

**Key Concept 4.1:** Total war and political instability in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave way to a polarized state order during the Cold War, and eventually to efforts at transnational union.

**Theme:** The conflicting goals of the peace negotiators in Paris pitted diplomatic idealism against the desire to punish Germany, producing a settlement that satisfied few.

**Aim:** To what extent was the Versailles Treaty an effective peace treaty?

### I- Wilsonian Idealism: the Fourteen Points (January 1918)

a) U.S. plan to end the war along liberal, democratic lines.

b) Provisions:

- 1) Abolish secret treaties
- 2) Freedom of the seas
- 3) Remove economic barriers (e.g. tariffs)
- 4) Reduce armament burdens
- 5) “Self-determination”: Promise of independence to oppressed minority groups (e.g. Poles and Czechs), millions of which lived in Germany and Austria-Hungary.
- 6) Adjustment of colonial claims in interests of both native peoples and colonizers
- 7) German evacuation of Russia; restoration of Belgium; return of Alsace-Lorraine to France; evacuation and restoration of the Balkans; return of Schleswig to Denmark
- 8) Adjustment of Italy’s borders along ethnic lines
- 9) Autonomy for non-Turkish parts of the Turkish Empire
- 10) 14th point: creation of an international organization to provide collective security
  - Foreshadowed the League of Nations that was created after the war

c) Most of Wilson’s Fourteen Points were rejected by Allied leaders as liberal idealism.

- 1) Wilson’s plan did influence the Versailles Treaty.

### II- End of the War

a) Meuse-Argonne offensive (spring 1918)

- 1) Germany transferred divisions from the east (after defeating Russia and the subsequent Brest-Litovsk Treaty) to the Western Front and mounted a massive offensive.
- 2) The U.S. entered the war in time to assist Britain and France in stopping the German offensive.

b) The Central Powers sought peace based on the Wilson’s Fourteen Points (believing they would get fair treatment).

- 1) Germany and Austria-Hungary were on the brink of revolution.
- 2) Austria-Hungary surrendered on November 3, 1918.
- 3) Germany agreed to an armistice which began on November 11.
  - Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate and fled to Holland.

“Today the dreadful armistice terms have been signed. [German diplomat Ernst] Langwerth says that anything else was out of the question: our Front has cracked completely. The Emperor has fled to Holland.”

—diary entry, Count Harry Kessler, German diplomat and writer, 11 November 1918

*Source: Berlin in Lights: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler, 1918-1937, Charles Kessler, ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 10.*

### III- Paris Peace Conference, 1919

a) **Big Four:** David Lloyd George (Br.), Georges Clemenceau (Fr.), Woodrow Wilson (U.S.), Vittorio Orlando (It.)

- 1) The Central Powers were excluded from negotiations as France was concerned with its future security.
- 2) Italy left the conference, angry it would not get some Austrian and Balkans territories it had been promised in 1915.

b) Versailles Treaty, 1919

- 1) **Mandates** were created for former colonies and territories of the defeated Central Powers.
  - Much of the Middle East was now controlled by Britain and France.
- 2) **Article 231** placed sole blame for the war on Germany that resulted in its severe punishment. (**War-guilt clause**)
  - Germany was forced to pay huge **reparations** to Britain and France.
  - **Germany’s army and navy were severely reduced.**
  - **The Rhineland was demilitarized;** the Saar coal mines were taken over by France.
  - Germany lost all its colonies.
  - **German territory was given away** to Poland (the “Polish Corridor” provided Poland access to the sea), Denmark (Schleswig), France (Alsace and Lorraine), and other smaller lands to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Lithuania.

c) **League of Nations** created

- 1) Germany and Russia were not included which weakened the League from the outset.

- 2) The U.S. Senate failed to ratify the Versailles Treaty resulting in U.S. isolationism for two decades.  
- The U.S. didn't want to answer to an international organization's call for war.
- 3) The League thus was born as a mere fraction of what it had originally been intended to achieve.

“The peacemakers of 1919 believed they were working against time. They had to draw new lines on the maps of Europe, just as their predecessors had done at Vienna, but they also had to think of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. ‘Self-determination’ was the watchword, but this was not a help in choosing between competing nationalisms. The peacemakers had to act as policemen and they had to feed the hungry. If they could, they had to create an international order that would make another Great War impossible. And, of course, they had to draw up the treaties...The expectations of the Peace Conference were enormous; the risk of disappointment correspondingly great.”

*Source: Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World, Margaret Macmillan (New York: Random House, 2001), p. xxix.*

#### IV- Impact of World War I on European Society

a) Massive casualties: 10 million soldiers dead; 10 million civilians dead, many also died from the 1918 influenza epidemic; perhaps 15 million died in the Russian Revolution and subsequent Russian Civil War.

- 1) Thus, the birthrate fell significantly after the war (although illegitimate births increased).

b) **The war promoted greater social equality**, thus blurring class distinctions and lessening the gap between rich and poor.

- 1) The Russian Revolution abolished the nobility and gave women more rights than any other country in Europe.
- 2) Women received the right to vote in Britain the same year that the war ended; Germany soon followed.
- 3) The nobility in Germany, Austria and Russia lost much of its influence and prestige.
- 4) During the war, women took over the jobs of men who were fighting the war (but were paid lower wages).

c) Dissent increased as the war continued.

- 1) Tsar Nicholas II was overthrown by the Provisional gov't in February 1917, who was then overthrown by the Bolsheviks
- 2) Irish Republicans staged an insurrection—the Easter Rebellion—in England in 1916.  
- They were inspired by British conscription of soldiers that began in 1916.
- 3) In Germany, militant socialists and anti-war activists Rosa Luxembourg and Clara Zetkin were imprisoned for trying to convince fellow socialists not to support the war effort.
- 4) Large crowds of women in France, Austria and Italy protested working conditions or high prices.
- 5) Government censorship existed in virtually every country and people increasingly grew dissatisfied with the integrity of their governments.

d) **End to long-standing royal dynasties**

- 1) Habsburg dynasty removed in Austria (had lasted 500 years)
- 2) Romanov dynasty removed in Russia (had lasted 300 years)
- 3) Hohenzollern dynasty removed in Germany (had lasted 300 years)
- 4) Ottoman Empire destroyed (had lasted 500 years)

e) The political map of Europe was redrawn.

- 1) Creation of the new states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Yugoslavia  
Albania regained its sovereignty
- 2) Germany was split in two by the Polish corridor (East Prussia was separated from rest of Germany).

f) The Russian Revolution resulted in the creation of the world's first communist country.

g) **German nationalist resentment of the harsh Versailles Treaty doomed the new Weimar Republic in Germany.**

- 1) John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919): Predicted the harsh terms of the treaty would hurt Germany's economy, and thus the economy of the rest of Europe, and lead to significant future political unrest.
- 2) German anger with the treaty was partially responsible for the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in the early 1930s (although the Great Depression was the immediate reason).
- 3) When Hitler took control of Germany in 1933 and began its aggressive policies, Keynes' predictions seemed prophetic.

h) **Shift in financial power to the United States**

- 1) Europe lost its preeminent position economically that it had enjoyed for 500 years.
- 2) The U.S. became the world's leading creditor and greatest producer due to the drain of Europe's resources during the war.

“Europe paid a terrible price in many ways for its Great War: in the veterans who never recovered psychologically or physically, the widows and orphans, the young women who would never find a husband because so many men had died. In the first years of the peace, fresh afflictions fell on European society: the influenza epidemic (perhaps as a result of churning up the rich microbe-laden soil in the north of France and Belgium) which carried off some 20 million people around the world; starvation because there were no longer the men to farm or the transportation network to get food to the markets; or political turmoil as extremists on the right and the left used force to gain their ends. In Vienna, once one of the richest cities in Europe, Red Cross workers saw typhoid, cholera, rickets and scurvy, all scourges they thought had disappeared from Europe. And, as it turned out, the 1920s and 1930s were only a pause in what some now call Europe's latest Thirty Years War. In 1939, the Great War got a new name as a second world war broke out.”

*Source: The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914, Margaret Macmillan (New York: Random House, 2013), p. xxv*