

Could World War II have been avoided?

Presenters:

Mac Matthews, Auburn Junior High School
LaDonna Powell, Auburn Junior High School
Jay Howell, Auburn University
John Saye, Auburn University

**Social Studies Council of Alabama Annual
Conference – Birmingham Southern College
October 19, 2009**

Full activity available to PIH Network members.

Culminating Activity Lesson Narrative

Central Question: Could World War II have been avoided? Could European democracies have taken different actions to avoid war?

Materials:

- pencil and paper
- country profiles with map of Europe
- overview of country profiles
- crisis scaffolds with embedded stats
- map of changing national boundaries
- main crisis scaffold
- name tags showing roles and national flag

Part A Narrative:European Council Meeting

During Part A of the European Council Culminating Activity, student groups representing various countries engage in a series of negotiating sessions centering on several crisis events.

Teacher begins by reminding students of the CQ, explaining the overall purpose of participating in the European Council, and emphasizing the authentic nature of the task. Teacher should arrange the classroom in preparation for the European Council so that that four groups are facing each other within a larger circle. (See [Diagram](#).) Mixed ability groups are assigned one of the following nations to represent: Great Britain, France, Czechoslovakia, and USSR. Each group is given the appropriate country profile document(see below) as well as country overview chart (see below) which overviews all nations involved in the council. Students should be given time to familiarize themselves with their country profile document prior to beginning the European Council.

[Country Overview Chart](#)

[Great Britain Country Profile](#)

[Czechoslovakia Country Profile](#)

[France Country Profile](#)

[USSR Country Profile](#)

To begin the European Council, teacher will proceed through the following steps: First, review the [European Council Crisis Management Instruction Packet](#) with students. The packet includes policy options available to student groups, procedures for the council, roles, assessment criteria, and editorial/editorial cartoon follow up assignment. Second, review the procedures that will be followed for each crisis scenario. Third, distribute the first crisis scenario and generic [Crisis Scaffold](#) that will be used for all crises. Fourth, open the European Council for business and assist students in proceeding through the steps listed below. Note: Germany is not represented at the council; teacher should advocate for Germany to the extent possible.

For each crisis, *students* will proceed through the following steps:

1. Read the crisis scenario (see below for all 4).
2. Make a Policy Decision: Discuss the crisis, decide your policy, identify possible allies, and develop arguments to convince other countries to join in your policy choice.(10 minutes)
3. Negotiate: Diplomats travel between countries to seek allies and argue for their policy decision. Only Diplomats may travel. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister remain in their country to negotiate with Diplomats from other nations. (5 minutes)
4. Make Final Decision: Diplomats return to home country. Prime Minister leads discussion of any adjustments to policy based upon negotiations with other countries. (5 minutes)
5. European Conference: A conference of European nations is held to resolve the crisis. Foreign ministers present each country's arguments of its policy (1 minute each) and debate a solution to the crisis. (10 minutes)

After a reasonable amount of time for debate, teacher reveals the actual outcome of the crisis and directs students to consider Crisis 2. The steps above are repeated for Crisis 2 and then again for Crisis 3 and Crisis 4.

[Crisis 1: Rhineland](#)

[Crisis 2: Anschluss](#)

[Crisis 3: Czechoslovakia and the Sudetenland](#)

[Crisis 4: Fall of Czechoslovakia](#)

[Crisis Scaffold](#)

[Czechoslovakia Crisis Scaffold](#) (To be given only to Czech group during Crisis 4)

Part B Narrative: Editorial Cartoon or Editorial

During Part B, students are given the option of creating an editorial cartoon or writing an editorial. For both, students are asked to take a position on the CQ.

Teacher presents students with both options, reviews the instructions for both, and reviews models for both.

[Editorial Instructions](#)

[Editorial Model 1 \(Industrial Revolution\)](#)

[Editorial Model 2 \(Industrial Revolution\)](#)

[Editorial Cartoon Instructions](#)

[Editorial Cartoon Scaffold](#)

[IR Editorial Cartoon Model](#)

Resolving 1930s Crises in Europe – Student Directions

You and a group of classmates will be assigned to represent a specific European country in the 1930s. You will be faced with a series of foreign policy crises that occurred during this historical time period. For each crisis you will decide how your country should respond. There is no single correct way to respond to any of the crisis decisions. In each case, the involved countries had a number of options from which to choose. **You do not have to take the same action that your assigned country actually chose in the 1930s.** However, your decision must be historically reasonable: You must show that you understand the conditions and concerns of people who lived in these countries in the 1930s and use historical evidence to defend your decision as the best choice for your country.

Policy Options

For each crisis you have the same general foreign policy options available to any nation:

- 1) **Mobilize your military:** This means that you prepare your military for active combat, but do not yet engage in warfare.
- 2) **Resist with force:** This means putting your military forces into combat against another nation.
- 3) **Form alliance(s) with other nation(s):** This means to seek one or more partners who will join you in whatever action you decide to take. These may be separate agreements with different partners or a joint agreement among all partners to act together.
- 4) **Remain neutral:** This means that you refuse to make alliances or agreements with any nation.
- 5) **Grant demands:** This means that you decide to accept the demands of another nation rather than taking either economic or military steps to discourage that nation's actions.

In coming to a decision, you may combine options to arrive at what you believe to be the most effective and/or just solution. For instance, you may **form an alliance** that agrees to use **economic sanctions** and at the same time **mobilize your military**.

Procedures for Making Your Decision

For each crisis you will follow these steps in coming to your decision:

- 1) **Read the Crisis Scenario.**
- 2) **Make a Policy Decision:** Discuss the crisis, decide your policy, identify possible allies, and develop arguments to convince other countries to join in your policy choice. (10 minutes)
- 3) **Negotiate:** Diplomats travel between countries to seek allies and argue for your policy decision. Only Diplomats may travel. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister remain in their country to negotiate with Diplomats from other nations. (5 minutes)
- 4) **Make Final Decision:** Diplomats return to home country. Prime Minister leads discussion of any adjustments to your policy based upon negotiations with other countries. (5 minutes)
- 5) **European Conference:** A conference of European nations is held to resolve the crisis. Foreign ministers present each country's arguments of its policy (1 minute each) and debate a solution to the crisis. (10 minutes)

Roles

Each member of your group will have specific roles in representing your country:

- **Prime Minister:** You will lead your group in weighing your policy options and developing your country's decision on each crisis. You will conduct discussions with diplomats who visit you from other countries. At the European Conference, you will provide supporting information to the Foreign Minister as needed.
- **Foreign Minister:** You will lead the discussion of possible allies and opponents for your policy decision and the development of arguments to convince other nations to agree with your view of the best solution to the crisis. You will assist the Prime Minister in conducting discussions with diplomats who visit you from other countries. You will present and defend your country's position in the European Conference.
- **Diplomat:** You will travel to other countries and seek to convince other nations to join you in your policy decision. At the European Conference, you will provide supporting information to the Foreign Minister as needed.

Crisis Management Assessment:

Your country's performance in managing the 1930's crises will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Policy decisions demonstrate adequate understanding of the historical facts and issues surrounding each crisis.
2. Policy decisions demonstrate adequate understanding of your assigned country's priorities and resources at the time of the crisis.
3. Policy decisions are historically possible: They represent realistic options that countries at the time could have chosen (they do not have to be the ones that countries actually chose).
4. Policy decisions demonstrate realistic consideration of how other European countries are likely to respond to your decision.
5. Group develops persuasive evidence and arguments to convince other nations of your country's point of view on each crisis
6. Country representatives clearly communicate your country's position and arguments.
7. Country representatives stay in assigned historical roles throughout the Crisis activity.

Individual Editorial Activity:

Following your participation in the Crisis Management Scenarios, you will be asked to use the knowledge you gain from this activity to make an individual decision on the Unit Central Questions: *Could World War II have been prevented? Did the European nations make the wisest policy decisions in managing the 1930s crises and responding to Nazi actions?* You may choose to address this in either a newspaper editorial or an editorial cartoon. You will be provided with specific instructions for completing this task.

Country Overviews

Great Britain:

WWI had a devastating effect on Great Britain. Great Britain had amassed an enormous war debt from financing the war effort. Her war debt combined with the effects of the Great Depression caused an economic collapse that greatly influenced foreign policy during the inter war years. Great Britain's central foreign policy goal was to maintain their empire while at the same time avoiding another costly war, allowing her to focus on solving her economic issues. This, combined with the belief that the Versailles Treaty had been too harsh, led Britain to adopt a reconciliatory approach to Germany in the hopes of discouraging German aggression.

Soviet Union:

Russia suffered the most casualties during WWI. The failing war effort coupled with economic collapse spurred a revolution which forced Russia out of the war. After a bloody civil war, a new communist government emerged and the Soviet Union was born. As a result of leaving the war effort and the establishment of a communist system, the Soviet Union was politically isolated during the inter war years. This new communist government turned their attention to preserving their communist system internally while seeking to spread communism abroad whenever possible. Fearing attacks from the west, much like those that occurred in the past, a major goal of the Soviet government was the security of their western border.

Czechoslovakia:

The nation of Czechoslovakia was born out of the Treaty of Versailles. At its birth it was one of the top ten most industrialized countries in the world. It emerged from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and contained several different groups of people. Its western edge, known as the Sudetenland, was heavily populated by Germans while the rest of the country was comprised of Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenes, Hungarians and Jews. Czechoslovakia's primary concern was uniting these cultural groups under the banner of a single nation. This desire for a national identity influenced their foreign policy, as Czechoslovakia looked to secure itself from aggressive neighboring countries such as Hungary and Germany.

France:

France's casualties from WWI were second only to Russia. A bitter rivalry had developed between France and Germany. Fear of German aggression guided France's foreign policy during the inter war years. France's main objectives were to maintain security in Europe while staying out of another war. This was a difficult task for France because it had an unstable government and an economy suffering the effects of the Great Depression. France looked for other countries to help maintain the balance of power in Europe. Along with securing allies during the inter-war years, France adopted a defensive strategy, fortifying their western border.

Great Britain Country Profile

Role in WWI

During WWI, Britain and Germany were bitter enemies. These sentiments (feelings, emotions) spilled over into the first few years after the war as British antagonism (rivalry, opposition) towards Germany dominated public opinion. This growing anger stemmed from the economic collapse that Great Britain was experiencing, a crisis caused by the strenuous economic costs of the war effort. These economic factors angered the British public as cries across the country were heard to “**Make Germany Pay**” in order to relieve the economic burden that Britain was experiencing.

Historical Background, 1918-1936

The defeat of Germany at the end of WWI also meant the end of the German challenge to Britain’s mastery of the seas. Britain now wanted to retreat from the problems of the European continent in order to deal with more pressing domestic problems. During the 1930’s, England’s economy was devastated by the **Great Depression**. England’s unemployment rate doubled reaching 20% of the work force while their export revenue decreased 50%. Furthermore, England opposed any commitment to uphold the security of the newly formed states of Eastern Europe as the public put its faith in the League of Nations to take up the responsibility of maintaining the balance of power in Europe.

Foreign Policy

On the heels of the economic devastation and large number of casualties of WWI, the horrific results of the Great Depression, and lack of military preparation, Great Britain’s main foreign policy was to avoid another war. In order to accomplish this goal, Britain maintained a strong navy which was second only to the United States, protected its colonies, and maintained strong ties with its allies. France was Britain’s major ally during the inter-war period even though each country differed significantly on whether or not the Treaty of Versailles mistreated Germany. Great Britain believed that Germany was indeed treated too harshly and showed a willingness to revise this treaty; however, the French had no such wishes. The central goal of the British after the First World War was to offer the hand of friendship toward Germany in order to avoid encouraging a spirit of revenge. There was also great hostility to the communist Soviet Union which many British business groups viewed as a much greater threat than fascism. This resulted in a strong opposition to an alliance with the Soviet Union who had remained in political and diplomatic isolation for most of the inter-war period. Furthermore, British and French relations were strained by two agreements between France and the Soviet Union that were signed outside the League of Nations. This increased Great Britain’s willingness to negotiate with Germany and led to the signing of an **Anglo-German Naval Agreement** that allowed Germany to begin rebuilding its navy. By October of 1935 the unity between Great Britain and France completely collapsed when Italy invaded Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia). In response Britain imposed economic sanctions on Italy. However, France did not support these sanctions. This disagreement between France and Britain damaged the credibility of the League of Nations proving that it would be hard pressed to stop military aggression in Europe.

Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.

Czechoslovakia Country Profile

Role in World War I

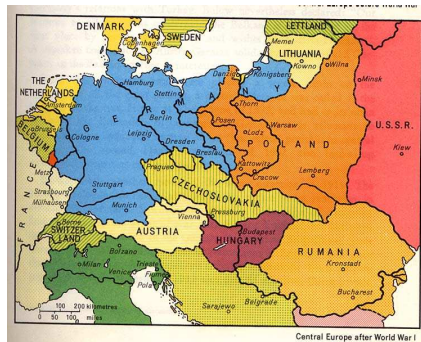
Czechoslovakia (today the independent nations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia) did not exist until after WWI. During WWI, although it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some Czechs and Slovaks did rebel, flee the area, and join a struggle to free their “country” either militarily or politically. Some fought within “Legions” against the Central Powers while others established themselves in foreign cities (like London) and promoted a political agenda of Czech independence.

Historical Background (1918-1936)

At the conclusion of WWI, Czechoslovakia emerged from the now defeated Austro-Hungarian (Hapsburg) Empire. It contained several different groups of peoples. The western edge of the country, known as the Sudetenland (in green at right), was heavily industrialized and heavily populated by Germans (approximately 86%). At its “birth”, Czechoslovakia was among the top ten most industrialized nations in the world.



Czechoslovakia’s primary early concern was uniting multiple cultural groups under the banner of a single nation. Her first President, Masaryk (1918-1935), struggled to satisfy the desires and dreams of Czechs (46%), Slovaks (40%), Germans (10%), Ruthenes, Hungarians, and Jews. Masaryk’s widespread popularity (he is often compared in popularity to George Washington) helped him navigate this difficult time without the new nation breaking apart.



The Great Depression damaged Czechoslovakia much as it did the rest of Europe, but the Sudeten Germans were especially hard hit. Much of their money for business investments came from Germany, which linked them to the U.S. economy (the Dawes Plan and German reparations)...not a good thing in 1929! The Sudeten Germans blamed the Czech government and the Jews for their financial problems. This led to the significant growth of Nazism during the early 1930’s amongst Sudeten Germans.

While they claimed no connection to Hitler, it is clear that the Nazis in Germany were directly supporting this growing movement.

Foreign Policy

During the early 1920’s, Czechoslovakia signed a series of treaties with smaller central European nations to secure herself against Hungary. From that point forward, she would focus on maintaining relations with the larger western European countries. A defensive pact was signed with France in 1924 (France would defend her if attacked). When Masaryk retired in 1935, Benes continued in his footsteps. He signed a defensive pact with the USSR in 1935, but it depended upon France actually actively defending Czechoslovakia before the Soviets would act.

Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.

France Country Profile

Role in World War I

During World War I, France fought along with Great Britain, Russia, USA and other “Allies” against the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. After four long years of fighting, the war finally came to an end. France was devastated by the war. Casualties were tremendous; France lost over one and half million dead, second only to lives lost by the Russians. Since most of the fighting was done in France the country was also physically devastated. The French land had been destroyed, buildings were in rubble, and lives were in chaos (confusion). The French blamed Germany for the war so they sought out harsh punishment for the Germans. The French desire to make Germany pay became the driving force behind Treaty of Versailles negotiations.

Historical Background, 1918-1936

After World War I, French public opinion was strongly against getting involved in another war. The French, however, did not trust the Germans especially considering their long history of armed conflict going all the way back to the Franco-Prussian War. In the early 1930's Europe was weakened by the worldwide Great Depression. However its effects did not reach France until 1932 when the country saw a drop in tourism and a drop in exports including perfumes, wine, and foods. Unemployment in France rose to 15%. Even before the Great Depression, France knew that its population and its economy were too small to compete with Germany. If another war ever occurred, France understood that it would need allies. Because of opposition to communism, France was reluctant (unwilling) to seek an alliance with the Russians. The French looked to Czechoslovakia (with whom it signed an alliance) and other smaller Eastern European countries for support. However, when the German threat became clearer, France signed an alliance with the Soviet Union - the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935. The French also looked to their long time ally, the British, for assurances of support in the event of another German attack.

Foreign Policy

When the British government seemed reluctant to form a military alliance, France chose to emphasize a defensive strategy. The French built a series of fortifications along the border with Germany, the Maginot Line, beginning in 1930 and completed in 1939 at a cost of 3 billion francs. In spite of these military efforts, the French government was in disarray during the interwar years and its policies shifted frequently. As Germany became stronger, France hung to their defensive stance. Should a conflict with Germany emerge, France hoped the British would support them. Although they hoped to discourage German expansion, the French had no real desire to use military force to stop the Germans from attacking other nations.

Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.

Soviet Union Country Profile

Role in World War I

Russia was actively engaged in WWI fighting along side Great Britain and France against Germany and the other Central Powers. In the process it lost more than 3 million soldiers and civilians. By 1917, Russia was beginning to lose the war militarily and her economy was on the verge of collapse. The situation got so bad that a revolution occurred under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. After a bloody civil war, a new communist government emerged and the Soviet Union was born. The Soviet Union withdrew from WWI before it was over so that it could begin to stabilize itself politically and rebuild its poor economy. It was forced to give up large amounts of land in Eastern Europe to the Central Powers as a consequence.

Historical Background, 1918-1936

At various points during the interwar years the Soviet Union's communist government increased its control of the nation's economy. The government's efforts to guide economic development helped the Soviet Union to withstand the worst effects of the world-wide Great Depression. Diplomatically and politically, however, the Soviet Union was isolated during the interwar years. This was due in part to the fact that the Soviet Union had withdrawn from WWI but even more because many European nations feared communism. Because the Soviet Union withdrew from WWI in 1917, it was excluded from the Treaty of Versailles negotiations. When the lands previously given to the Central Powers were divided up by the Allies into new Eastern European nations, the Soviets came to increasingly resent its former allies and also to fear a future invasion. After World War I but before the rise of Adolf Hitler, the Soviets and Germans had occasionally agreed to work together. In one case, Germany and the Soviet Union signed an economic treaty and in another case, the Soviet Union allowed German military forces to train on Soviet land. Friendly relations ended, however, when Hitler came to power and began denouncing communism. When Germany began rearming, the Soviet Union signed a treaty of mutual assistance with France on May 2, 1935. In that treaty, the Soviet Union agreed to assist France if it was attacked by an outside power without provocation. The treaty however was written carefully – France had to be actively engaged defending itself before the Soviet Union was obligated to enter into conflict. Within the framework established by the treaty with France, the Soviet Union also signed a mutual defense agreement with Czechoslovakia.

Foreign Policy

Because the Soviet Union was not a democracy during the interwar years, public opinion had a minimal effect on the foreign policies of the Soviet Union. In fact, during the Great Purge of 1937, Stalin ordered the imprisonment or killing of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens suspected of being traitors. Because of these internal struggles and a fear of even more casualties, most Russian leaders wanted to avoid another war. During these early years, the Soviet Union's foreign policy was pragmatic; it was interested in preserving its communist system. One way to ensure Soviet safety was for other nations in Europe to become communist. To this end, the Soviet Union established the Communist International in the hopes of spreading communism to other nations. This group addressed Joseph Stalin's fear that Western Europe would save itself by pushing aggressive nations like Germany to the east. The Soviet Union therefore felt obligated to work with countries to stop fascist governments. If it ensured communism's survival, the Soviet Union was willing to assist countries who were opposed to fascism even if they were opposed to communism. Going to the aid of any nation in Western Europe, however, would require Poland or Romania to allow the Soviet "Red" Army to pass. Although the Soviet Union was not willing to publicly commit to fighting against fascism, they encouraged Western Europe to resist fascist aggression wherever it occurred.

Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.

The Rhineland Crisis

The Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to take full blame for the war and to pay huge reparations to the victors that crippled the German economy. The treaty also placed strict limitations on German military power. The German army could have no more than 100,000 troops, its navy was limited to a 36-vessel coastal defense force, and it was not allowed to possess tanks, submarines, battleships, or aircraft. Under the treaty, Germany lost 13 % of its national territory to France and Poland. In addition, the German coalmining region of Saar was put under the control of the League of Nations. Finally, to address French demands for a buffer zone to protect itself from future German aggression, the treaty included a provision demilitarizing the German Rhineland region: No German troops or fortifications were ever to be placed there. The Rhineland contained 18.5% of Germany's land and 24% of its population. Hitler first defied the treaty in 1935 when he announced German re-armament and introduced a military draft to build up the army. Then, on March 7, 1936, thousands of German troops entered the demilitarized Rhineland zone. On the same day, Hitler stated that he was willing to re-join the League of Nations and wanted to negotiate with France and Belgium over the status of the Rhineland. He also offered non-aggression pacts to France and Belgium. Hitler explained that placing German troops in the Rhineland was a necessary act of self-defense because of the 1935 Franco-Soviet treaty. In this agreement, France agreed to aid the Soviets if they were attacked by the Germans.

As German troops marched into the Rhineland, France was in the midst of elections and without stable leadership. Despite this internal political turmoil, the French immediately sent thousands of troops to the German border. "All over Europe statesmen met to talk over the situation. Telephone and telegraph wires and cables flashed diplomatic dispatches. Diplomatic couriers were started on a race through Europe by train, motor car and airplane (The Cleveland Press, March 7, 1936)."

Decision Point: How should your nation respond to Germany's actions?

Relative Military & Economic Strengths: 1936

	Military	Economic (% Change)			
	Army Divisions (10,000/div.)	1929-32		1932-37	
		GDP	Indus. Prod.	GDP	Indus. Prod.
Britain	2	-5.8	-11.4	25.7	52.9
France	53	-11.0	-25.6	7.9	20.0
Czech.	na *	-18.2	-26.5	20.3	51.5
USSR	na	6.9	66.7	146.7	59.3
Germany	10-12**	-15.7	-40.8	67.5	122.2
USA	na	-28.0	-44.7	46.6	86.8

* na = Information not available

**Germany was limited to 10 divisions by the Treaty of Versailles but had been rearming and also had paramilitary SS and SA troops.

