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United Nations Security Council

Topic 1:

Resolving the Division of Cyprus and Competing Territorial Claims

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Topic Overview

Beginning on July 23rd, 1914, this crisis committee will examine the diplomatic decisions that led to the transformation of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand into a European war. Each delegate represents a major power of that era. During this period of time, ultimatums, alliance commitments, mobilization and military planning had the potential to either contain the crisis or cause it to escalate. Delegates are expected to use their understanding of the historical setting as a basis for their decisions, however, they are encouraged to consider plausible alternative scenarios based upon the facts known at that point in history.

Background Information

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 was carried out by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb nationalist. On July 23, Austria-Hungary sent an ultimatum to Serbia with Germany's backing. While Serbia agreed to some of the terms set forth by the ultimatum, it refused to agree to other terms without conditions. Therefore, Austria-Hungary initiated a declaration of war against Serbia on July 28. Russia then began to mobilize its forces; Germany declared war on both France and Russia; Germany invaded Belgium; and Great Britain entered the conflict, thereby expanding the scope of the conflict. However, the alliances between nations played a role in shaping the conflict, as did the choices made by national leaders, the schedules of each nation's military, the perceived threats each nation felt from other nations, and the inability of each nation to resolve disputes through diplomatic channels.

International Frameworks and Previous Actions

During 1914, there was no such thing as the United Nations or League of Nations. Both were established post-WW1, so delegates should concentrate on using diplomatic procedures and treaties to find solutions.

Key Challenges

The leadership was facing uncertainty, internal political pressures, concern over strategic disadvantages and a potential military plan which emphasized quickness. There was disagreement among the governments regarding how credible the assurances were and what was meant by "mobilization."

The honor of the nation and the credibility of the alliance would have made any type of compromise politically costly.

The delegates must control the possibility that their defensive preparations would be viewed as offensive actions, and that a small conflict would create larger commitments.

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Possible Areas for Resolution

1. Mediation: Think about meetings help from a third party talks that have set times to finish and ways for everyone to save face
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1. Ultimatums and guarantees: Look into conditions ways to check that promises are kept and guarantees that deal with safety worries without asking for total surrender.

1. De-escalation: Talk about stoppable military actions letting people know in advance and taking short breaks to make room for talks.

1. Alliance management: Think about how friends can help each other but also stop things from getting worse and keep choices open when making decisions.

1. Crisis communication: Check out lines, between leaders and diplomats to stop mistakes from happening and to stop things from getting out of control.

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Questions to Consider

1. Which demands in Austria-Hungary's ultimatum were most difficult for Serbia to accept, and why?

2. What could Germany have done to support Austria-Hungary without encouraging a wider war?

3. How might Russia have supported Serbia while reducing the perceived threat to Austria-Hungary?

4. What role could Britain, France or Italy have played in mediation?

5. How did mobilisation plans and deadlines limit diplomatic choices?

6. Which single decision or communication could plausibly have changed the course of the crisis?

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Suggested Research Sources

US Department of State: Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914 — https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1914Supp

Avalon Project: The Austro-Hungarian Ultimatum to Serbia — https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/ultimatum.asp

Encyclopaedia Britannica: World War I — https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I

Imperial War Museums: Causes of World War One — https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-caused-the-first-world-war