

WISMUNC I

The First Iteration Of Washington
International School's Model United Nations
Conference



The Fate of Tenochtitlan, June 1520

Novice Crisis Committee

Background Guide

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Letters from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

I'm Shiloh, a senior at WIS. I've been part of Model UN since 8th grade and have been competing ever since. This year, I'm Co-President of the MUN Club at WIS. Outside of MUN, I serve as the Secretary of our student government, teach Tae Kwon Do, and am an avid scuba diver. I'm excited to guide delegates through this committee and see what strategies they come up with in the heat of the moment.

Sincerely,

Shiloh Wallace

Chair, The Fate of Tenochtitlan, June 1520

Dear Delegates,

My name is Lorelei Hillier and I am a Grade 11 student at WIS. I am very excited to welcome you to this year's conference as your Vice Chair! I have been involved in Model UN since Grade 9 and one of my favourite MUN experiences was attending BOSMUN. It was such a fun and memorable conference that made MUN so enjoyable for me. Outside of MUN, some of my main interests are listening to music and going to concerts. I enjoy discovering new music and experiencing my favorite artists live, as well as spending time with friends.

As your Vice Chair, my goal is to make sure everyone feels comfortable participating in the committee and has the opportunity to contribute. Since this is a novice committee, I hope you will not be afraid to ask questions, speak up and try new things. I am really looking forward to meeting all of you and seeing the ideas and perspectives you bring to the committee. I hope you have an amazing conference and, most importantly, have fun!

Best,

Lorelei Hillier

Vice Chair, The Fate of Tenochtitlan, June 1520

Historical Context

Introduction

The arrival of the Spanish army in Mesoamerica in 1519 was a major turning point in the history of the region. Led by the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, they entered a politically complex area that was largely controlled by the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan.

The Formation of the Triple Alliance

Before the Spanish arrived, central Mexico contained many different Indigenous communities and political groups that were not all controlled by one government and did not always agree with one another. In 1428, Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan formed the Triple Alliance after defeating the powerful Tepanec city of Azcapotzalco. The alliance became one of the strongest political and military powers in central Mexico.. Over time, Tenochtitlan became the dominant member of the alliance, creating an imbalance of power between the three cities. Like Tenochtitlan, Texcoco was also an important political and cultural centre, while Tlacopan played a smaller role. The alliance expanded its influence through military campaigns and the system of tribute: payments made by communities under the control or influence of the alliance. These payments could include food, textiles, luxury goods, and labour. Tribute helped support the large population of Tenochtitlan and allowed the alliance to maintain its military power. However, the tribute system also created resentment and sparked disagreements. Some communities did not want to be controlled by the Mexica or forced to provide tribute. Although many communities continued to have their own local leaders and systems of government, they were still expected to recognize the power of the Triple Alliance. This became important when the Spanish arrived, as Cortés entered a region that was powerful but politically divided. This division created opportunities for the Spanish to make alliances since not every Indigenous community supported the Mexica.

Political Divisions

One of the most important challenges facing the Triple Alliance is the political division between different Indigenous communities. The Mexica had expanded their influence through warfare and political relationships but not every community accepted its rule due to forceful requirements to pay tribute as well as long histories of conflict with the Mexica. This has meant that since Cortés arrived, there has been no single Indigenous response to the Spanish as some communities have fought against them, while others have formed alliances and some are changing their positions as the situation is developing. Tlaxcala was one of the most important examples of this as it was an independent Indigenous state that had a long history of conflict with the Mexica. When Cortés first encountered the Tlaxcalans, they did not immediately become his allies. Instead, they initially fought against the Spanish. However, after several battles, the Tlaxcalans decided to work with Cortés because they saw an opportunity to weaken their longtime enemy. This alliance is extremely important to Cortés as the Tlaxcalans provide thousands of soldiers, supplies and knowledge about the region while also helping the Spanish build relationships with other Indigenous communities. The Tlaxcalans are not simply helping the Spanish without reason as they have their own political goals and believe that working with Cortés could benefit their community. This shows that Indigenous groups are playing an active role in the conflict and are making their own decisions based on their personal political interests rather than simply being caught between Spain and the Triple Alliance. The alliance with Tlaxcala is therefore becoming one of the most important factors allowing Cortés to increase his forces and challenge the power of the Triple Alliance. These competing interests created a complex political landscape where the loyalty of indigenous states was not assumed, meaning that alliances could shift depending on which side communities believed would best protect their own interests.

Cortés and the Spanish Strategy

Hernán Cortés arrived on the Gulf Coast of Mexico in 1519 as the leader of a Spanish expedition that had come from Cuba. Cortés did not immediately march toward Tenochtitlan and attack, but instead spent time gathering information about the region and developing relationships with Indigenous communities. This is an important part of his strategy because he quickly learned that there are rivalries

between different Indigenous groups, allowing him to use these divisions to his advantage. Cortés also faced difficulties with communication as the Spanish did not speak the languages of the Indigenous communities they encountered. Gerónimo de Aguilar was a Spanish survivor who had learned a Mayan language after spending years among Indigenous people and became an interpreter for Cortés. Malintzin, also known as Doña Marina or La Malinche, later became another extremely important interpreter as she spoke Nahuatl and Maya and helped Cortés communicate with Indigenous leaders. However, Malintzin's importance went beyond simply translating words as she also helped Cortés understand political relationships and communicate during negotiations. Her role shows that communication and diplomacy are extremely important to the Spanish campaign because without the ability to communicate, Cortés would struggle to create the alliances he needs to challenge the Triple Alliance. Malintzin was able to help Cortes understand the concerns and interests of different indigenous leaders which allowed him to negotiate with communities that may have been opposed to Mexica rule. This made communication an important part of Spanish diplomacy because Cortes needed to understand the political situation around him before deciding which communities could become potential allies. Cortes is, therefore, relying on more than military strength as he uses diplomacy, information and political divisions to increase his influence in the region.

Montezuma II and the arrival of the Spanish in Tenochtitlan

Moctezuma II was the ruler of Tenochtitlan when Cortés arrived and faced difficult decisions about how to respond to the unfamiliar Spanish forces. Reports about the Spanish reached Tenochtitlan before Cortés entered the city and Moctezuma responded through diplomatic exchanges and the sending of gifts. In November 1519, Cortés and his forces entered Tenochtitlan and were initially able to stay in the city peacefully. However, tensions between the Spanish and Mexica quickly increased, and Cortes eventually took Moctezuma into Spanish custody, allowing the Spanish to place pressure on the Mexica leadership.

Spanish-Mexican Relations

The relationship between the Spanish and the Mexica has become increasingly violent as both sides have begun to view the other as a serious threat. While Cortés

was in Tenochtitlan another Spanish force led by Pánfilo de Narváez arrived to challenge Cortés which forced him to leave the city and deal with the new Spanish threat. Cortés left Pedro de Alvarado in charge of the Spanish forces inside Tenochtitlan and while Cortés was away Alvarado ordered an attack during a religious ceremony at the Templo Mayor. The attack caused outrage among the people of Tenochtitlan and contributed to a large uprising against the Spanish as the people began fighting back against the foreign soldiers who had taken control of their city. The situation has become extremely dangerous for the Spanish as they were surrounded by people who had previously allowed them to remain in Tenochtitlan and Moctezuma's position also became increasingly unstable. Moctezuma died during this period although Spanish and Indigenous accounts disagree about how his death occurred which makes it difficult to know exactly what happened. The Spanish have now been forced to escape from Tenochtitlan in June 1520 in an event that has become known as La Noche Triste or the Night of Sorrows. During the retreat the Spanish and their Indigenous allies suffered heavy losses which demonstrates that the Spanish are not guaranteed to win the conflict. Cortés is now forced to regroup and rebuild his alliances while deciding what his next move will be and whether he can continue his campaign against Tenochtitlan.

The Threat of Disease

Disease is becoming another major threat to the Triple Alliance as smallpox reaches central Mexico and spreads rapidly through Indigenous communities that have little or no previous exposure to the disease. The epidemic is killing large numbers of people and is affecting not only ordinary citizens but also important political and military leaders which is creating further instability at a time when the Mexica were already dealing with war. The effects of the disease are also going beyond the loss of individual leaders as communities are losing family members, workers and soldiers which could make it more difficult for the Mexica to organize a strong resistance. The continued spread of smallpox could seriously affect the population and political stability of the region and may change the balance of power between the Spanish, the Mexica and their Indigenous allies. However, disease is not the only challenge facing the Triple Alliance as political divisions, military conflict and the growing number of Indigenous communities supporting Cortés are also shaping the situation.

Competing Perspectives

The conflict involves many different groups and each has their own goals and reasons for making the decisions they do. The Spanish were interested in gaining wealth, land and political power while also spreading Christianity and expanding Spanish influence. Cortés also has personal goals including increasing his own wealth and political position which influence the way he approaches the conflict. The Mexica have different goals as they wanted to protect Tenochtitlan, maintain their political power and defend their territory from the Spanish and their Indigenous allies. After the Spanish entered the city the Mexica resistance has become focused on removing the Spanish and protecting their independence. The Tlaxcalans have their own political interests and their long-standing conflict with the Mexica is one of the main reasons they are willing to work with Cortés. Their alliance is helping them challenge Mexica power but it also raises questions about what continued Spanish involvement could mean for their own political independence. Other Indigenous communities also have different relationships with the Triple Alliance as some want independence from Mexica rule while others oppose the Spanish and some may change their position depending on how the conflict develops. There is therefore no single Indigenous perspective on the Spanish arrival and understanding these different viewpoints is important when considering how different communities may respond to the growing conflict.

Current Situation

In June 1520, when this committee is occurring, the political situation in central Mexico is continuing to become unstable as the Spanish presence has created new alliances and tensions between Indigenous states. The Mexica and Tlaxcacans remain longtime enemies due to years of prior conflict and tension, making an alliance or agreement between them highly unlikely. On the other hand, the Spanish and Tlaxcacans have formed a strong alliance because the Tlaxcacans see this as an opportunity to weaken Mexica power while Cortes gains soldiers, supplies and regional knowledge. Being one of the members of the triple alliance but having independent political interests and less power than Tenochtitlan, Texcoco has an ambivalent relation with Mexica. The Spanish have developed relationships with other Indigenous groups, using already existing rivalries between the Indigenous states to their advantage. Concurrently, the Mexica have varying relationships with the Indigenous states, including allies and rivalries. These diverse relationships construct a complex, unstable political environment that is constantly shaping the situation and changing based on each group's individual goals and beneficial interests. Delegates, it is up to you to work together to figure out the Fate of Tenochtitlan.

List of Characters

Hernán Cortés - Conquistador (Spanish)

Hernán Cortés led the Spanish expedition from Cuba, originally arriving in South America to come to the aid of fellow conquistador Juan de Grijalba, who was tasked with exploring the Yucatán Peninsula. When he arrived in South America, he was in command of 11 ships and 500 soldiers.

Gerónimo de Aguilar - Translator (Spanish)

Gerónimo de Aguilar boarded a ship headed for Hispanola, only for the ship to become shipwrecked during a storm. When himself and the surviving members of the crew came onto land, they were quickly captured by the Maya. When he was eventually freed by Cortés, Aguilar had learned the Mayan language, and became a translator for Cortés.

Alfonso Delgado* - Representative of the Governor of Cuba (Spanish)

Alfonso Delgado has come on Hernán Cortés' mission as a direct representative of Diego Velazquez, the current governor of Cuba, who sent Cortés on his mission in the first place. As time passes and tails of the conquistadors' growing success pass down to the governor, he begins to grow jealous of the fame his soldier is receiving.

Pedro de Alvarado* - Lieutenant (Spanish)

One of Cortés' most trusted men, Thomas de Alvarado commands a significant portion of Cortes' troops. As second in command, Alvarado is set to succeed Cortes as the leader of the mission should he become incapacitated.

Enrique López* - Ship Builder (Spanish)

Enrique López helped create the ships originally used in order to reach the Yucatan peninsula. He was brought along with the mission in order to make repairs as necessary and

Tetlepanquetzatl - Ruler (Tlacopan)

Tetlepquetzatl has military control of the Tlacopan force, yet their numbers are

lesser than both the Tenotichlan and Texcoc armies. Tetzepanquetzatl represents his people's interests, acting as a representative of both the Tlacopan and Triple Alliance, though the second is a lesser priority.

Coatl* - Commoner (Tlacopan)

Coatl represents the interests of everyday people. While not having the same military powers as other members of the committee, Coatl has the ability to rally the common people to a cause that would support their needs. Coatl is a farmer by trade.

Yaretzi* - Merchant (Tlacopan)

Yaretzi is a middle class merchant that travels throughout the peninsula. Through their trade, they have made numerous connections across multiple tribes, but are still loyal to the Tlacopan. Yaretzi has a vested interest in keeping trade routes open.

Tracael* - Political Advisor (Tlacopan)

Tracael is the senior advisor to Tetzepanquetzatl. As an advisor, Tracael's official interests align with the interests of the ruler.

Atotoztli* - Next in line to the throne (Tlacopan)

Atotoztli is Tetzepanquetzatl's only child, being next in line for the throne if something were to happen to their father. They don't hold any official power but have great influence as the sole heir of the Tlacopan leadership.

Cuitlahuac - Military Leader (Tenochtitlan)

Focuses on defending Tenochtitlan and organizing resistance against the Spanish. Wants to protect Mexico independence and remove the Spanish's presence. Has the ability to make military decisions in response to Spanish movements.

Cuauhatemoc - Military Commander (Tenochtitlan)

Focuses on protecting the city and strong military presence. Aims to prevent Spanish influence from expanding. Has the ability to advocate for aggressive action against the Spanish and their allies.

Quetzalli* - Religious Leader (Tenochtitlan)

Focuses on religious and cultural concerns during the crisis. Aims to protect Mexica religious traditions and respond to the disruption caused by the Spanish. Conducts religious ceremonies and can interpret events through a religious perspective.

Yolotl* - Political Advisor (Tenochtitlan)

Focuses on internal politics and maintaining the power of Tenochtitlan. Aims to protect the authority of Mexica leadership and prevent political divisions. Through diplomacy, can conduct negotiations that deal with other Indigenous states.

Atlas* - Supply Commander (Tenochtitlan)

Focuses on maintaining food, supplies and soldiers in defense of Tenochtitlan. Aims to keep the city supplied and prepared for conflict. Manages resources and plans the city's defense.

I Alejandro Gomez II* - Texcocan Ruler (Texcoco)

Focuses on protecting Texcoco's political independence. Aims to strengthen Texcoco's position in the Triple Alliances. Can decide how closely Texcoco should operate with Tenochtitlan.

Tenoch Texcoco - Political Advisor and Noble (Texcoco)

Focuses on the relationship between Texcoco and Tenochtitlan. Makes sure Texcoco's interests aren't ignored by the Mexica. Can conduct internal Triple Alliance negotiations.

Comoc* - Texcocan Military Commander (Texcoco)

Focuses on Texcoco's military forces and aims to protect Texcoco from the Spanish. Has the ability to decide whether or not to send troops to support Tenochtitlan.

Tenoch - Diplomat (Texcoco)

Focuses on Texcoco's relationships with other states and builds these relationships for the benefit of Texcoco. Can negotiate with Indigenous communities and can communicate with the Spanish

Tonatiuh* - Texcocan Religious Leader (Texcoco)

Focuses on protecting Texcoco's traditions and cultural identity. Can assist with religious concerns and responses to disagreements with the Spanish.

*Means a character is fictional. If you are playing a fictional character, you can use the information given to you about them in order to determine their opinions and goals during the committee.

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