



Source 4

Statement about a meeting between British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, and a deputation from the League of Nations on 13 December 1935

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Questions

1. These representatives from the League of Nations wanted Britain to apply economic sanctions to Italy to hinder its war effort in Abyssinia. Baldwin decided to take no further action. Why?
2. What did the British government fear might happen if Britain stood up to Mussolini?
3. According to this source, what would be the chances of France getting involved? Why?
4. What other actions could Britain have taken to stop Mussolini?



Source 4a

Strictly confidential.

The Prime Minister received our deputation in a most friendly way. He assured us that he held faithfully to all his pledges with regard to the League and suggested that the interview should be both frank and confidential. It was agreed that no information should be given to the press and only a confidential written memorandum put before the Executive of the LNU.

The Prime Minister said that the League policy is still the policy of the Government and we were all in agreement in desiring that that policy should be effective. Translating desire into action, however, raised extremely difficult questions. He then explained the great gravity of the European situation, including the danger that Mussolini might make a "mad dog" attack on the British fleet. Though the result of such an attack must in the long run be the defeat of Italy, the war might last some time and produce both losses and diplomatic complications of a serious kind. Meantime we were bound to consider whether we could rely on effective support from any other Member of the League. No Member except Great Britain had made any preparations for meeting an attack. As to France, apart from the sympathy of the parties of the Right for Mussolini, the whole French nation had a horror of war



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Source 4b

and could hardly be mobilized by any provocation short of actual invasion. Consequently M. Laval would not consent - at any rate without first making further efforts at conciliation - to any step likely to precipitate an act of war by Mussolini, as the embargo on oil very probably would. He considered, however, that there might be some change in French opinion if Mussolini had been offered, and had refused to accept, peace terms which Laval would no doubt put before the French nation as highly favourable to Italy.

Nor was there any hope of finding an effective ally outside France.

The Prime Minister expatiated on the preparedness for war of the despotic powers such as Italy and Germany and the comparative unpreparedness of the parliamentary nations, such as England and France, and drew the general conclusion that the experience of the last few months had disclosed a situation which would require the gravest possible attention on the part of all the States Members of the League. The course of events in dealing with an aggressor seemed likely in the end to require effective action upon the territory of the aggressor. With the exception of ourselves (and our own preparations had fallen far into arrears) none



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of the Members of the League seemed in a position to take action of that kind.

There was no discussion of the merits of the Hoare-Laval proposals, nor how far the British Government was committed to them. The Prime Minister told us that, though he considered the oil-embargo raised many serious difficulties both because of French opposition and because of its inherent dangers and difficulties, Mr. Eden's instructions were to vote for continuing the present sanctions. He thought they were exercising a pressure greater than was commonly believed and were likely, in conjunction with the other difficulties of the Abyssinian campaign, to put Signor Mussolini in a much weaker position by the time of the next rains.