

XVI. The First World War

85. The International Anarchy

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A. Rival Alliances: Triple Alliance versus Triple Entente

Nations kept huge peace-time armies; compulsory military service produced millions of trained reserves. Few wanted war; all assumed it would come.

1. **Triple Alliance:** **Germany's** wealth, industry, and population grew immensely after 1870, and Germany felt it deserved its "place in the sun." The **French** had grievances of 1870, the **British** feared competitors for markets and colonies. From 1871-1890, Bismarck followed a policy of peace; his goal was to isolate France and to keep it interested in colonies, hopefully causing problems with Britain. Bismarck made key alliances; the Triple Alliance was formed by joining with Austria in 1879, then Italy in 1882. He then added the "Reinsurance Treaty" with Russia. These alliances were obviously under severe internal strains due to competitive interests.
2. **Triple Entente:** France secured a Russian alliance in 1894 when Wilhelm II changed Germany's policies; thus the most radical nation allied with the most conservative, a relationship cemented by French capital for Russian railroads. Britain, held to its "**splendid isolation**"--until the shock of its isolation (Boer War), the building of a German navy, and Germany's insulting attitude. Germans, reading **A. T. Mahan's** book on the influence of sea power, began a naval race which Britain saw as a threat to their survival. The result was a British alliance in 1902 with Japan (against Russia), the 1904 Entente Cordiale with France, and in 1907 the Anglo-Russian Convention--which together were called the Triple Entente.

B. The Crises in Morocco and the Balkans

1. The Germans tested the Entente Cordiale in the first Morocco Crisis (1905), resulting in the Algeiras Conference, and with the second, or "Panther" crisis of 1911. Both failed, driving the British and French closer together. Germany claimed to seek Moroccan independence, but their real goal was to gain more African colonies.
2. The center of the Balkan crisis was Serbia, seeking Bosnia and Croatia/Slovenia from Austria; its pan-Slavic agitation aimed at unity of the South (Yugo) Slavs.
 - a. Events came to a boil in 1908, with the Young Turks out to save the Ottoman Empire and Russia out to restore its damaged pride. Russia and Austria made a secret deal: Austria would annex Bosnia and support opening the Dardanelles to Russian warships. Austria took Bosnia (angering the Serbs) but did nothing for Russia--which was frustrated, but had to accept the *fait accompli*.
 - b. In 1911, Italy went to war with the Ottomans, grabbing Tripoli. Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia attacked the Ottomans in the First Balkan War. Bulgaria grabbed too much, so Serbia joined with Greece, Romania, and the Turks to defeat it in the Second Balkan War. Several nations wanted Albania, so the Great Powers established it as an independent kingdom. Serbia was again frustrated and blocked from the sea; Russia, again humiliated, was forced to back down.

C. The **Sarajevo** Crisis and the Outbreak of War

1. A Serb terrorist, with Serbian complicity, assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand, a moderate, who angered both the Serbs and the status quo Austrians. Austria now determined to crush the South Slav movement, and Germany promised the "**blank check**" of support. Serbia refused the Austrian ultimatum and brought war, counting on Russian support. Russia counted on France, which itself gave a virtual blank check. Russia began to mobilize, and Germany set in motion its war plan, attacking France through Belgium--counting on British reluctance to act. The Kaiser dismissed Britain's protests, calling the treaty of Belgian neutrality a "scrap of paper," and Britain declared war.
2. Why had war come?

The Alliance system had divided Europe into two entangled, hostile camps. Each was concerned about its credibility with its allies. Germany feared encirclement by Russia and France; France feared increasing German superiority. Austria and Russia acted recklessly, feeling they had much to gain and little to lose. Germany, moreover, had an internal crisis, with the growing power of the Social Democrats, anti-war and anti-military--while power was held by the arrogant, obstinate Junkers. In addition, the international economy showed the vulnerability of nations, relying on the import of raw materials and food, the export of goods, services, or capital in return--and with no policing power. The resulting imperialism stimulated the quest for binding alliances in a seemingly anarchic world.

86. The Armed Stalemate

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A. The War on the Land

1. Most people expected a short war, but it lasted through four years of appalling losses. Germany launched its attack with 78 divisions against about the same Allied strength; a surprisingly rapid Russian offensive forced reduced strength; over-extended by their rapid surge, the Germans were slowed and then stopped by the counter-attack called the Battle of the Marne. The Russians were defeated in the East and the whole Western front turned into trench warfare, dominated by artillery and the machine gun.
2. The second year of the war brought Russian successes against Austria and the Allied attempt to punch through the Dardanelles to supply Russia--the **Gallipoli** campaign. The third year was characterized by the two great battles of

attrition, **Verdun** (launched by Germany) and the **Somme** (launched by Britain). Artillery was built up on a massive scale and losses were immense, with no real gains. Poison gas was introduced at Verdun, and the tank at the Somme--neither with intelligence or success.

- B. The War at Sea: Both sides blockaded the other, violating a 1909 agreement on contraband/non-contraband trading. Neutrals were kept out of German ports, and the US called for “**freedom of the seas**.” Germany countered by using submarines, declaring a war zone around Britain in February of 1915. The sinking of the *Lusitania* in May (it carried both contraband and 1200 passengers) shocked the US and Germany, concerned about US entry, backed down. The only major sea battle was the **B of Jutland**, after which German surface ships were kept bottled up.
- C. Diplomatic Maneuvers and Secret Agreements
1. The **Ottoman Empire**, traditional rival of Russia, quickly joined Germany; Bulgaria, being anti-Serb, joined the Central Powers in 1915. **Italy** bargained with both sides; promised the Trentino, Trieste, and south Tyrol (“*Italia Irridenta*”) in a secret treaty, Italy joined the Allies--in spite of divided public opinion. The Allies made plans to divide up the Ottoman spoils: Russia (Armenia, the Bosphorous), Britain (Iraq); and France (Syria).
 2. **Germany** worked to stir up subject nationalities like the Poles and Ukrainians, talked of “holy war” with Moslems, worked with Irish Republicans, and sent the Zimmerman Note to Mexico to gain Mexico’s support if the US ever joined the war. German war aims remained decidedly expansionistic.
 3. The Allies worked on Slavic and Arab hopes for independence (with the work of T. E. Lawrence, “Lawrence of Arabia”), and Lord Balfour made promises concerning a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Japanese entered the war to gain German colonies in the Pacific and to move further into both Manchuria and North China. An important incident was the massacre of the Armenians in 1915, occurring as the Turks forced Armenians from their homeland to prevent a nationalist rising in support of Russia. Political ideas were exacerbated by an atmosphere of military crisis, political hatred, bureaucratic contempt, wartime scarcity, and much ethnic and religious hatred. Armenians speak of the “forgotten genocide”.
 4. **Woodrow Wilson** could see little to choose between the two sides; in 1916 he offered mediation, but both sides rejected compromise. Re-elected on the slogan “He kept us out of war,” Wilson continued to argue neutrality and supported “peace without victory.”

87. The Collapse of Russia and the Intervention of the US

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- A. The Withdrawal of Russia and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
1. The Tsarist government lost the loyalty of the people through their failure to fight the war and serve the needs of the people. Troops mutinied in Petrograd in the midst of strikes, and the government collapsed. Nicholas II abdicated and a Provisional Government (liberal nobles, middle class intellectuals who were democrats and constitutionalists) took over. This new government continued the unpopular war and talked of “democracy.” Ordinary Russians turned to socialism, from non-Marxist to Menshevik moderates to Bolshevik extremists. Germany allowed Lenin to travel from his Swiss exile to Petrograd to promote revolution. The ultimate result was the **Bolshevik coup d’etat** (Nov. 1917).
 2. The Bolsheviks pulled out of the war, both to appease the people and from convictions about the “imperialist war.” The **Peace of Brest-Litovsk** was signed in March, 1918, stripped most of western Russia: Baltic coast, Poland, Finland, and the Ukraine. For Germany, the treaty ended the two-front war and provided additional supplies from such areas as the Ukraine. Germany soon began a major new offensive on the Western front, and by June 1 the German army was again on the Marne. Could the US save the day?
- B. The United States and the War
1. The US was divided but tended to support the Allies, especially after the Russian Revolution. The German military decided to make an all-out effort against Britain, over civilian leadership objections. Germany knew the US would enter the war, but they calculated that US help would be too late. Unrestricted submarine war in early February, and ship losses, the action of German agents in the US, and the Zimmerman Note brought the US into the war in April, 1917. Losses were heavy at first, but new anti-sub tactics and the use of convoys proved effective.
 2. Meanwhile, the continuation of attrition tactics led to a mutiny of French troops and the **B of Caporetto** in Italy brought huge losses of manpower and territory. The US began a draft, but training was slow. Major war loans boosted the US economy as ships were built, supplies sent. Civilian rationing including day-light savings, prohibition, Victory Gardens and Meatless Tuesdays.
 3. The Allies created a unified command under Marshall **Foch**. US troops arrived in division strength by June, 1918, with US Marines in action at Chateau-Thierry. German civilians were beginning to seek peace, but the high command called for one last gamble. The attack was halted in the Second Battle of the **Marne**, and the Allies quickly launched a counter-attack, spear-headed by 9 fresh US divisions. The arrival of fresh US divisions led Germany to negotiate, and the **Armistice** was signed on **November 11, 1918** (11/11 at 1). Four years of heavy losses, severe civilian suffering, and the arrival of US troops turned the tide.

89. The Collapse of the Austrian and German Empires

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- A. Austrian collapsed immediately; the last emperor abdicated (11/12/17) and the Austrian empire disintegrated into its component states.

B. Ludendorff was ready to quit on September 30 and called for a new, democratic government; Liberal Prince Max of Baden formed a cabinet. The army thus unloaded the guilt for defeat onto the new government. Wilson helped, insisting on dealing with the “true representatives” of the German people. The German navy mutinied at Kiel, and worker/soldier councils were forming; a general strike was called, and the Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland. Germany was a republic, and the war was over. The people wanted only peace and the avoidance of revolution. The German army was still at the front; thus was born the lie that the army had been “stabbed in the back” by a socialist/Jewish government.

90. The Economic and Social Impact of the War

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A. Effects on Capitalism: Government-Regulated Economies

1. Older capitalism was laissez faire, but by 1914 tariffs, national industries, imperialism, and social legislation produced radical changes: the “planned economy,” was everywhere by 1916; economies were run by boards and commissions designed to coordinate the war effort. Competition was seen as wasteful, private enterprise too slow, profits non-patriotic. Control of finances, raw material, labor, prices. Everyone was part of the war effort; women were hired by factories, with new jobs open for the first time.
2. Foreign trade was controlled, with US trade tripling as European exports almost ceased. Europe also needed huge loans and much US stock was sold off by Europeans. The US for the first time became a creditor nation. Germany had to become self-sufficient, with tight controls administered by Walter Rathenau, the industrialist who organized the German war effort. In Britain, efficiency resulted in incredible outputs of war goods.

B. Inflation, Industrial Changes, Control of Ideas

1. With heavy demand, taxes were not enough; governments printed money, forced credit, sold bonds--and the result was price inflation. Hardest hit were middle class savers. Heavy debts ultimately meant reversal of export-import balance, and a lower living standard. With Europe out of action, the rest of the world increased industrialization, especially the US and Japan, but also Brazil, Argentina, and India.
2. Propaganda and censorship were used on a huge scale. Both sides blamed the other, and facts were scarce; raising doubts was unpatriotic. Civilians were stressed: war casualties, hard work, poor food, and a major effort to keep emotions at a high pitch (shades of 1984). The enemy was portrayed as a fiend, evil incarnate--and out to control the world. These ideas became major obstacles in the peace making process.

90. The Peace of Paris, 1919

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A. The Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Versailles

1. During the winter of 1918, five peace treaties were hammered out. Everyone agreed that the US had ended the war, and looked to Wilson as the Messiah to lead civilization out of its wasteland. Wilson's **Fourteen Points** of January, 1918, were well known:

end to secret treaties and diplomacy (“open covenants, openly arrived at”); freedom of the seas, in peace and war;
removal of trade barriers;
reduction in arms;
adjustment of colonial problems;
evacuation of occupied territory;
self-determination of nationalities, redrawing boundaries along national lines; an international political organization to end wars.

The Fourteen Points were thus the fruition of the major movements of the past century: democracy, liberalism, and nationalism. He believed the war should end with a new type of treaty, settled in an atmosphere of mutual confidence.

2. However, the French demanded reparations, and the British insisted on their naval power. Germany, unrealistically, expected the Fourteen Points, with reparations. Some 27 nations met, but decisions were made by the **Big Four**: Wilson, George, Clemenceau, and Orlando. Wilson insisted on a League of Nations, with its Covenant made part of the treaty, but the final result was a compromise of idealism.

3 Provisions of the Treaty of Versailles:

- a. The French were adamant about security: Germany must be weakened. Alsace and Lorraine were returned; Saar coal was to go to France for 15 years; the Rhineland was to be demilitarized and occupied.
- b. Poland got all Polish or Polish-German territory, plus the “**Polish Corridor**.” Upper Silesia also went to Poland; Danzig was made an international city.
- c. Austrians and Sudeten Germans desired annexation to Germany, but **Anschluss** (union of Austria and Germany) was prohibited and **Sudeten** Bohemia became a part of Czechoslovakia.
- d. Germany was stripped of its colonies, given as “**mandates**” to the victors.
- e. The German fleet was to be seized, but German crews scuttled most ships.
- f. The German armed forces were to be cut drastically, and denied heavy artillery, airplanes, and submarines.
- g. Immense **reparations** were demanded, with no set total and no consideration of how Germany might pay. As a first payment, Germany lost all of its merchant navy and all property of German citizens abroad. (The French

later agreed to limited reparations if Great Britain and the US would guarantee its border with Germany in a separate treaty; the US, turning isolationist, refused.)

h. To justify the reparations, Germany was **blamed** for the war in Article 231.

4. The treaty was concluded in three months--because the Russians were not invited, the Germans not allowed a hearing, and Wilson made concessions to preserve his League of Nations. The Germans refused to sign until threatened. The other treaties were also concluded relatively rapidly, creating a new eastern Europe with the victors picking up territory. Seven new independent states appeared: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Romania and Greece were enlarged and the Ottoman Empire disappeared, replaced by Turkey and with Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq as mandates under the League of Nations.

B. The Significance of the Paris Peace Settlement

1. Self-determination, based on language, was clearly represented in the new Europe. But populations were thoroughly inter-mixed, and most of the new nations had minority problems. The treaty tried to defuse the German menace, but it was too severe to conciliate the German and too lenient to destroy their power. Moderation would have been wise, since the new German Republic was loaded with the guilt of Versailles. The division of the Allies eventually made German repudiation of the treaty easier, especially in light of the newly rising fear of "Bolshevism." US isolationism after rejecting the Treaty of Versailles also hurt prospects for peace, especially angering the French.
2. The Treaty was a blow to monarchy, a victory for democracy, but it offered no solution to problems of industrialism and nationalism and no guarantees for economic security and international stability.