

Treaty of Versailles (1919)



ExCom

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Introduction

On November 11th, 1918, the German Army signed the armistice at Compiègne, ending four years of conflict that had driven all major European powers, and their colonies, to war. World War I resulted in the death of 20 million soldiers and civilians, making it the deadliest war that had ever occurred in history. The loss of civilians and soldiers shook the countries, and the economies of major powers in Europe were significantly reduced. In many people's eyes, the war resulted from poor diplomacy and decision making, as nations failed to discuss and communicate, leading to the outbreak of war. Rather than focusing on preventing the outbreak of the war, countries were progressively brought into the conflict, through a series of competing alliances such as the Dual Alliance of 1879 and the Triple Entente of 1907. As the victors of the war reunite in Versailles to discuss the terms of the peace treaty with Germany, addressing the issues of finding methods to ensure long-lasting peace, and creating an effective international body must be a main point of focus. Such agreements could help foster a fair and effective peace treaty that is vital to ensure the long-term stability of both Europe and the world.

Definition of Key Terms

Armistice

A ceasefire or cessation of hostilities, although not necessarily permanent, in which all organized fighting and offensives are stopped. Typically, these are issued to allow for diplomatic negotiations that may work towards either short-term compromises or long-term peace.

Self-Determination

The right or power of a group of people to declare autonomy and its form of political governance, independent of external bodies or groups that may influence said decision.

The Fourteen Points

First established by the President of the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson, in a speech to Congress on January 8th, 1918, the Fourteen Points were a set of guidelines Wilson had for his idealization of how to rebuild the political and economic climate of the West after the war. Some main topics covered by the points were trade, colonies, territory and borders, self-determination, and arguably the most important: mentions of the establishment of a 'League of Nations'. Wilson brought these points with him to the Paris Peace Conference of 1918 as directions for negotiations.

The League of Nations

The League of Nations was a proposed intergovernmental organization that would prioritize global cooperation to ensure long lasting peace and unity. At the time of the Paris Peace Conference, the League of Nations was still an idea proposed by Woodrow Wilson as one of the possible solutions to resolving international tensions in a postwar world.

The Triple Alliance

Officially established in 1882, the alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. It originated from the Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary of 1879, but expanded to include Italy after a colonial dispute between Italy and France in Tunisia in 1881. The alliance had the main priority of forming a defense against the Triple Entente. Italy can be said to have left the alliance in 1915 when it entered the war on the side of The Triple Entente after staying neutral throughout the start of the war. The Dual Alliance remained intact until the end of the war, and also became known by its alias, The Central Powers.

The Triple Entente

The Triple Entente was an informal alliance between Great Britain, France, and Russia, formed due to the individual alliances between each of the three nations. The Triple Entente stayed intact throughout the war and fought against the aforementioned Triple Alliance, eventually leading to the victory of the former alliance. The members of the Triple Entente thus represent the victors of the war during the Paris Peace Conference. The Entente also went by the name of The Allied Powers.

General Overview

Agreeing upon methods to ensure long-lasting peace

Establishing measures to ensure long-lasting peace is of utmost importance, as a way to provide immediate action to stabilize the political, social, and economic situations of nations. Nevertheless, the Treaty of Versailles not only aims to restore peace but also to provide a stable foundation for the well-being of civilians and countries for the next decades.

A major concern that can be addressed in order to preserve international peace is the militarization of Europe and parties involved in the conflict. Sensitive areas such as the Rhineland region in Germany, Alsace-Lorraine in France, East Prussia, and the Balkans as well as the territorial and military expansion of neighboring states were one of the determining factors to the start of World War I. As these regions are of strategic importance for access to the sea, resources and trade, their importance for different nations can still be a source of conflict in Europe today. The Rhineland region was first annexed by Napoleon and the French Army during the Napoleonic War of the 19th century. Having become an industrial powerhouse after the defeat of Napoleon and the integration into Germany, its strategic position close to the French border and on the Rhine River made it an effective center of operations for the German Army during the war. Its natural resource-rich land was also vital in the production of weapons for the German Army. This land, along with the region of Alsace-Lorraine has been at the center of conflicts between France and Germany for years. East Prussia was also both sought after by the German and the former Russian Empire, now the Soviet Union. Finally, the Balkans, after gaining their independence from the Ottoman Empire, led to power moves between the former empires Austria-Hungary and Russia, as well as being the initial starting point of the war. All these regions were heavily militarized, with army posts, factories and naval bases to protect them from another conflict. Demilitarization could potentially ensure that states do not have the chance to face off in such regions, and limit the impacts of regional conflicts on the stability of world peace.

Another issue that countries faced at the end of the war was self-determinism and the recognition of minorities in Europe. As major empires such as Austria-Hungary, Germany and the Ottoman Empire were dissolved, many minority communities such as the Poles, the Slovaks, the Croats and the Serbs claimed their independence. The creation of nationalist groups in these former empires such as the Black Hand in Bosnia and Herzegovina funded by Serbian Nationalists had grown significantly in the decade preceding the war. Quickly, guerrillas and armed groups would advocate for their independence, assassinating high-ranking members such as Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The end of the war was an opportunity for such communities to create their own states. This would also ensure that no internal conflicts between the different minorities occurred, allowing them to form their own states and peacefully resolve differences between ethnicities. Not only is self-

determination an issue to the peace and stability of Europe, nationalism was also on the rise before the war, especially in newly formed states such as Serbia, which increased the desire to start a conflict and eventually escalate into a war.

Finally, recognizing that Germany, France, the UK, Russia and all other parties have been equally hit by the war is critical to ensure fairness in the discussion of the outcome of the war. By ensuring that all nations involved are supported, the reconstruction of Europe can be done in cooperation and not division. However, it is important to acknowledge the different parties in the war, and that despite both sides having a role to play at the start of the war, Germany was the first country to declare war on both Russia and France, leading to the start of World War I.

In conclusion, methods such as demilitarization, proclaiming the independence of separatist states to prevent civil war and global cooperation through mediation and discussion are necessary to ensure that peace throughout the world is long-lasting, and prevent the outbreak of war.

Considering the foundation of an international peacebuilding organization

The First World War was one of the first conflicts that escalated to an international scale. Rather than two opposing countries facing each other off, the war occurred on multiple fronts, from the Mediterranean to northern France. Industrialization and the increasing globalization between nations have made it necessary for nations to communicate in order to prevent war. The creation of an effective peacebuilding organization is therefore crucial to the stability of world peace.

- *(Note: the League of Nations was created during the treaty, therefore no international organization exists at the time of the Expert Committee session)*

Such a peacebuilding organization must promote inclusivity and transparency to all countries of the world. The lack of diplomatic channels for European countries before the war was a determining factor that led to the sudden outbreak of the conflict. Germany, France, the UK and Russia's main way of communicating with each other was via Treaties and diplomatic envoys, as well as alliances which resulted in the escalation of the initial conflicts that sparked WWI. By ensuring that all countries of the world are represented, different views and opposing perspectives can still be heard, and conflicting sides in the conflict can be resolved in the most diplomatic way possible. Member states not participating and being involved in the discussion could potentially lead to measures taken by the assembly not being applied in such states. Underrepresentation could also

decrease the long-lasting effects of the measures taken by the organization, as the terms decided upon could potentially be infringed upon.

When considering the foundation of an international organization, the aims of mediation, collective security and addressing economic and social issues must be addressed in order to truly ensure peace in the world. To begin, mediation and conflict resolution between states is primordial in order to prevent the escalation of small disagreements into large-scale conflicts. As seen in the past history of the world, many states would resolve their differences via an armed conflict. However, such a war would generally not have a lasting impact, as only a few nations were involved. World War I has proved to world leaders that such small conflicts have disappeared, as the increasing interconnection of countries has changed the way war is fought. The alliance system introduced by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck with the Three Emperors League of 1873, the industrial revolution and the colonial empires of Britain and France have made it difficult for an armed conflict not to escalate into a major war. Therefore, diplomatic mediation must become one of the primary arms of an international organization, to ensure peace and stability. Another important aim that such a body could address is promoting collective security. By enforcing a mutual alliance and strength between nations, the scramble for power and influence between nations would be reduced, in an effort to promote international cooperation. For centuries, nations have tried to project their influence through military might and isolationism from enemy nations as seen with Germany and France. However, by enforcing a common security program, countries would both feel defended and forced to cooperate for a peaceful outcome. Finally, addressing economic and social issues after the war is also vital in order to restore world peace and order. All European nations have been deeply impacted by the deaths of millions of soldiers at the front. The working population in nations has been severely reduced, with France, Germany, Austria and Hungary already showing signs of significant economic recession. Social and economic instability has also risen in countries, as men return from combat with wounds and shellshock, unable to fully work and improve the economy. Unemployment in the city significantly increased, and the loss of land for the Central Powers (72% of land for Hungary, 25% for Austria) has also negatively affected their industrial output. Ensuring that economic and political stability has been restored in Europe will ensure the prevention of uprisings and civilian discontent, as seen with the Bolshevik Revolution which saw the rise of the Soviet Union.

Overall, creating an international peacebuilding organization not only is important to promote international peace and stability, it could also potentially ensure that no other international armed conflict is given the chance to occur.

Establishing a peace treaty to stabilize tensions in Europe

In conclusion, the establishment of a peace treaty is vital to restoring peaceful relations between European powers. States must recognize the necessity of preventing future conflicts in the region, in order to ensure peace that is stable and long-lasting. From the medieval conflicts to the First World War, the notion of stabilizing tensions on the continent had become necessary to assure a positive outcome to the war. A comprehensive peace treaty that would address the root causes of the war and pave the way for lasting harmony would truly assist in establishing a new future for Europe. Diplomats and world leaders after the war recognize that only a diplomatic solution will ensure that the First World War will be the last international conflict of History.

Stabilizing tensions is crucial for many reasons, yet the most important remains to prevent future armed conflicts. While a treaty cannot prevent the start of a war, it can ensure that measures are being put in place to prevent the start of major disagreements that cannot be resolved through mediation. Therefore, leaders must encourage the reestablishment of trust between disagreeing nations. For many years, France and Germany have seen their rival as an 'ever-lasting threat' which will destroy them if not destroyed. Such a mentality is one of the key factors which led to such a large-scale military engagement from both France and Germany during World War I. However, if measures were taken such as diplomatic cooperation and summits as well as encouraging economic trade, this perception of the 'ultimate enemy' could be tainted.

Another way in which stabilizing tensions in Europe could be achieved is through social and economic stability. All nations involved were severely hit economically and socially, with soaring unemployment rates and lack of manpower already being critical issues European governments are facing months after the armistice. It is undeniable to state that Europe was hard hit by this war. If these instabilities are left unresolved, nations will be prevented from reaching economic stability, which will ultimately be reflected in the political stability of the country as a whole. Before the war, Germany feared economic recession and stagnation would lead them to lose their position as hegemonic power in continental Europe to Russia, leading to an acceleration in their declarations of war. If countries reach such a stability, partnership and trade will increase relations with other

countries, and the population will see no need for war when the economy has reached a stable state.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
20 th of May, 1882	The Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy is formed.
1907	The Triple Entente is informally formed between France, Great Britain, and Russia.
28 th of June, 1914	Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo.
28 th of July, 1914	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia. World War I begins.
1 st -25 th of August, 1914	Germany declares war on Russia, then France. Britain declares war on Germany. Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia. Japan declares war on Germany. Austria-Hungary declares war on Japan.
7 th of May, 1915	Germany torpedoes a British ocean liner, the Lusitania, killing nearly 1200 people, 128 of which were American passengers.
23 rd of May, 1915	Italy declares war on Austria-Hungary, thus entering the war on the side of the Triple Entente.
3 rd of February, 1917	USA ends diplomatic relations with Germany.
6 th of April, 1917	USA declares war on Germany.
15 th of December, 1917	Russia signs an armistice with Germany.
8 th of January, 1918	Woodrow Wilson establishes his 14 Points for peace negotiations.

3rd of March, 1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed, allowing for Russia's withdrawal from the war.
26th of September, 1918	The Allied forces begin the last offensive of the war.
11th of November, 1918	Germany signs the armistice at Compiègne, ending World War I.
18th of January, 1919	The Paris Peace Conference begins in the Palace of Versailles.

Major Parties Involved

France

As one of the main countries involved in the First World War, France was severely impacted by the series of battles and conflicts that took place in the north of the country from 1914 to 1918. Thousands of French soldiers were killed during the fight, and the country left the war in economic ruin and a nationwide trauma due to the horrors they experienced during the war. Now that the war has ended, France is committed to ensuring long-lasting peace in Europe, in hopes that such a conflict would never happen again. Nevertheless, the country still holds deep resentment against the Germans who they blame for the start of the war. Although citizens want a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Germans and the French, the people also want revenge for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine (during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871) and retribution from the German government for the destruction that the war caused.

Germany

As the leading nation of the Central Powers, Germany was also deeply involved in World War I and its aftermath. Germany is considered by most of its neighbors as the initiator of the war, and now suffers from the defeat against the Allies. Germany's economy prior to the war was one of the most prosperous in the world, however, their involvement in the war led to the collapse of both their economy and social welfare for citizens. The military ambitions of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his generals led to the outbreak of the war against France and the UK, an act which both nations have not forgotten. While the government actively supported the war, the population had had enough of the thousands of deaths of soldiers and the decline of German economic might. This would lead to the German Revolution of 1918 and the armistice being signed on November 11th of the same year. While the Germans recognize their role in the war, they hope that the Allies show some respect for

their old rivals, and appreciate the role that the population had in the overthrow of the Kaiser and the end of the war by willingly signing the armistice.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom was another major country involved in the First World War. Having sided with the Allied powers, the British navy had imposed a food blockade on Germany and funded military technology as well as sending soldiers to the Front. Having one of the largest colonial empires in world history, the UK was relatively less affected economically by the effects of war. Eventually, the war would initiate the decline of the colonial empire that had dominated the world stage for a century. They share the desire with France and the other Allied nations to restore peace in Europe. Although they have stated that Germany should pay reparations for initiating the war, the UK has been slightly more lenient on the terms of surrender compared to France.

USA

For the majority of World War I, the United States had stayed on the sidelines, deciding not to take a side in the war and rather supplying food and weapons to both sides. However, after the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915 and the Zimmerman Telegram in 1917, the USA finally decided to declare war on Germany. Their arrival in the war, which also coincided with the defeat of the Russian army, was a turning point for the Allies who benefited from a fresh and technologically superior army. The USA played a major role in the outcome of the war and has not forgotten it. As the peace treaty is being discussed, the US feels that solving the issues and political problems of the “old continent” is of primordial importance to establish world peace. Unlike France and the UK, the USA is not seeking vengeance or reparations from Germany, rather creating once and for all a peaceful world where international trade between the two continents can prosper.

Italy

Another significant party in the First World War was Italy. Initially siding with the Germans and Austria-Hungary in the Triple Alliance of 1882, Italy decides to declare its neutrality at the start of the war in 1914. Unable to settle territorial disputes with Austria-Hungary on the control of the Adriatic Coastline and afraid of angering France and the UK, Italy’s neutrality comes as a relief for the population. The UK and France see it as an advantage to convince Italy to join the Allies. After months of negotiations, the Allies and Italy signed the 1915 Treaty of London which promised Italy significant land in the Adriatic region in exchange for their formal declaration of war against Germany and Austria. On May 23, 1916, Italy declares war on Austria-Hungary. Despite having less

casualties and fighting as the Eastern and Western Front, the Italian front was one of the deadliest, with soldiers having to fight in the extreme temperatures of the Alps' summits. The war ended and fighting over, the Italian delegation hopes that their sacrifices will be recognized by the other victors, and that the engagements and promises of the UK and France are kept and acknowledged in the Treaty.

Possible Solutions

Of the many ways in which the issue can be approached, the most prevalent solution would be to establish some form of a peace treaty, as mentioned earlier. The objective of this treaty would be to achieve a mutual understanding between all parties involved on what the future of Europe should be. Possible clauses within this treaty might be the initiation of a permanent armistice, as well as monetary reparations if the parties involved find it necessary. Moreover, representatives may choose to ask for a redistribution of European territory as it was prior to the war, or to use this redistribution as another form of reparatory payments. It should be noted that blame plays a dangerous factor in post-war peace negotiations, as if too much blame is placed on one specific party, future retaliations or revenge plots may ensue, thus representatives should steer clear of one-sided condemnation.

A second, previously discussed solution, would be the establishment of an international intergovernmental body that focuses on peace-keeping, diplomatic relations, and global cooperation. The foundation for this body would need some form of charter that may be debated upon by the representatives, including clauses on member states, ground rules, and collective objectives. Moreover, the power granted to the organization might be decided upon in debate, including discussions of armament or army possession, judiciary power (i.e. an international court), or the organization's executive power on the global stage. It should be noted that representatives may choose to use the acceptance or rejection of a certain nation as a member state of the organization as a form of punishment or diplomatic reparation against that nation. Although, doing this may lead to less global cooperation and more division between the parties involved.

A final possible solution to the issue of a war-stricken Europe would be to resume regular activities as quickly as possible, including the resumption of trade, based on pre-war agreements, and diplomatic relations. Doing so would help prevent economic warfare as a form of reparatory

punishment, and would also help the continent regain economic stability and momentum. Recommencing political and economic interactions as before may help the involved parties remain focused on rebuilding the foundations of European cooperation as well as total disarmament, rather than preparations for revenge.

Further Reading

<https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/peace/fourteen-points>

This source provides and summarizes Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, which may be useful to get a sense of his objectives with these negotiation outlines.

<https://www.mytutor.co.uk/answers/877/GCSE/History/What-were-the-main-aims-of-the-Big-3-leaders-involved-in-the-Treaty-of-Versailles-of-1919-and-how-happy-were-they-with-the-end-result/>

This source analyzes the aims of three members states participating in the Treaty negotiations.

<https://peacepalacelibrary.nl/blog/2019/treaty-versailles-centennial-french-aims-paris>

This source provides information on the aims of the French delegation during the Treaty of Versailles negotiations.

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/italian-delegates-return-to-paris-peace-conference>

This source provides information on the role of Italy during the Paris Peace Conference

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/treaty-of-versailles-1>

This source gives a general overview of facts and dates associated with the Treaty of Versailles

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