6 Reconciliation and Disarmament 1924–30: The Locarno Era

POINTS TO CONSIDER

This chapter covers the period after the failure of the Ruhr occupation. Confrontation was now slowly replaced with co-operation between Britain, France and Germany. It looks at:

- The impact of the Dawes Plan
- The Locarno Treaties
- The 'Locarno spirit' and Germany's re-emergence as a Great Power
- Russia and eastern Europe during the Locarno era
- The development of the League of Nations
- Progress made towards disarmament

As you read this chapter ask yourself both why the League was at last able to function more effectively and to what extent Europe by 1928–9 had recovered from the consequences of the First World War. Also consider whether the USA had in practice given up isolation.

Key dates

1921	March	Franco-Polish Alliance
1921–2		Washington Conference and Five Power Naval Convention
1925	October	Locarno Conference
1926	January	Allies evacuated Cologne zone
	April	German–Soviet Treaty of Friendship
	September	Germany joined the League of Nations
1928	August 27	Kellogg–Briand Pact signed by 15 states
1929	August	Hague Conference
	October 29	Wall Street Crash

Key question
What were the terms of the Dawes Plan, and why did it help to stabilise Europe after the Ruhr crisis?

1 | The Impact of the Dawes Plan

The Dawes Plan played a crucial part in ending the bitter conflict over reparations which had nearly escalated into open war during the Ruhr occupation.

The recommendations of the Dawes Plan

Key question
What were the recommendations of the Dawes Plan?

- Although the plan did not alter the overall reparation total, which had been fixed in 1921, it did recommend a loan of 800 million gold marks, which was to be raised mainly in the USA, to assist the restoration of the German economy. This was a crucially important component of the plan because it opened the way for US investment in Germany.
- Annual reparation payments were to start gradually and rise at the end of five years to their maximum level. These payments were to be guaranteed by the revenues of the German railways and of several key industries.
- A committee of foreign experts sitting in Berlin under the chairmanship of a US official was to ensure that the actual payments were transferred to Britain, France and Belgium in such a way that the German economy was not damaged. The plan was provisional and was to be renegotiated over the next 10 years.

The reaction to the Dawes Plan

Key question
What was the reaction of the British, French and Germans to the Dawes Plan?

The British

It was welcomed enthusiastically in April 1924 by the British Treasury as 'the only constructive suggestion for escape from the present position, which if left must inevitably lead to war, open or concealed, between Germany and France'. It also had the advantage of involving the USA in the whole process of extracting reparations from Germany.

The French

There was much that the French disliked about the plan. For instance, it was not clear to them how the Germans could be compelled to pay if they again defaulted and refused to pay, as they had in 1922. However, with the defeat of Poincaré in the elections of June 1924 their willingness to co-operate markedly increased. Essentially, if the French were ever to receive any reparation payments and to avoid isolation, they had little option but to go along with the Dawes Plan.

The Germans

The Germans also disliked the Plan as it placed their railways and some of their industry under international control and did nothing about scaling down their reparation debts. Stresemann, who, after the fall of his cabinet in November 1923, was now Foreign Minister, realised, however, that Germany had no alternative but to accept the plan if the French were to be persuaded to evacuate the Ruhr sooner rather than later.

The London Conference

Key question
What steps were taken to ensure that France would not again be able to act alone if Germany defaulted on reparation payments?

Agreement to implement the Dawes Plan and to withdraw French and Belgian forces from the Ruhr within 12 months was achieved at the London Conference in August 1924. The new balance of power in Europe was clearly revealed when Britain and the USA devised a formula for effectively blocking France's ability to act

Profile: Gustav Stresemann 1878–1929

1878 – Born in Berlin
1906 – Elected to the *Reichstag* as a National Liberal
1917 – Succeeded to party leadership
1923 – Chancellor
1924–9 – Foreign Secretary
1929 – Died

During the war Stresemann was an ardent nationalist and close supporter of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. After 1922 he moderated his position and aimed to win the confidence of the Western Powers by carrying out the Treaty of Versailles. In August 1923 he called off passive resistance in the Ruhr. Between 1924 and 1929, as Foreign Minister, he had considerable success in restoring Germany's position in Europe through the Locarno Treaties and by securing Germany a seat on the council of the League of Nations. He was hated by the nationalists in Germany, but he believed that Germany would eventually dominate Europe through peaceful means.

Key term

Permanent Court of International Justice
An institution set up at The Hague, the Netherlands, by Article 14 of the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1920.

alone against Germany in the event of another default in reparation payments. If Germany again refused to pay, it was agreed that Britain as a member of the Reparation Commission would have the right to appeal to the **Permanent Court of International Justice** at The Hague, and that a US representative would immediately join the Reparation Commission. Joint Anglo-American pressure would then be more than enough to restrain France from reoccupying the Ruhr. Deprived of much of their influence on the Reparation Commission, the French had undoubtedly suffered a major diplomatic defeat at the London Conference.

Summary diagram: The impact of the Dawes Plan

Recommendations	• 800 million mark loan to Germany • A committee under American chairmanship set up in Berlin to arrange transfer of reparation payments • Payments to start gradually to reach maximum level after 5 years
Reaction of the Great Powers: Britain France Germany	 Welcomed it to break the reparation deadlock After failure of the Ruhr occupation, France had no option but to accept it The Germans too had to accept if the French were to quit the Ruhr
	Dawes Plan implemented at the London Conference, 1924

2 | The Locarno Treaties

France's need for security

Key question
How did France seek to gain security from future German aggression?

The Dawes Plan, by bringing the Ruhr crisis to an end, had, together with the **German measures to stabilise the mark**, made Germany an attractive prospect for US investment. To a certain extent, one of the preconditions for a European economic recovery was now in place, but investment was to come from individuals and banks and was not guaranteed by the US government. Nor was it accompanied by offers of military security to the French. Thus, should a new economic crisis blow up, US money could melt away and France could be left facing a strong and aggressive Germany.

Initially, the French had little option but to continue to insist, in as far as they still could, on the literal implementation of the Treaty of Versailles. They refused, for instance, to agree to the evacuation of the Cologne zone, which was due in January 1925 (see page 92), on the grounds that Germany had not yet carried out the military clauses of the treaty 'either in the spirit or in the letter'.

Key figure

Austen Chamberlain (1863–1937)
Member of Lloyd George's government 1919–21 and then British Foreign Secretary 1924–9. He was the half-brother of Neville Chamberlain.

Negotiating the Locarno Treaties 1925

Key question
What were the terms of Locarno Treaties?

The urgent need to reassure the French of Germany's peaceful intentions, and so secure the evacuation of Cologne, prompted Gustav Stresemann, on the unofficial advice of the British ambassador in Berlin, to put forward a complex scheme for an international guarantee by the European great powers of the Rhineland and of the status quo in western Europe.

Austen Chamberlain, the British Foreign Secretary, at first suspected the proposals of being an attempt to divide France and Britain. Then he rapidly grasped that it was potentially a marvellous opportunity to square the circle by achieving both French security and the evacuation of Cologne without committing Britain to a military pact with France, which the cabinet would never tolerate. Aristide Briand, now back in power, was aware that only within the framework of an international agreement on the lines put forward by Stresemann could he in any way commit Britain to coming to the assistance of France if it were again attacked by Germany.

In the ensuing negotiations Briand successfully persuaded Chamberlain and Stresemann to widen the international guarantee to cover the Belgian–German frontier. He also attempted to extend it to Germany's eastern frontiers, but this was rejected by both Stresemann and Chamberlain. However, Stresemann did undertake to refer disputes with Poland and Czechoslovakia to arbitration, although he refused to recognise their frontiers with Germany as permanent. Chamberlain was quite specific that it was in Britain's interests only to guarantee the status quo in western Europe. He told the House of Commons in November 1925, in words that were to return to haunt the British government (see page 169), that extending the guarantee to the Polish corridor would not be worth 'the bones of a British grenadier'.

Key term

German measures to stabilise the mark
In November 1924 the devalued German currency was replaced temporarily by the *Rentenmark* and then in August 1924 by the new *Reichsmark*, which was put on the gold standard. Theoretically this meant that paper bank notes could be converted into agreed, fixed quantities of gold.

Key date

Locarno Conference: October 1925

Profile: Aristide Briand 1862–1932

1862 – Born in Nantes
1906 – Resigned from Socialist Party
1906–9 – Cabinet minister
1909–29 – Headed 11 governments and was a strong supporter of the League of Nations and reconciliation with Germany
1932 – Died

Briand started off his political career as a socialist, but when he joined a left-wing liberal coalition government in 1906, he was expelled from the party. Between 1906 and 1929 Briand headed 11 governments and was also Foreign Minister from 1925 to 1932. As a wartime Prime Minister he lacked energy and charisma, but he came into his own after the war when between 1924 and 1929 as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister he supported the League of Nations and Franco-German reconciliation. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with Gustav Stresemann.

Key term

Inviolability
Not to be changed or violated.

The negotiations were completed at the Locarno Conference, 5–16 October 1925, and resulted in a number of treaties that were signed on 1 December. The most important of these were agreements confirming the **inviolability** of the Franco-German and Belgian–German frontiers and the demilitarisation of the Rhineland.

The treaties were underwritten by an Anglo-Italian guarantee to assist the victims of aggression. If a relatively minor incident on one of the frontiers covered by Locarno occurred, the injured party (for example, France) would first appeal to the Council of the League of Nations (see page 120), and if the complaint was

The signatories of the Treaties of Locarno in the garden of 10 Downing Street, London. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin is on the far right, French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand in the front row, centre, and Winston Churchill back row, right.

upheld, the guarantors would assist the injured state to secure compensation from the aggressor (for example, Germany). In the event of a serious violation of the treaty the guarantors could act immediately, although they would still eventually refer the issue to the council.

Assessing the agreements

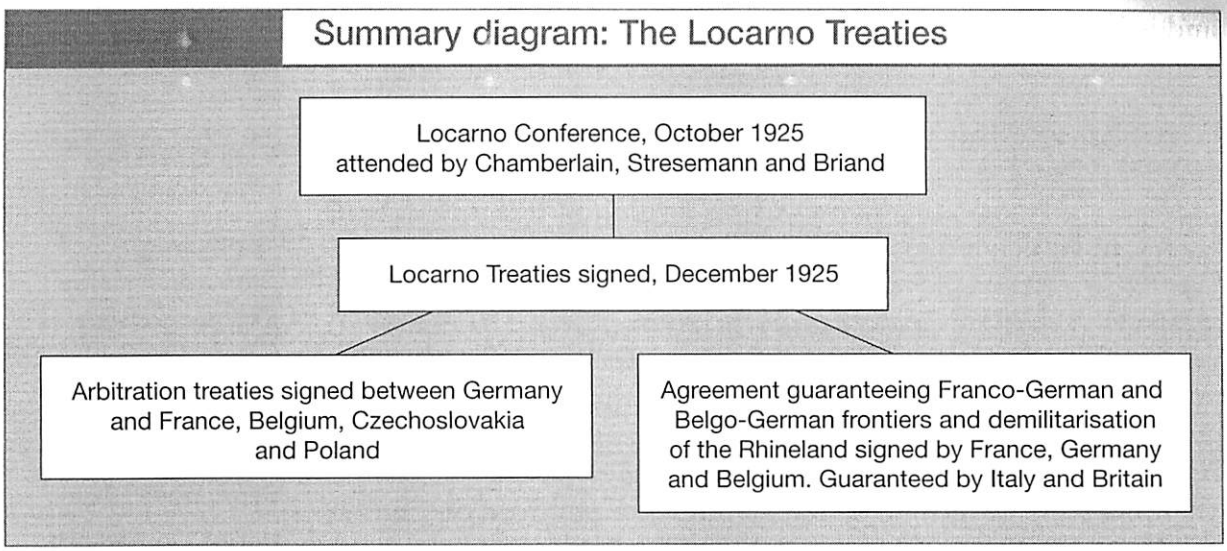
Key question
What did Britain, France and Germany gain from the Locarno Agreements?

Throughout western Europe and the USA the Locarno Treaties were greeted with enormous enthusiasm. It appeared as if real peace had at last come. Had France now achieved the security it had for so long been seeking? Of all the great powers the French gained least from Locarno. It is true that France's eastern frontier was now secure, but under Locarno it could no longer threaten to occupy the Ruhr in order to bring pressure to bear on Berlin in the event of Germany breaking the Treaty of Versailles. The British had managed to give France the illusion of security, but the provision for referring all but major violations of the Locarno Agreements to the League before taking action ensured that the British government would in practice be able to determine, through its own representative on the Council, what action, if any, it should take. For Britain there were two main advantages to Locarno: it tied France down and prevented it from repeating the Ruhr occupation. Also, by improving relations between Germany and the Western Powers and by holding out the prospect of German membership of the League, it discouraged any close co-operation between Moscow and Berlin.

Locarno was deeply unpopular with the German nationalists, but for Stresemann it was the key to the gradual process of revising the treaty. He wrote to the former heir to the German throne on 7 September 1925:

> There are three great tasks that confront German foreign policy in the more immediate future. In the first place the solution of the reparation question in a sense tolerable for Germany, and the assurance of peace, which is essential for the recovery of our strength. Secondly the protection of the Germans abroad, those 10–12 millions of our kindred who now live under a foreign yoke in foreign lands. The third great task is the readjustment of our Eastern frontiers: the recovery of Danzig, the Polish frontier, and a correction of the frontier of Upper Silesia.

By assuring Germany of peace in the west, and by not placing its eastern frontiers with Poland under international guarantee, Locarno left open the eventual possibility of revision of the German–Polish frontier. Stresemann's aims were therefore diametrically opposed to Briand's, but both desired peace and therein lay the real importance of Locarno. It was a symbol of a new age of reconciliation and co-operation. Locarno, as Ramsay MacDonald (1866–1937), the leader of the British Labour Party, observed, brought about a 'miraculous change' of psychology on the continent.



3 | The 'Locarno Spirit' and Germany's Re-emergence as a Great Power

Key question
To what extent did the Locarno Treaties lead to a revision of the Treaty of Versailles?

Key term

Locarno spirit
The optimistic mood of reconciliation and compromise that swept through Europe after the signing of the Locarno Treaties.

The '**Locarno spirit**' was an elusive concept which was interpreted differently in London, Paris and Berlin. All three powers agreed that it involved goodwill and concessions, yet the scope and timing of these concessions were a matter of constant and often bitter debate. Both Stresemann and Briand had to convince their countrymen that the Locarno policy was working. Briand had to show that he was not giving too much away, while Stresemann had to satisfy German public opinion that his policy of '**fulfilment**' was resulting in real concessions from the ex-Allies. It can be argued that the survival not only of Stresemann's policy but of the German Republic itself depended on ever more ambitious diplomatic successes. What would happen once these were unobtainable?

Stresemann's initial successes and failures 1925–7

Key question
How much had Stresemann achieved by the end of 1927?

Key terms

Fulfilment
A policy aimed by Germany at extracting concessions from Britain and France by attempting to fulfil the Treaty of Versailles.

Détente
A process of lessened tension or growing relaxation between two states.

The atmosphere of ***détente*** created by Locarno quickly led to the evacuation of the Cologne zone in January 1926, and in September 1926 Germany at last joined the League of Nations and received a permanent seat on the Council.

Stresemann exploited every opportunity both inside and outside the League to accelerate the revision of Versailles. In 1926 he attempted to exploit France's financial weakness by proposing that Germany pay the French nearly one-and-a-half billion gold marks, most of which Germany would raise in the USA by the sale of bonds. In return France would evacuate the Rhineland and give back the Saar and its coalmines to Germany. Despite initial interest, the plan was rejected in December. The French government's finances had, contrary to expectation, improved, and it also emerged that the US government was not ready to approve the sale of more German bonds to US investors.

Stresemann did, however, manage to extract further concessions from both Britain and France. In January 1927 the Allied Disarmament Commission was withdrawn from Germany,

and in the following August Britain, France and Belgium withdrew a further 10,000 troops from their garrisons in the Rhineland.

The Young Plan and the evacuation of the Rhineland

Two years later Stresemann achieved his greatest success when he managed to negotiate a permanent reduction in reparations with an Anglo-French evacuation of the Rhineland five years before the Treaty of Versailles required it. At the Hague Conference in 1929 the overall reparation sum was reduced from 132 billion gold marks to 112 billion, to be paid over the course of 59 years, and Britain and France agreed to evacuate the Rhineland in 1930.

The agreement to end the Rhineland occupation helped to make the Young Plan acceptable in Germany, but even so in December the government faced a referendum forced on them by the Nazi and Nationalist parties declaring that its signature would be an act of high treason on the grounds that Germany was still committed to paying reparations. This was easily defeated and the Young Plan was officially implemented on 20 January 1930.

Key question
What did Stresemann achieve at the Hague Conference?

Key dates

Allies evacuated Cologne zone: January 1926

Germany joined League of Nations: September 1926

Hague Conference: August 1929

Wall Street Crash: 29 October 1929

Proposals for a European customs union and a common currency

With the evacuation of the Rhineland, Germany's restoration to the status of a great European power was virtually complete. Briand, like his successors in the 1950s, appears to have come to the conclusion that Germany could only be peacefully contained through some form of European federation. At the tenth assembly of the League of Nations in 1929, he outlined an ambitious, but vague scheme for creating 'some kind of federal link … between the peoples of Europe'.

Stresemann reacted favourably and urged both a European customs union and a common currency. Briand was then entrusted by the 27 European members of the League with the task of formulating his plan more precisely; but when it was circulated to the chancelleries of Europe in May 1930, the whole economic and political climate had dramatically changed. Stresemann had died and the political crisis in Germany caused by the onset of the Depression brought to power a government under **Heinrich Brüning** that was more interested in a customs union with Austria than in a European **federation**. The German cabinet finally rejected the memorandum on 8 July 1930. A week later it was also rejected by Britain.

It is tempting to argue that Briand's plans for a European federation, which were killed off by the economic crisis that was eventually to bring Hitler to power, was one of the lost opportunities of history. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to view them through the eyes of early twenty-first century European federalists. Essentially, Stresemann hoped that it would open the door to an accelerated revision of the Treaty of Versailles, while Briand calculated that it would have the opposite effect. Perhaps under favourable circumstances it could at least have provided a framework within which Franco-German differences could have been solved.

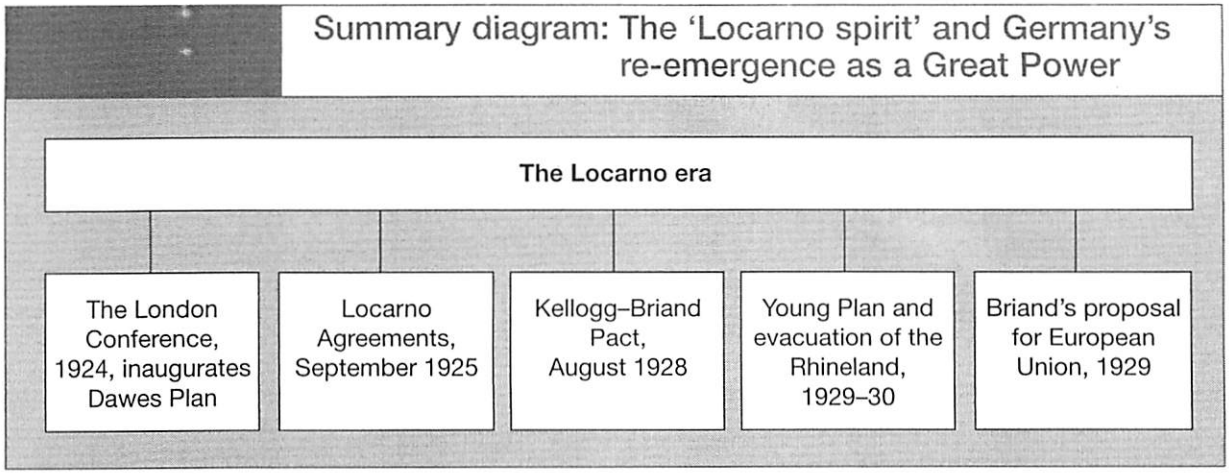
Key question
Why did Briand's proposals for a European federation fail?

Key figure

Heinrich Brüning (1885–1970)
Leader of the German Centre Party and Chancellor of Germany 1930–2.

Key term

Federation
A system of government in which several countries or regions form a unity but still manage to remain self-governing in internal affairs.



4 | Russia and Eastern Europe During the Locarno Era

Russia and Germany

Key question
What were the aims of Russian foreign policy towards Germany, 1924–9?

Key date
German–Soviet Treaty of Friendship: April 1926

The Soviet government, which after the death of Lenin in January 1924 increasingly fell under the control of Stalin (see page 144), viewed the progress made in stabilising western Europe through the Dawes Plan and the Locarno Agreements with both dismay and hostility, as it feared that this would strengthen the anti-Bolshevik forces in Europe and delay revolution in Germany. The Russians initially attempted to deflect Stresemann from his Locarno policy, first with the offer of a military alliance against Poland, and then, when that did not work, with the contradictory threat of joining with France to guarantee Poland's western frontiers.

Stresemann, aware of Russia's attempts to stir up revolution in Germany in 1923, was not ready to abandon the Locarno policy, but he was anxious to keep open his links with Moscow and consolidate the Rapallo Agreement of 1922 (see page 104), if only as a possible insurance against Anglo-French pressure in the west. Thus, the Russians were able first to negotiate a commercial treaty with Germany in October 1925. Then in April 1926, at a time when the Poles and the French were trying to delay Germany's membership of the League council, they persuaded Stresemann to sign the German–Soviet Treaty of Friendship (the Berlin Treaty). Essentially, this was a neutrality pact in which both powers agreed to remain neutral if either party was attacked by a third power.

Anglo-Russian relations

Key question
Why were relations so bad between Britain and Russia 1924–9?

Relations between Russia and Britain sharply deteriorated when the incoming Conservative government refused in October 1924 to ratify the Anglo-Soviet General Treaty which had been negotiated by the outgoing Labour administration. In 1927, after ordering a raid on the offices of the official Soviet trading company, Arcos, in an attempt to discover evidence of espionage, the British government severed all official relations with Russia.

Only in 1929, with the return of Labour, were ambassadors again exchanged. This outbreak of the first 'Anglo-Soviet cold war', as the American historian Jacobson has called it, strengthened Stalin's determination to cut Russia off from the West. Increasingly, the main thrust of Soviet foreign policy in the late 1920s was to exploit anti-Western feeling in the Middle East, China and India.

France and eastern Europe

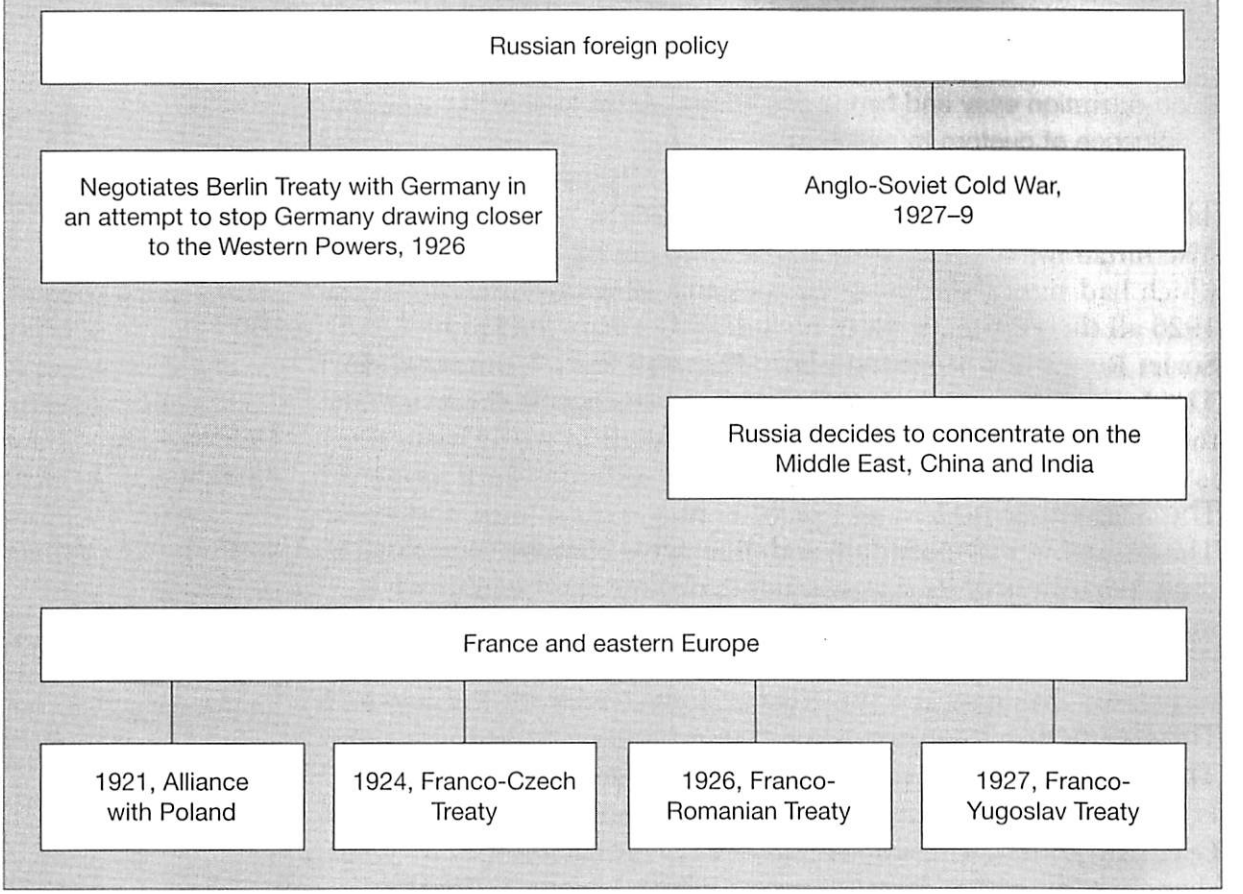
Key question
To what extent did France consolidate its influence in eastern Europe?

With the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War, the French began to build up a series of alliances in eastern Europe to take the place of their original pre-war alliance with Tsarist Russia (see page 33). In March 1921 they concluded an alliance with Poland which, because it was hated by Russia and Germany and was on bad terms with Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, was the most vulnerable of the east European states. Further French attempts to strengthen it met with little success. Paris failed to persuade Stresemann to agree to a guarantee of Poland's frontiers or to ensure that Poland gained a permanent seat on the League council. In 1925–6 it even looked as if the Polish state would suffer financial collapse, but by 1927 its financial position stabilised and for the time being the USSR and Germany had to tolerate its existence.

Key date
Franco-Polish Alliance: March 1921

The French were less successful in organising the other new states created by Versailles into a defensive alliance against Germany. In August 1920 Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia signed a pact which became known as the Little *Entente*, and were joined by Romania in 1921. However, it was primarily directed against Hungary and was designed to prevent the return of the Habsburgs and the revision of the Trianon Treaty. Only in 1924 did Paris succeed in concluding a treaty with Czechoslovakia but, again, it was not strictly an anti-German alignment. It would only come into operation in the event of a restoration of the royal families of Austria or Germany or of an Austrian *Anschluss* with Germany. Despite attempts by Italy to challenge French influence in the Balkans, the French government was able to exploit the suspicions caused by the growth of Italian influence in Albania to sign first a treaty with Romania guaranteeing its frontiers (1926) and then a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia (1927). By the end of the decade French influence was preponderant in the Balkans.

Summary diagram: Russia and eastern Europe during the Locarno era



Key date

Key question
How successful was the League of Nations?

5 | The Development of the League of Nations

The League was a part of the international settlements negotiated in 1919–20. Inevitably, the tensions and divisions inherent in these were also present in the League. The absence in 1920 of three Great Powers from the League reflected the reality of the international situation where both Germany and the USSR licked their wounds in defensive isolation, while the US government, after having played such a key role in negotiating the new peace settlement, had been forced by Congress to disengage from most of its international responsibilities. The League's ultimate success or failure was dependent on the progress made by the great powers in stabilising Europe after the First World War. Not surprisingly, the League's golden age coincided with the new stability created by the Locarno era.

Key question
How did the League of Nations work?

The Covenant of the League of Nations

In retrospect, it is possible to argue that the League's Covenant or constitution provided too many loopholes for war, supported the status quo which favoured the Great Powers and, in the final analysis, lacked the machinery for collective action against an aggressor. Yet even if it had had a theoretically perfect constitution, would its history have been any different? Perhaps

the official British commentary on the Covenant was realistic when it pointed out:

> If the nations of the future are in the main selfish, grasping and warlike, no instrument or machinery will restrain them. It is only possible to establish an organisation which may make peaceful co-operation easy and hence customary, and to trust in the influence of custom to mould opinion.

The organs of the League of Nations

Key question
What roles did the organs of the League play?

The initial members of the League were the 32 Allied states which had signed the peace treaties and 12 neutral states. By 1926 all the ex-enemy states including Germany had joined, but Soviet Russia did not do so until 1934, and the USA never did. The League at first consisted of three main organs: the Assembly, the Council and the Permanent Secretariat.

The Assembly

The Assembly was essentially a **deliberative chamber** where each state, regardless of its size, was allotted three representatives. It was a jealously guarded principle that even the smallest state had the right to be heard on international issues.

The Council

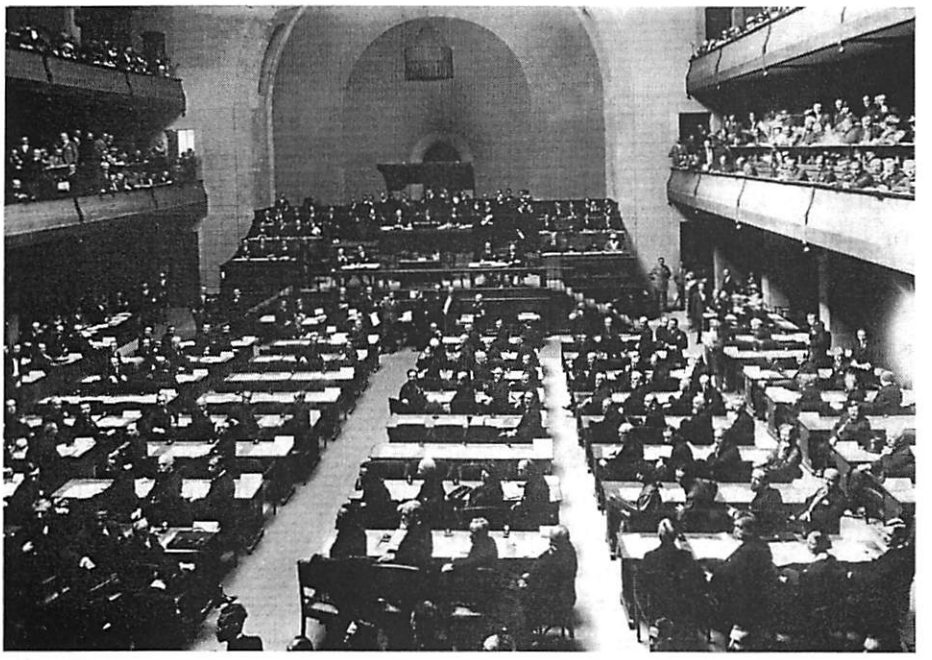
The Council in 1920 had four permanent members: Britain, France, Italy and Japan. In 1926 this was increased by one when Germany joined. The smaller states were represented by a changing rota of four temporary members, later increased to seven, who were all selected by the Assembly. As the Council met more frequently than the Assembly and was dominated by the Great Powers, it gradually developed as an **executive committee** or 'cabinet' of the Assembly, and worked out the details and

Key terms

Deliberative chamber
An assembly appointed to debate or discuss issues.

Executive committee
A committee which can take key decisions.

Key term



Ambassadors from around the world assemble in the Reformation Hall at Geneva's Palais de Nations for the first session of the League of Nations in November 1920.

implementation of policies which the Assembly had endorsed in principle. Decisions in both bodies were normally taken by unanimous vote. The votes of states involved in a dispute under discussion by the League were discounted when the Assembly and Council voted on recommendations for its settlement. In this way they could be prevented from vetoing an otherwise unanimous decision.

Permanent Secretariat

The routine administrative work of the League was carried out by the Permanent Secretariat which was staffed by a relatively small **international civil service.**

Key term
International civil service
A permanent administration made up of officials from all the member states.

Permanent Court of International Justice

In 1921 a fourth organ was added to the League when the Permanent Court of International Justice was set up at The Hague in the Netherlands with the task of both advising the council on legal matters and judging cases submitted to it by individual states.

Key question
How effective were the League's powers for solving international disputes?

What powers did the League of Nations possess to solve international disputes?

The heart of the covenant, Articles 8–17, was primarily concerned with the overriding question of the prevention of war. The League's long-term strategy for creating a peaceful world was summed up in the first section of Article 8:

> The members of the League recognise that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety, and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.

The process for solving disputes between sovereign powers was defined in Articles 12–17. Initially (Article 12) disputes were to be submitted to some form of arbitration or inquiry by the League. While this was happening, there was to be a cooling off period of three months. By Article 13 members were committed to carrying out the judgements of the Permanent Court of International Justice or the recommendations of the Council. Even if a dispute was not submitted to arbitration, the Council was empowered by Article 15 to set up an inquiry into its origins. The assumption in these articles was that states would be only too willing to eliminate war by making use of the League's arbitration machinery. If, however, a state ignored the League's recommendations, Article 16 made it clear that:

> I. ... it shall ... 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 ...
> II. It shall be the duty of the council in such case to recommend to the several governments concerned what effective military, naval

> or air force the members of the League shall severally contribute to the armed forces to be used to protect the covenants of the League.

In Article 17 the League's powers were significantly extended by its right to intervene in disputes between non-members of the League, while in Article 11 member states were encouraged to refer to the assembly or council any international problem which might threaten the peace.

In theory, the League seemed to have formidable powers, but it was not a world government in the making, with powers to coerce independent nations. Its existence was based, as Article 10 made clear, on the recognition of the political and territorial independence of all member states. Article 15, for instance, recognised that if a dispute arose from an internal issue, the League had no right to intervene. There were, too, several gaps in the League Covenant which allowed a potential aggressor to wage war without sanction. War had to be officially declared before the League could act effectively. It had, for instance, no formula for dealing with acts of guerrilla warfare, which the instigating state could disown. Even in the event of a formal declaration of war, if the International Court or the Council could not agree on a verdict, then League members were free to continue with their war.

The League of Nations struggles to find a role

Key question
What problems faced the League in 1920?

In January 1920 the governments of the Great Powers viewed the League with either cynicism or open hostility. The French doubted its ability to outlaw war, while the Germans saw it as a means for enforcing the hated Versailles Treaty. For a short time after the Republican victory in November 1920 the US government was openly hostile to the League and its officials were instructed to avoid any co-operation with the organisation.

Under the Treaty of Versailles the League was responsible for the administration of the Saar and Danzig (see pages 91–3). This inevitably involved the danger of it becoming too closely associated with the policy of the Allies. Indeed, in the Saar, it made the mistake of appointing a French chairman to the governing commission which then administered the territory in the interests of France. The League was also the guarantor of the agreements, signed by the Allies and the successor states created in 1919, which were aimed at ensuring that the various racial minorities left isolated behind the new frontiers enjoyed full civil rights.

The mandates

Key question
Was the mandate system merely a façade for colonialism in a new form?

Article 22 of the Covenant marked a potentially revolutionary new concept in international affairs:

> To those colonies and territories, which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the states which have formerly governed them, and which are inhabited by

> peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples should form a sacred trust of civilisation, and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

When the Allies distributed the former German and Turkish territories among themselves, they were divided into three groups according to how developed they were. The most advanced were in the Middle East, while the most backward were the ex-German islands in the Pacific. The League's greatest task was to avoid becoming a façade for colonialism in a new form. Thus, mandate powers were required to send in annual reports on their territories to the League's Permanent Mandates Commission, which rapidly gained a formidable reputation for its expertise and authority.

The League's attitude towards the mandates was by modern standards paternalistic and condescending, but nevertheless, as the historian F.S. Northedge has argued, 'it helped transform the entire climate of colonialism', since the imperialist powers were forced by moral pressure to consider the interests of the native populations and to begin to contemplate the possibility of their eventual independence.

Key question
How effective was the League's welfare, medical and economic work?

The League's welfare, medical and economic work

Economic and financial work

The League was excluded from dealing with the key financial issues of reparations and war debts, but nevertheless in 1922 its Financial Committee was entrusted by the Allied leaders with the task of rebuilding first Austria's and then Hungary's economy. Its Economic Committee had the far greater task of attempting to persuade the powers to abolish **protection** and create a worldwide **free trade zone**. It organised two world economic conferences, held in 1927 and 1933, which both Soviet Russia and the USA attended. But not surprisingly, given the strongly protectionist economic climate of the times, it failed to make any progress towards free trade.

Key terms

Protection
Stopping foreign goods by levying tariffs or taxes on imports.

Free trade zone
An area where countries can trade freely without restrictions.

The International Labour Organisation

One of the greatest successes of the League was the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This had originally been created as an independent organisation by the Treaty of Versailles, but it was financed by the League. In some ways it was a league in miniature. It had its own permanent labour office at Geneva, staffed by 1000 officials. Its work was discussed annually by a conference of labour delegates. Right up to 1939 the ILO turned out an impressive stream of reports, recommendations and statistics which provided important information for a wide range of industries all over the world.

Health Organisation

The League's Health Organisation provided an invaluable forum for drawing up common policies on such matters as the treatment

of diseases, the design of hospitals and health education. The League also set up committees to advise on limiting the production of opium and other addictive drugs, on the outlawing of the sale of women and children for prostitution and on the effective abolition of slavery.

The League as peacemaker and arbitrator 1920–5

Key question
How effective was the League in solving international disputes 1920–5?

Until 1926, when the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Germany began to attend the meetings of the Council and turn it into a body which regularly discussed the main problems of the day, the League of Nation's role in the many post-war crises was subordinated to the Allied leaders and the Conference of Ambassadors, which had been set up to supervise the carrying out of the Treaty of Versailles (see page 102). For the most part it therefore dealt with minor crises only.

In 1920 the inability of the League to act effectively without the backing of the great powers was clearly demonstrated when it failed to protect Armenia from a joint Russo-Turkish attack, as neither Britain, France nor Italy was ready to protect it with force. One of the French delegates caustically observed in the Assembly that he and his colleagues were 'in the ridiculous position of an Assembly which considers what steps should be taken, though it is perfectly aware that it is impossible for them to be carried out'.

Polish–Lithuanian quarrel over Vilna

Key question
Why did the League fail to solve the Vilna dispute?

In October 1920, in response to appeals from the Polish Foreign Minister, the League negotiated an armistice between Poland and Lithuania, whose quarrel over border territories was rapidly escalating into war. The ceasefire did not, however, hold, as shortly afterwards **General Zeligowski** with a Polish force, which the Warsaw government diplomatically pretended was acting on its own initiative, occupied the city of Vilna and set up the new puppet government of Central Lithuania under his protection. The League first called for a plebiscite and then, when this was rejected, attempted in vain to negotiate a compromise settlement. In March 1922 Poland finally annexed Vilna province. A year later, after it was obvious that the League could not impose a solution without the support of the Great Powers, the Conference of Ambassadors took the matter into its own hands and recognised Polish sovereignty over Vilna. Britain, France and Italy, by failing to use the machinery of the League to stop Polish aggression, had again effectively marginalised it.

Key figure

Lucjan Zeligowski (1865–1947)
A Polish General of Lithuanian origin. He fought in both the First World War and the Polish–Soviet War.

The Aaland Islands dispute

Key question
How was the League able to solve this problem successfully?

In less stubborn disputes, however, where the states involved were willing to accept a verdict, the League did have an important role to play as mediator. The League enjoyed a rare success in the dispute between Finland and Sweden over the Aaland Islands. These had belonged to the Grand Duchy of Finland when it had been part of the Russian Empire. Once Finland had broken away from Russia in 1917, the islanders, who were ethnically Swedish, appealed to Stockholm to take over the islands. When Sweden

began to threaten to use force, the British referred the matter to the League. In 1921 the League supported the status quo by leaving the islands under Finnish sovereignty, but insisted on itself ensuring the civil rights of the Swedish population there. Neither government liked the verdict, but both accepted it and, what is more important, made it work.

Key question
To what extent did the role of the League in these crises indicate that it was essentially subordinated to the Conference of Ambassadors?

Albania, Upper Silesia, Memel and the Ruhr

In the second half of 1921 the League did serve as a useful means of focusing the attention of the Great Powers on the plight of Albania when it urgently appealed for help against Greek and Yugoslav aggression. As the Conference of Ambassadors had not yet finally fixed its frontiers, the Greeks and Yugoslavs were exploiting the ambiguous situation to occupy as much Albanian territory as they could. The Council responded by dispatching a commission of inquiry, but it took a telegram from Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, both to galvanise the Conference of Ambassadors into finalising the frontiers and to push the League Council into threatening economic sanctions against Yugoslavia if it did not recognise them. When this was successful, the League was then entrusted with supervising the Yugoslav withdrawal. Thus, in this crisis the League had played a useful but again secondary role to the Allied powers. The fact that the Conference of Ambassadors then made Italy the protector of Albania's independence indicates where the real power lay.

In August 1921 the League played a key role in solving the bitter Anglo-French dispute over the Upper Silesian plebiscite, which was referred to the League Council (page 103). It again proved useful in the protracted dispute over Memel. When the Lithuanians objected to the decision by the Conference of Ambassadors to internationalise the port of Memel, and seized the port themselves in 1923, the League was the obvious body to sort out the problem. Its decision for Lithuania was accepted by Britain and France.

Attempts by Britain and Sweden to refer the question of the Ruhr occupation of 1923 (see pages 104–5) to the League were blocked by the French, who had no intention of allowing the League to mediate between themselves and the Germans.

Key question
To what extent did the Corfu incident show the continuing ability of the Great Powers to ignore the League and to take unilateral action when it pleased them?

The Corfu incident

In the Corfu incident of August–September 1923 the League's efforts to intervene were yet again blocked by a major power. The crisis was triggered by the assassination in Greek territory near the Albanian frontier of three Italians, who were part of an Allied team tracing the Albanian frontiers for the Conference of Ambassadors. Mussolini, the Italian Fascist Prime Minister, who had come to power the preceding October, immediately seized the chance to issue a deliberately unacceptable ultimatum to Athens. When the Greeks rejected three of its demands, Italian troops occupied Corfu. The Greeks wanted to refer the incident to the League, while the Italians insisted that the Conference of Ambassadors should deal with it. The Conference, while initially

Profile: Benito Mussolini 1883–1945

1883	– Born in Romagna
1904–14	– Socialist agitator and journalist
1915–18	– Supported the war against Germany
1919	– Founded the Italian Fascist Party
1922–43	– Gained power in Italy and gradually established a Fascist dictatorship
1943–5	– After the Allied invasion of Italy he was kept in power in northern Italy by the Germans
1945	– Captured and shot by Italian partisans

Mussolini was the son of a blacksmith and originally a socialist, but was expelled from the party when he supported Italy's entry into the war. He created the Fascist Party in 1919 and successfully exploited the post-war economic crisis, fear of Bolshevism and disappointment with the peace treaties to gain power in 1922. By 1929 he had consolidated his position and established a one-party government. Mussolini was determined to re-establish the Roman Empire and turn the Mediterranean into an 'Italian lake'. His fatal mistake was to enter the war as an ally of Hitler's in June 1940 on the assumption that Germany would win. After a series of defeats in Greece and North Africa the Germans had to send troops to stop Italy from being knocked out of the war. From that point on Italy became a German satellite. In the 1930s Hitler had been a great admirer of Mussolini and in many ways regarded him as a role model.

accepting some assistance from the League, nevertheless ultimately settled the case itself and insisted that Greece should pay 50 million lire in compensation to Italy. Once this was agreed, Italian forces were withdrawn from Corfu. The Corfu incident, like the Ruhr crisis, underlined the continuing ability of the major powers to ignore the League and to take unilateral action when it pleased them.

The League's successes: Mosul and the Greco-Bulgarian dispute

Key question
Why was the League able to deal with these disputes successfully?

In 1924 the League was confronted with another crisis involving a greater power and a lesser power. On this occasion it was able to mediate successfully. It provided a face-saving means of retreat for Turkey in its dispute with Britain over the future of Mosul, which according to the Treaty of Lausanne (see page 101) was to be decided by direct Anglo-Turkish negotiations. When these talks broke down and the British issued in October 1924 an ultimatum to Turkey to withdraw its forces within 48 hours, the League intervened and recommended a temporary demarcation line, behind which the Turkish forces withdrew. It then sent a commission of inquiry to consult the local Kurdish population, which, as total independence was not an option, preferred British to Turkish rule. The League's recommendation that Mosul should

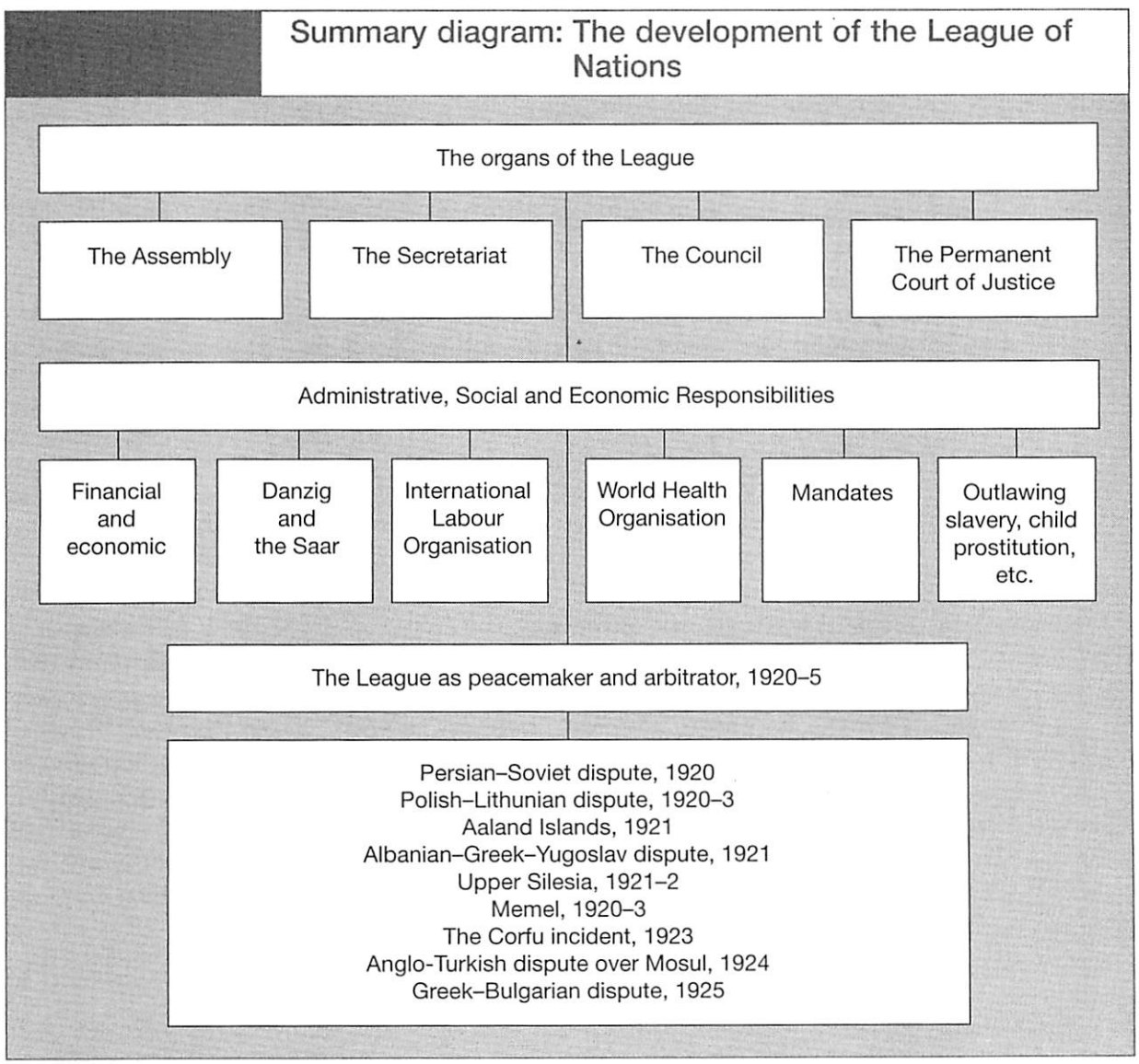
become a mandate of Iraq for 25 years was then accepted. As Iraq was a British mandate, this effectively put it under British control.

In October 1925, the League's handling of the Greco-Bulgarian conflict, like its solution to the Aaland Islands dispute, was to be a rare example of a complete success. When the Bulgarians appealed to the Council, its request for a ceasefire was heeded immediately by both sides. So too was the verdict of its commission of inquiry, which found in favour of Bulgaria.

It was an impressive example of what the League could do, and in the autumn of 1925 this success, together with the new 'Locarno spirit', seemed to auger well for the future. Briand was able to claim at the meeting of the Council in October 1925 that 'a nation which appealed to the League when it felt that its existence was threatened, could be sure that the Council would be at its post ready to undertake its work of conciliation'.

The League was not put to the test again until the Manchurian crisis of 1931. Unfortunately Briand's optimism was then shown to be premature (see pages 186–90). The League could function well only if the Great Powers were in agreement.

Summary diagram: The development of the League of Nations



6 | Progress Made Towards Disarmament

The Geneva Protocol

Key questions
What role did the USA play in the disarmament question 1921–33?

Why did Britain reject the Geneva Protocol?

One of the major tasks of the League was to work out an acceptable world disarmament programme. Disarmament, however, could not be divorced from the question of security, for if a state did not feel secure, it would hardly disarm. To solve this problem the League in 1924 drafted an ambitious **collective security** agreement, the Geneva Protocol, but this was rejected by Britain, who feared that it would commit it to policing the world.

The Washington Four Power Treaty and Naval Convention 1922

Key question
Why did the USA want Britain to terminate the Anglo-Japanese Treaty?

Key date
Washington Conference and Five Power Naval Convention: 1921–2

With the USA outside the League the twin problems of growing Anglo-American naval rivalry and deteriorating American–Japanese relations in the Pacific could only be tackled by negotiations between the powers concerned. By 1919 the USA had become alarmed by the rise of Japanese power in the Pacific. Japan, already possessing the third largest navy in the world, had begun a major naval construction programme. The Americans responded by forming a Pacific fleet and embarking on their own formidable building programme, which, when completed, would make the US navy the largest in the world.

In turn this pushed Britain in early 1921 into announcing its own naval programme, but privately it told Washington that it desired a negotiated settlement as it could not afford a naval race. **President Harding** was anxious both to reduce armaments and to economise, but he would only negotiate with Britain if it agreed to terminate the 20-year-old Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which, theoretically at least, could have involved Britain as Japan's ally in a war against the USA (see page 37). As the treaty was due for renewal in July 1921, the British and Japanese agreed under pressure from Washington to replace it by a new four-power treaty, which committed Britain, France, Japan and the USA to respect each other's possessions in the Pacific and to refer any dispute arising out of this agreement to a conference of the four signatory powers.

Key term
Collective security
Security gained through joining an alliance or signing an agreement where the security of each state is guaranteed by the others.

With the Anglo-Japanese Treaty out of the way, the first Washington Naval Convention was signed in February 1922 for a duration of 14 years. It halted the building of capital ships for 10 years, provided for the scrapping of certain battleships and battle cruisers, and, for those capital ships which were spared the breaker's yard, established a ratio of three for Japan and 1.67 each for Italy and France to every five for Britain and the USA. In 1929 Britain, Japan and the USA in the London Naval Treaty agreed to extend the main principle of this agreement to smaller fighting ships.

Key figure
Warren Harding (1865–1923)
US President 1921–3. He was a Republican and had been an opponent of President Wilson's internationalism.

Key question
How important was the Kellogg–Briand Pact?

The Kellogg–Briand Pact

From 1922 onwards the USA's attitude towards the League began to alter. The Americans saw the value of participating in some of the League's committees on social, economic and health matters, and President Harding even considered US membership of the Permanent Court of International Justice in 1923, but the Senate again vetoed it. When the League set up a Preparatory Commission in 1926 to prepare for a world disarmament conference, both the USA and Soviet Russia participated.

Key date
Kellogg–Briand pact signed by 15 states: 27 August 1928

Peace movements, such as the **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, put considerable moral pressure on the US government to play a greater role in the disarmament question. In March 1927, Professor Shotwell, a director of the Carnegie Endowment, on a visit to Paris persuaded Briand to propose a Franco-American pact that would outlaw war. **Frank B. Kellogg**, the US Secretary of State, replied cautiously in December and suggested a general pact between as many states as possible, rejecting war 'as an instrument of national policy'. On 27 August 1928 the Kellogg–Briand Peace Pact was signed by 15 states, and by 1933 a further 50 had joined it.

Key term
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
An organisation founded by the industrialist Andrew Carnegie. It describes itself as being dedicated to advancing co-operation between nations.

Optimists saw the pact as supplementing the Covenant. It outlawed war, while the League had the necessary machinery for setting up commissions of inquiry and implementing cooling off periods in the event of a dispute. Pessimists, however, pointed to the fact that it was just a general declaration of intention, which did not commit its members. Perhaps, in reality, all that could be said for it was that it would give the US government a moral basis on which it could intervene in world affairs, should it desire to do so.

Key question
Why did the World Disarmament Conference fail?

The World Disarmament Conference 1932–4

In 1930 the Preparatory Commission, after protracted discussions on different models of disarmament, produced its final draft for an international convention. The League council called the long-awaited World Disarmament Conference in February 1932 at Geneva. It could not have been convened at a more unfortunate time: the Manchurian crisis (pages 186–90) had weakened the League, the rise of nationalism in Germany was making France and Poland less likely to compromise over German demands for equality in armaments, while the impact of the Depression on the USA was reviving the isolationist tendencies of the early 1920s. Long before the Germans withdrew in November 1933 (page 138) it was clear that the conference would fail.

Key figure
Frank B. Kellogg (1856–1937)
US lawyer, statesman, senator and Secretary of State. For his part in negotiating the Kellogg–Briand Pact he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1929.

Summary diagram: Progress made towards disarmament

Washington Four Power Treaty and Naval Convention, 1922	Halted building of capital ships for ten years. Established ratio of capital ships comprising three for Japan and 1.67 for Italy and France to every five for Britain and the USA
Geneva Protocol, 1924	Attempted to provide worldwide security by obliging members of the League to come to the assistance of any state which was the victim of aggression and was situated in the same continent as themselves – rejected by Britain
Kellogg–Briand Pact, 1928	Rejected war as a 'national instrument' – by 1933 65 states had signed it
World Disarmament Conference, 1932–4	Failed to achieve any agreement. November 1933 Germany withdrew

7 | The Key Debate

To what extent did the Locarno Agreements mark the beginning of a new era of conciliation?

The acceptance of the Dawes Plan and the signature of the Locarno Agreements together marked a fresh start after the bitterness of the immediate post-war years. For the next four years the pace of international co-operation quickened and the League of Nations, despite a hesitant start, grew in authority and influence. After Germany joined the League in 1926 a new framework for Great Power co-operation evolved. The Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Germany (Austen Chamberlain, Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann) regularly attended the meetings of the League Council and Assembly and played a key part in drawing up their agenda and influencing their decisions. The partnership of these three statesmen came to symbolise the new era of peace and apparent stabilisation. All three were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As long as the three European Great Powers co-operated, the League, too, had a chance of working.

Were these men really the great peacemakers they seemed or were they pursuing the same aims as their predecessors, although somewhat more subtly? Stresemann, particularly, is a controversial figure. Initially in the 1950s a debate raged over whether he was a great European statesman or in fact a German nationalist who just went along with Locarno as it suited Germany's interests at that point. Certainly up to 1920 Stresemann had been an uncompromising German nationalist, but in 1923 the gravity of the Ruhr crisis did convince him that only through compromise could Germany achieve the revision of Versailles and the re-establishment of its power in Europe. In a sense, as his most recent biographer, Jonathan Wright, has shown, the logic of Germany's position began to push Stresemann down the road of

European integration. Neither had Briand, who had threatened Germany with the occupation of the Ruhr in April 1921 (see page 103), really changed his fundamental aims. He still sought security against German aggression, but after the failure of Poincaré's Ruhr policy, he was determined to achieve it by co-operation with Britain and Germany itself. In many ways Briand was the right man for the moment. He had a genius for compromise or, as the French historian J. Neré has observed, 'for creating the half-light conducive to harmony'. Chamberlain, too, pursued the same policies as his predecessors, but he had a much stronger hand to play.

As a consequence of France's failure in the Ruhr, the USA's refusal to play a political role in Europe and Soviet Russia's isolation, the Dawes Plan and the Locarno Treaties made Britain the virtual arbiter between France and Germany. In that enviable but temporary position Britain could simultaneously advise the Germans to be patient and the French to compromise, while retaining the maximum freedom to attend to the pressing problems of its empire.

Some key books in the debate:

C.S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1988).

F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times* (Leicester University Press, 1986).

Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed* (OUP, 2005).

J. Wright, *Gustav Stresemann: Weimar's Greatest Statesman* (OUP, 2002).