The Siege of Rhodes (1480)

Crisis Committee

Background Guide
Welcome!

My name is Dylan Sexton and I will serve as the chair of the Siege of Rhodes Crisis Committee. I am a senior at Florida Virtual School and have been in FLVS’s Model United Nations for three years. I have attended over twelve conferences and chaired several as well. Outside of FLVS’s MUN, I also am the Deputy Secretary General of Global Debates for O-MUN and the founder of Model United Nations Global Initiative. Crisis committees are awesome because it is crisis.

My name is Erica Nathan and I will serve as the co-chair of the Siege of Rhodes Crisis Committee as well as serve on the crisis staff. I am a senior at Florida Virtual School and have been with FLVS’s Model United Nations since the beginning of this year. In addition to being the webmaster for MUN, working on the executive team of MUNGI, and coming up with insane ideas like this committee, I am very active in many of Florida Virtual School’s other clubs. I intend to pursue a career and astrophysics, but plan to continue on with Model UN in college. Since starting MUN, it is easy to say that crisis committees are my absolute favorite due to their dynamic nature and invitation for creativity.

My name is Matthew Youngster and I will serve as the director of the crisis staff for the Siege of Rhodes Crisis Committee. I am a senior at Florida Virtual School and have been with FLVS’s Model United Nations since the beginning of this year. Since joining this club, I’ve had the pleasure of attending two MUN conferences rife with crises and they have quickly become, by far, my favorite part of the Model UN. In addition to MUN, I also am a part of FLVS’s Student Ambassadors where I was the Vice President for two years and FLVS’ Rook’s Nook Chess Club where I am serving my 3rd term as an officer, currently as President of the club. I plan to pursue my dream career in Law; specifically Criminal Defense, whilst also remaining an active participant in Model UN at the college level. Crisis-style committees are by far the most exciting type of Model UN committee; rife with excitement, intrigue, deception, and fast-paced action; I hope you’ll enjoy this thrilling aspect of the MUN world.
Crisis Committee

Crisis Committees are a unique committee format on the Model United Nations circuit. Unlike a general assembly committee, there are only a small number of delegates on crisis committees. As such, delegates on crisis will speak more than in assembly. Unmoderated caucusing is used more in crisis. As the sessions progress, the crisis staff will introduce new crisis updates that will impact the committee's initiatives. To deal with these, delegates can use any of the forms of writing in crisis: directives, press releases, communiques, and notes. Each position will be notified at the beginning of the first session of their portfolio powers.

Though some crisis committees require position papers, they will not be required for FLVSMUN Crisis: Siege of Rhodes.

Introduction

In this background guide, you will find a brief history of the situation, general information, and information for the various position in this committee. While position papers are not required, conducting research on your position and the situation is highly advisable. Remember, in crisis, ANYTHING can happen. Our committee will begin in late May of 1480. (Please note that time can pass faster than usual in crisis committees.) Scouting ships have reported increased activity on the Ottoman coast and the Knights of St. John fear that this may be indication of a possible attack. Tensions between Rhodes and the Ottoman Empire have been evident for years, as seen by the evacuations of nearby islands over the last decade.

The Knights of St. John

Also known as the Knights Hospitaler, The Knights of St. John are the last major Crusader-era order still operating in the fight against the expanse of Islam across the Western world. Founded in 1099 by Blessed Gerard Thom as an order dedicated to the care of pilgrims, the sick, and the homeless, this mission remained the cornerstone of the order even after its transformation into a military order under Blessed Gerard’s successor, the first Grand Master of the Order, Raymond du Puy.

The Knights of St. John soon became renowned throughout the Holy Land and the whole of the Western world for their bravery and heroics in the many battles against the Muslims in the Holy Land. With their black mantles emblazoned with a white cross, the Knights were distinctive and stylish figures in Outremer (The Holy Land) for as long as there was Western presence there throughout the years of the Crusades.

The organization of the Knights of St. John divided the order into nine langues (or tongues) consisting of England, France, Auvergne, Provence, Germany, Italy, Castile, Portugal and
Aragon. The French element was by far the strongest. The order had been founded in that country, and as it possessed no less than three of the langues (France, Auvergne, and Provence) and held the greater part of the high official positions in the Order, it was only kept in check by the other langues acting together to demand their fair share of dignities. The authority of the Grand Master was considerable, but it was checked by the council, which was composed of bailiffs and knights of the highest order, known as Grand Priors. Each of these Grand Priors was elected by Knights from that langue. All of these Grand Priors had supreme authority over the Knights from that region and had a seat on the Council of the Knights of St. John, which was headed by the Grand Master, who has the supreme authority over every Knight in the Order.

Each of the Grand Prior had a role in the running of the Order; in alphabetical order by langue, here are their respective duties:

❖ The Grand Prior of Auvergne was the Commander-in-Chief of all military forces on the island army and navy. His duty was to ensure that all troops stationed on the island were working in a way beneficial to the defense of the island from any attacker. This position of influence was kept in check by other Grand Priors who were responsible for specific parts of the forces.

❖ The Grand Prior of England was the Commander of the Calvary. While the order of St. John no longer has a strong focus on calvary fighting, occupying as they do, an island fortress; the cavalry forces of the Order nonetheless remain formidable.

❖ The Grand Prior of France was the Grand Hospitaller. He had supreme authority over the direction and running of all of the hospitals (today known as guesthouses) and infirmaries of the Order. This meant that he was responsible for the care of any troops injured in battle as well as the well-keeping of the residents of the island and the refugees trapped there by the Ottomans’ aggression.

❖ The Grand Prior of Italy was the Grand Admiral of the Order. As the headquarters of the Knights is an island, the power of the Order’s Navy is essential to it’s power. As a result, the Knights of St. John maintain a small but powerful Navy, built in proportion to the number of Knights on the island. The Grand Admiral maintains complete independence over all naval movements and absolute power over any Knight who serves on a Naval ship of the Order.

❖ The Grand Prior of Provence was the Grand Commander of the Order. Under this position, the Knight holding this office was responsible for the treasury, stores, and arsenal (including artillery). As a result, he was the officer in charge of all the expenditures of the Order and responsible for keeping the Order from falling into debt; an event which would be dishonorable. This officer was also the Knight responsible for maintaining the stores of the Order and ensuring their was enough food, weapons, ammunition, slaves, and other supplies to secure the safe defense of Rhodes.

In the early days of the Order, when Jerusalem was in the hands of Christians, the care of the hospitals was its chief and most important function. Innumerable pilgrims visited Jerusalem, and these were entertained at the immense guesthouse of the Order. But with the loss of
Jerusalem and the expulsion of the Christians from Palestine, that function had become of very secondary importance, although there was still a guesthouse and infirmary at Rhodes where strangers and the sick were carefully attended by the Knights. Very rarely now did these Knights ride out to battle of their war horses. It was now on the sea that the foe was met most often, and the Knights had become more sailor than soldier in recent decades, with the vast majority of fights taking place on the sea against corsairs, pirates, and Ottoman galleons.

Each langue has charge of a separate part of the wall. From the foot of the mole of St. Nicholas to the Palace of the Grand Master is the section defended by the langue of France. From the Palace of the Grand Master to the Baston & Gate of St. George is the section defended by the langue of Germany. From that gate until the Tower of Spain is the section defended by the langue of Auvergne. The wall between the Tower of Spain and the Tower of St. Mary as well as the lower level of the Tower of St. Mary is the section defended by the langue of England. The upper level of the Tower of St. Mary and the wall extending to the gate of St. John is the section defended by the langue of Aragon. From that point until the Tower of Italy is the section defended by the langue of Provence. Finally, the seafront, including the crucially important mole and Tower of St. Nicholas is defended equally by the langues of Italy and Castile. The Palace of the Grand Master is defended by a set force comprised of an equal number of Knights from each langue.

The town of Rhodes is defended by 10 great towers (also known as bastions) each of which has troops and 6 cannons stationed on them. The walls are 20 feet thick and further strengthened by small square towers at regular intervals. Surrounding the exterior of the walls facing the land was a massive ditch cut from solid rock that ran around the whole circuit of the walls. This ditch was between 40 and 60 feet deep and from 90 to 140 feet wide. It was from this massive cutting that the stones for the building of the walls, towers, and buildings of the town had been taken; this labor being performed by a host of slaves captured by the Knights (mostly corsairs and pirates). The houses of the town are all built of stone, with flat roofs. The streets were very narrow and were crossed at frequent intervals by broad stone arches. This had the effect of not only giving shelter from enemy fire, but of affording means by which troops could march rapidly across the town upon the roofs of houses to reinforce the defenders of the wall wherever they are needed. By law, all homes are built at the same height so as to make this easier. During times of peace, the people of the town use the roofs of their homes as a resort in the evening; spreading carpets and couches and receiving visitors and talking with neighbors over the low walls that separate the roofs.

For the past 2 years, the town has been preparing harder than ever for an attack; ever since word came from the spies of the Grand Master that the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire was preparing a massive attack force to attempt to take the island. Defenses have been refortified, the residents of the island evacuated into the city, supplies filled to the overflowing, and foreign aid called for and received, with the brother of the Grand Master, Antoine (an Italian noble) arriving along with 2,000 mercenaries. At the time the council is convening in late May, 1480; an attack is expected any day…
The Ottoman Empire

In 1480, the Ottoman Empire was the largest and most powerful country in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Knights of St. John are long-time enemies with this Empire which has opposed them for decades.

The Ottomans control all of Palestine, Syria, Anatolia, Greece, much of the Balkans, as well as dozens of islands in the Aegean Sea. They have monumental military capabilities with hundreds of thousands of troops at their command, a vast fleets consisting of hundreds of ships, as well as vast amounts of some of the most sophisticated artillery in the world today. While their troops are not as well trained or armed as those of the Christian Knights, they have a vast numerical advantage in almost all battles.

Led by Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, the Ottoman Empire has, in the past 30 years, conquered Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire, as well as Serbia, Morea, Wallachia, Bosnia, Shkodra, Negroponte, Lemnos, Karaman, Albania, and Crimea. The next target of the Sultan and his military might is considered to be the island of Rhodes, where the Knights of St. John stand as one of the last outposts of Christianity in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Other Regions

The Knights of St. John have come to peace terms with the Sultan of Egypt. This has allowed them to build up their supplies with greater ease as a result of the ensuing trade. However, the Egyptian Empire has shown no desire to assist a Christian power militarily against the Muslim power of the Ottomans.

The Republic of Venice has a position of much influence in the Mediterranean, especially in the Aegean Sea. As a power built upon trade, they have much to lose if the Christian outpost of Rhodes were to fall as their islands in the region would be the next targets.

Western Europe, namely France, Spain and England are preoccupied with internal conflicts as are too far away to be able to aide the Knights of St. John substantially.
The Island of Rhodes

The Island of Rhodes has an area of approximately 1400 square kilometers with about 220 kilometers of coastline. It is located in the southern Aegean Sea. In addition to the usual inhabitants, Rhodes also currently houses the residents of Tilos and Chalki, two other islands that were evacuated in 1470 and 1475 respectively due to their susceptibility to attacks from the Ottoman Empire. Historically, the island was part of Greece and was in fact famous for a large statue of Helios called Colossus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, which stood on the island until it was toppled in the 226 BC earthquake. The island was did not have European medieval constructions until the Knights Hospitaller came into power in 1309. These constructions included the walls that so famously withstood Egypt's attacks in 1444 as well as the Palace of the Grand Master, which also functioned as a command center and fortress for the knights.
Sources:

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