manchurian Incident (1931):** The Japanese invasion of Manchuria began with the Mukden Incident, where Japanese forces staged an attack to justify military intervention. This event marked a critical turning point in international relations, as it tested the effectiveness of the League of Nations and highlighted the failure of diplomatic efforts to prevent aggression.
- **Stimson Doctrine (1932):** Articulated by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Stimson, this doctrine declared that the United States would not recognize any territorial changes resulting from Japan's invasion of Manchuria. While it represented a moral stance against aggression, it lacked the enforcement capacity to reverse the annexation, reflecting the limitations of diplomatic measures in the face of military actions.
- **Charter of the United Nations (1945):** Established the United Nations and outlined principles for maintaining international peace and security, replacing the League of Nations.
- **United Nations Security Council (UNSC):** The UN body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, with the authority to take action in response to aggression.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, affirming the rights and freedoms of all individuals, which can be relevant in contexts of occupation and sovereignty violations.
- **Geneva Conventions (1949):** International treaties establishing standards for humanitarian treatment in war, which can be applied to conflicts involving occupation and annexation.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Following Japan's invasion of Manchuria in September 1931, the League of Nations faced immediate pressure to respond. In October 1931, China appealed to the League for intervention, leading to a resolution demanding the withdrawal of Japanese troops. However, Japan ignored this directive, insisting on direct negotiations with China instead. To further

investigate the situation, the League established the Lytton Commission in 1932. The Commission's findings culminated in the Lytton Report, published in October 1932, which condemned Japan's actions as aggression and recommended the restoration of Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria. Despite its clear conclusions, the League failed to enforce these recommendations or impose effective sanctions against Japan, undermining its credibility. In January 1932, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Stimson articulated the Stimson Doctrine, declaring that the United States would not recognize any territorial changes resulting from Japan's aggression. However, this doctrine lacked enforcement mechanisms and did not deter Japan's actions. The League's response was further hampered by the reluctance of major powers, particularly Britain and France, to confront Japan militarily, as both nations were concerned about their own imperial interests in the Far East. Ultimately, these attempts demonstrated the League's weaknesses and its inability to maintain collective security in the face of aggression from member states.

Possible Solutions

- **Strengthening International Law and Enforcement Mechanisms**
 - Update international treaties, including the League of Nations Charter, to clearly prohibit acts of aggression and annexation.
 - Create a permanent tribunal to adjudicate cases of territorial aggression and impose penalties.
 - Provide the League of Nations with greater authority and resources to enforce laws and resolutions related to territorial disputes.
- **Developing Rapid Response Mechanisms**
 - Establish a League of Nations or regional rapid response force to intervene quickly in cases of aggression.
 - Set clear guidelines for when and how the League of Nations Security Council should intervene in territorial disputes.
- **Implementing Targeted Economic Sanctions**

- Apply multilateral sanctions focused on key sectors of aggressor states, ensuring they are targeted to minimize humanitarian impact.
- Offer sanctions relief for states that withdraw from occupied territories and comply with peace agreements.
- **Promoting Diplomatic Solutions and Regional Cooperation**
 - Support UN-facilitated mediation and dialogue between conflicting parties to negotiate peaceful resolutions.
 - Promote measures such as transparency and joint exercises to build trust among states in conflict-prone regions.
- **Supporting Human Rights and Rule of Law Initiatives**
 - Implement mechanisms to monitor and report abuses in occupied territories and hold perpetrators accountable.
 - Provide assistance to build judicial and administrative capacity in vulnerable states.

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