To what extent was the League of Nation’s Failure to maintain Peace in the Interwar period due to its inherent Weakness?

The Interwar period was tension fuelled due to the tenuous peace that was sought following the First World War. Many aspects contributed to the unease of this period, including changing borders and new nations in Europe, dictators and their invasions, and weak ‘powers’ in the West; but most importantly was President Woodrow Wilson’s idea of the League of Nations, it was the main point of his fourteen and therefore a feature on every peace treaty written in 1919-1920. The League of Nations Covenant stated that the League was set up to provide an international forum for discussion to prevent future disagreements, however the same Covenant also greatly limited the effectiveness of the League, as did the absence of major powers and the self-interest of key members. Therefore the turbulence of the Interwar period was not only caused by changing international relations but also, and significantly, by the failure of the League of Nations to secure peace after World War One.

The League of Nations was inherently weak from the start due to several factors, one of the most important was the absence of the USA. Following the Paris Peace Conference Wilson had taken the Treaty to the American Senate to attempt to have it ratified, however due to both public opinion against the harsh treaty and the American government’s reluctance to get involved in European and Colonial wars through the military sanctions, the Senate never signed the Treaty. This meant that the USA did not ratify the League of Nations and were therefore not a member of the League. Not only did this mean that the League lost a huge deal of international authority, credibility and economic backing but it also meant that the USA would not take part in any sanctions placed on nations condemned by the League. The Sanctions were hugely weakened by the presence of the USA, firstly if the League imposed a trade sanction on a nation, they would still be able to export and import goods to and from the USA, the world’s richest and most affluent nation, and secondly the military sanction was made inherently weaker by the lack of US troops to support the crippled European powers of Great Britain and France.

The US were not the only ones not to join the League of Nations, both Germany and Russia were not invited to join the League. Germany had obviously been defeated and then blamed for war guilt, the Big Three did not invite the incriminated nation to join their peace-making force. Also, Russia was not a member of the League from the start because she had been defeated in 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had crippled her and communism was rising, the Peace-makers saw this opposing ideology as a big threat and therefore did not invite Russia to the League. No attention was paid to either Germany or Russia’s economic influences on Eastern Europe - perhaps their involvement in the League could have helped to stabilise the region - and the League of Nations looked like a ‘Victors Club’ to the international community.

The members that did form the major powers that made up the Council of the League were Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan, all of these nations had been greatly crippled by the war. This hugely impacted the League of Nations because it left the countries feeling defensive of their own and they therefore adopted a policy of self-interest. This meant that the countries did little to aid other nations and focused purely on what would result in the best outcome for them. This was mainly shown through the unwillingness to commit troops to the League. The League of Nations had no army however it had Military Sanctions as one of its strategies to prevent war; this meant that countries had to volunteer their troops and because all of the main countries who would have been able to provide troops were operating a policy of self-interest no troops ever fought on behalf of the League of Nations. It was obvious that no one wanted to re-live the horrors of World War One and