

Chapter 18

World War I: The West in Despair

- **Aggravated Nationalist Tensions in Austria-Hungary**
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Focus Questions

1. How did the nationality problem in Austria-Hungary contribute to the outbreak of World War I?
2. In assessing responsibility for the war, what arguments have been advanced by historians for each of the major countries involved?
3. Why did many Europeans celebrate the coming of war?
4. Why was trench warfare so deadly?
5. Why did the United States enter the war?
6. What was President Wilson's peace program? What obstacles did he face?
7. What was Germany's reaction to the Treaty of Versailles?
8. Why did the Provisional Government and liberal democracy fail in Russia in 1917?
9. How did World War I transform the consciousness of Europeans?

Prior to 1914, the dominant mood in Europe was one of pride in the accomplishments of Western civilization and confidence in its future progress. Advances in science and technology, the rising standard of living, the spread of democratic institutions, and Europe's position of power in the world all contributed to a sense of optimism, as did the expansion of social reform and the increase in literacy for the masses. Furthermore, since the defeat of Napoleon, Europe had avoided a general war, and since the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), the Great Powers had not fought each other. Few people recognized that the West's outward achievements masked an inner turbulence that was propelling Western civilization toward a cataclysm. The European state system was failing.

By 1914, national states, answering to no higher power, were fueled by an explosive nationalism and were grouped into alliances that faced each other with ever-mounting hostility. Nationalist passions, overheated by the popular press and expansionist societies, poisoned international relations. Nationalist thinkers propagated pseudoscientific racial and Social Darwinist doctrines that glorified conflict and justified the subjugation of other peoples. Committed to enhancing national power, statesmen lost sight of Europe as a community of nations sharing a common civilization. Caution and restraint gave way to belligerency in foreign relations.

The failure of the European state system was paralleled by a cultural crisis. Some European intellectuals attacked the rational tradition of the Enlightenment and celebrated the primitive, the instinctual, and the irrational. Increasingly, young people were drawn to philosophies of action that ridiculed liberal, bourgeois values and viewed war as a purifying and ennobling experience. Colonial wars, colorfully portrayed in the popular press, ignited the imagination of bored factory workers and daydreaming students and reinforced a sense of duty and an urge for gallantry among soldiers and aristocrats. These “splendid” little colonial wars helped fashion an attitude that made war acceptable, if not laudable. Yearning to break loose from their ordinary lives and to embrace heroic values, many

Europeans regarded violent conflict as the highest expression of individual and national life. “If only there were a war, even an unjust one,” wrote George Heym, a young German writer, in 1912. “This peace is so rotten.”¹ The popular historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896), whose lectures influenced many students who were to rise to positions of importance in the German army and administration, expressed the prevailing mood: “Those who preach the nonsense about everlasting peace do not understand the life of the [German] race. . . . To banish war from history would be to banish all progress.”² Although technology was making warfare more brutal and dangerous, Europe retained a romantic illusion about combat.

While Europe was seemingly progressing in the art of civilization, the mythic power of nationalism and the primitive appeal of conflict were driving European civilization to the abyss. Few people recognized the potential crisis—certainly not the statesmen whose reckless blundering and horrific miscalculations allowed the Continent to stumble into war. ❖

AGGRAVATED NATIONALIST TENSIONS IN AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

On June 28, 1914, a young terrorist, with the support of a secret Serbian nationalist society called Union or Death (more popularly known as the Black Hand), murdered Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. Six weeks later, the armies of Europe were on the march; an incident in the Balkans had sparked a world war. An analysis of why Austria-Hungary felt compelled to attack Serbia and why the other powers became enmeshed in the conflict shows how explosive Europe was in 1914. And nowhere were conditions more volatile than in Austria-Hungary, the scene of the assassination.

With its several nationalities, each with its own history and traditions and often conflicting aspirations, Austria-Hungary stood in opposition to nationalism, the most powerful spiritual force of the age. Perhaps the supranational Austro-Hungarian Empire was obsolete in a world of states based on the principle of nationality.

Primary Source

Friedrich von Bernhardi: *Germany and the Next War*

A militaristic attitude that glorified war was widespread in Germany prior to World War I. The following excerpt comes from Friedrich von Bernhardi's work Germany and the Next War (1911), which was immensely popular in his country.

. . . War is a biological necessity of the first importance, a regulative element in the life of mankind which cannot be dispensed with, since without it an unhealthy development will follow, which excludes every advancement of the race, and therefore all real civilization. "War is the father of all things." The sages of antiquity long before Darwin recognized this.

The struggle for existence is, in the life of Nature, the basis of all healthy development. . . . The law of the stronger holds good everywhere. Those forms survive which are able to procure themselves the most favourable conditions of life, and to assert themselves in the universal economy of Nature. The weaker succumb. . . .

Struggle is, therefore, a universal law of Nature, and the instinct of self-preservation which leads to struggle is acknowledged to be a natural condition of existence.

Strong, healthy, and flourishing nations increase in numbers. From a given moment they require a continual expansion of their frontiers, they require new territory for the accommodation of their surplus population. Since almost every part of the globe is inhabited, new territory must, as a rule, be obtained at the cost of its possessors—that is to say, by conquest, which thus becomes a law of necessity.

The right of conquest is universally acknowledged. . . .

. . . Vast territories inhabited by uncivilized masses are occupied by more highly civilized States, and made subject to their rule. Higher civilization and the correspondingly greater power are the foundations of the right to annexation. . . .

Lastly, in all times the right of conquest by war has been admitted. It may be that a growing people cannot win colonies from civilized races, and yet the State wishes to retain the surplus population which the mother-country can no longer feed. Then the only course left is to acquire the necessary territory by war. Thus the instinct of self-preservation leads inevitably to war, and the conquest of foreign soil. It is not the possessor, but the victor, who then has the right. . . .

In such cases might gives the right to occupy or to conquer. Might is at once the supreme right, and the dispute as to what is left is decided by the arbitrament of war. War gives a biologically just decision, since its decisions rest on the very nature of things. . . .

The knowledge, therefore, that war depends on biological laws leads to the conclusion that every attempt to exclude it from international relations must be demonstrably untenable.

Question for Analysis

1. What conclusions did Friedrich von Bernhardi draw from his premise that war was a biological necessity?

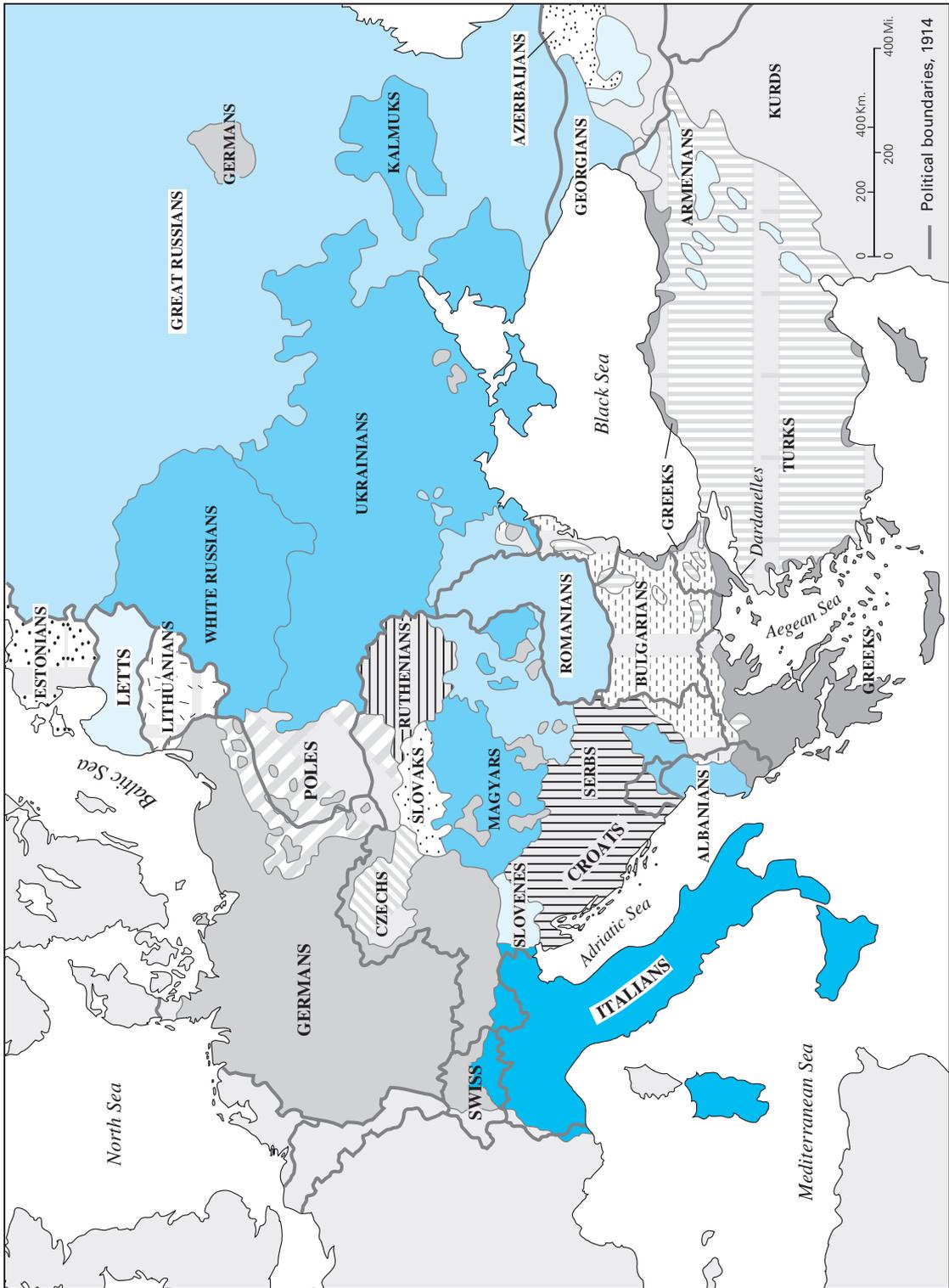
Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, trans. Allan H. Fowles (New York: Longmans, Greens, 1914), 18, 21–24.

Chronology 18.1 ❖ World War I

1882	Formation of the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy
1894	Alliance between Russia and France
1904	Anglo-French Entente
1907	Anglo-Russian Entente
1908	Bosnian crisis
June 28, 1914	Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria is assassinated at Sarajevo
August 4, 1914	Germans invade Belgium
September 1914	First Battle of the Marne saves Paris
May 1915	Italy enters the war on the Allies' side
Spring 1915	Germany launches offensive that forces Russia to abandon Galicia and most of Poland
February 1916	General Pétain leads French forces at Verdun; Germans fail to capture the fortress town
July–November 1916	Battle of the Somme: the Allies suffer 600,000 casualties
January 1917	Germany launches unrestricted submarine warfare
April 6, 1917	United States declares war on Germany
November 1917	Bolsheviks take power in Russia
March 1918	Russia signs the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, losing territory to Germany and withdrawing from the war
March 21, 1918	Germans launch a great offensive to end the war
June 3, 1918	Germans advance to within fifty-six miles of Paris
August 8, 1918	British victory at Amiens
October 1918	Turkey is forced to withdraw from the war after several British successes
November 3, 1918	Austria-Hungary signs armistice with the Allies
November 11, 1918	Germany signs armistice with the Allies, ending World War I
January 1919	Paris Peace Conference
June 28, 1919	Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles

Dominated by Germans and Hungarians, the empire remained unable either to satisfy the grievances or to contain the nationalist aims of its minorities, particularly the Czechs and South Slavs (Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs).

Heightened agitation among the several nationalities, which worsened in the decade before 1914, created terrible anxieties among Austrian leaders. The fear that the empire would be torn apart by rebellion caused Austria



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to pursue a forceful policy against any nation that fanned the nationalist feelings of its Slavic minorities. In particular, this policy meant worsening tensions between Austria and small Serbia, which had been independent of the Ottoman Empire since 1878.

Captivated by Western ideas of nationalism, the Serbs sought to create a Greater Serbia by uniting with their racial kin, the South Slavs who dwelled in Austria-Hungary. Since some seven million South Slavs lived in the Hapsburg Empire, the dream of a Greater Serbia, shrilly expressed by Serbian nationalists, caused nightmares in Austria. Fearing that continued Serbian agitation would encourage the South Slavs to press for secession, some Austrian leaders urged the destruction of the Serbian menace.

The tensions arising from the multinational character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in an age of heightened nationalist feeling set off the explosion in 1914. Unable to solve its minority problems and fearful of Pan-Serbism, Austria-Hungary felt itself in a life-or-death situation. This sense of desperation led it to lash out at Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand.

THE GERMAN SYSTEM OF ALLIANCES

The war might have been avoided, or might have remained limited to Austria and Serbia, had Europe in 1914 not been divided into two hostile alliance systems. Such a situation contains inherent dangers. For example, knowing that it has the support of allies, a country might pursue a more provocative and reckless course and be less conciliatory during a crisis. Furthermore, a conflict between two states might spark a chain reaction, drawing in the other powers and transforming a limited war into a general war. That is what happened after the assassination. This dangerous alliance system originated with Bismarck and the Franco-Prussian War.

◀ **Map 18.1** Various Ethnic Groups in Europe Before World War I.

The New German Empire

The unification of Germany in 1870 and 1871 turned the new state into an international power of the first rank, upsetting the balance of power in Europe. For the first time since the wars of the French Revolution, a nation was in a position to dominate the European continent. To German nationalists, the unification of Germany was both the fulfillment of a national dream and the starting point for an even more ambitious goal: extending German power in Europe and the world.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, German nationalism became more extreme. Believing that Germany must either grow or die, nationalists pressed the government to build a powerful navy, acquire colonies, gain a much greater share of the world's markets, and expand German interests and influence in Europe. Sometimes these goals were expressed in the language of Social Darwinism: that nations are engaged in an eternal struggle for survival and domination. Decisive victories against Austria (1866) and France (1871), the formation of the German Reich, rapid industrialization, and the impressive achievements of German science and scholarship had molded a powerful and dynamic nation. Imbued with great expectations for the future, Germans became increasingly impatient to see the fatherland gain its “rightful” place in world affairs—an attitude that alarmed non-Germans.

Bismarck's Goals

Under Bismarck, who did not seek additional territory but wanted only to preserve the recently achieved unification, Germany pursued a moderate and cautious foreign policy. One of Bismarck's principal goals was to keep France isolated and friendless. Deeply humiliated by its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, France found its nationalists yearning for a war of revenge against Germany. Even though the French government, aware of Germany's strength, was unlikely to initiate such a conflict, the issue of Alsace-Lorraine increased tensions between the two countries.

Bismarck also hoped to prevent a war between Russia and Austria-Hungary, for such a conflict

could lead to German involvement, the breakup of Austria-Hungary, and Russian expansion in Eastern Europe. To maintain peace and Germany's existing borders, Bismarck forged complex alliances. In the 1880s, he created the Triple Alliance, consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, as well as an alliance with Russia.

Bismarck conducted foreign policy with restraint, forming alliances not to conquer new lands but to protect Germany from aggression by either France or Russia. His aim was to preserve order and stability in Europe, not to launch war. But in 1888, a new emperor ascended the German throne. When the young Kaiser William II (1888–1918) clashed with his aging prime minister, Bismarck was forced to resign (1890). Lacking Bismarck's diplomatic skills, his cool restraint, and his determination to keep peace in Europe, the new German leaders pursued a belligerent and imperialistic foreign policy in the ensuing years—a policy that frightened other states, particularly Britain. Whereas Bismarck considered Germany a satiated power, these men insisted that Germany must have its place in the sun.

The first act of the new leadership was to permit the treaty with Russia to lapse, allowing Germany to give full support to Austria, which was considered a more reliable ally. Whereas Bismarck had warned Austria to act with moderation and caution in the Balkans, his successors not only failed to hold Austria in check but also actually encouraged Austrian aggression. This proved fatal to the peace of Europe.

THE TRIPLE ENTENTE

Fear of Germany

When Germany broke with Russia in 1890, France was quick to take advantage of the situation. Worried by Germany's increasing military strength, expanding industries, growing population, and alliance with Austria and Italy, France coveted Russia as an ally. In 1894, France and Russia entered into an alliance; the isolation forced on France by Bismarck had ended. France hoped that the alliance would deter German aggression, for Germany was now threatened with a two-front war.

Germany's growing military and industrial might also alarmed Great Britain. In addition, its spectacular industrial growth had made Germany a potent trade rival of England. Britain was distressed, too, by Germany's increased efforts to become a great colonial power—a goal demanded by German nationalists. But most troubling was Germany's decision to build a great navy. Germany was already the strongest land power on the Continent. Achieving naval parity with England would give Germany the potential to threaten Britain's overseas empire and to blockade the British Isles, depriving Britain of food and supplies. Germany's naval program was the single most important reason that Britain moved closer first to France and then to Russia. Germany's naval construction, designed to increase its stature as a Great Power but not really necessary for its security, was one indication that German leaders had abandoned Bismarck's policy of good sense. Eager to add the British as an ally and demonstrating superb diplomatic skill, France moved to end longstanding colonial disputes with Britain. The Entente Cordiale of 1904 accomplished this conciliation. England had emerged from its self-imposed isolation.

Wishing to counter Germany's Triple Alliance with a strong alliance of their own, French diplomats now sought to ease tensions between their Russian ally and their new British friend. Two events convinced Russia to adopt a more conciliatory attitude toward Britain: a humiliating and unexpected defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 and a working-class revolution in 1905. Shocked by defeat, its army bordering on disintegration, and its workers restive, Russia was now receptive to settling its imperial disputes with Britain over Persia, Tibet, and Afghanistan—a decision encouraged by France. In the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907, as in the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale of 1904, the former rivals conducted themselves in a conciliatory, if not friendly, manner. In both instances, what engendered this spirit of cooperation was fear of Germany.

Europe was now broken into two hostile camps: the Triple Entente of France, Russia, and Britain and the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The costly arms race and the maintenance of large standing armies by

all the states except Britain increased fear and suspicion between the alliances.

German Reactions

Germany denounced the Triple Entente as a hostile anti-German coalition designed to encircle and crush Germany; to survive, Germany must break this ring. Considering Austria-Hungary to be its only reliable ally, Germany resolved to preserve the power and dignity of the Hapsburg Empire. If Austria-Hungary fell from the ranks of Great Powers, Germany would have to stand alone against its enemies. At all costs, Austria-Hungary must not be weakened.

But this assessment suffered from dangerous miscalculations. First, Germany overstressed the hostile nature of the Triple Entente. In reality, France, Russia, and Britain had drawn closer together not to wage aggressive war against Germany but to protect themselves against burgeoning German military, industrial, and diplomatic power. Second, by linking German security to Austria, Germany greatly increased the chances of war. Growing more and more apprehensive of Pan-Serbism, Austria might well decide that only a war could prevent its empire from disintegrating. Confident of German support, Austria would be more likely to resort to force; fearing any diminution of Austrian power, Germany would be more likely to give Austria that support.

THE DRIFT TOWARD WAR

Starting in 1908, several crises tested the competing alliances, pushing Europe closer to war. Particularly significant was the Bosnian affair, which involved Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Serbia. This incident contained many of the ingredients that eventually ignited the war in 1914.

The Bosnian Crisis

Russia's humiliating defeat by Japan in 1905 had diminished its stature as a Great Power. The new Russian foreign minister, Alexander Izvolsky, hoped to gain a diplomatic triumph by

compelling Ottoman Turkey to allow Russian warships to pass through the Dardanelles, fulfilling a centuries-old dream of extending Russian power into the Mediterranean.

Russia made a deal with Austria: if Austria would support Russia's move to open the Dardanelles, Russia would permit Austrian annexation of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Officially a part of the Ottoman Empire, these provinces had been administered by Austria-Hungary since 1878. The population consisted mainly of ethnic cousins of the Serbs. A formal annexation would certainly infuriate the Serbs, who hoped one day to make the region part of a Greater Serbia.

In 1908, Austria proceeded to annex the provinces, but Russia met stiff resistance from England and France when it presented its case for opening the straits to Russian warships. Austria had gained a diplomatic victory, while Russia suffered another humiliation. Even more enraged than Russia was Serbia, which threatened to invade Bosnia to liberate its cousins from Austrian oppression. The Serbian press openly declared that Austria-Hungary must perish if the South Slavs were to achieve liberty and unity. A fiery attitude also prevailed in Vienna: Austria-Hungary could not survive unless Serbia was destroyed.

During this period of intense hostility between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, Germany supported its Austrian ally. To keep Austria strong, Germany would even agree to the dismemberment of Serbia and its incorporation into the Hapsburg Empire. Unlike Bismarck, who tried to hold Austria in check, German leadership now coolly envisioned an Austrian attack on Serbia, and just as coolly offered German support if Russia intervened.

Balkan Wars

The Bosnian crisis pushed Germany and Austria closer together, brought relations between Austria and Serbia to the breaking point, and inflicted another humiliation on Russia. The first Balkan War (1912) continued these trends. The Balkan states of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece attacked the dying Ottoman Empire. In a brief campaign, the Balkan armies captured the Turkish Empire's European territory, with the exception of



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THE ASSASSINATION OF ARCHDUKE FRANCIS FERDINAND. Immediately after the assassination, Austrian authorities arrest one of the assassins.

Constantinople. Because it was on the victorious side, landlocked Serbia gained the Albanian coast and thus a long-desired outlet to the sea. Austria was determined to keep its enemy from reaping this reward, and Germany, as in the Bosnian crisis, supported its ally. Unable to secure Russian support, Serbia was forced to surrender the territory, which became the state of Albania.

Incensed Serbian nationalists accelerated their campaign of propaganda and terrorism against Austria. Believing that another humiliation would irreparably damage its prestige, Russia vowed to back Serbia in its next confrontation with Austria. And Austria had exhausted its patience with Serbia. Emboldened by German encouragement, Austria wanted to end the Serbian threat once and for all. Thus, the ingredients for war between

Austria and Serbia, a war that might easily draw in Russia and Germany, were present. Another incident might well start a war. It came in 1914.

Assassination of Francis Ferdinand

On June 28, 1914, Francis Ferdinand was assassinated while making a state visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Young Gavrilo Princip, who was part of a team of Bosnian terrorists linked to the Black Hand, fired two shots at close range into the archduke's car. Francis Ferdinand and his wife died within fifteen minutes. By killing the archduke, the terrorists hoped to bring tensions in the Hapsburg Empire to a boiling point and to prepare the way for revolution.

For many years, leaders of Austria had yearned for war with Serbia in order to end the agitation for the union of the South Slavs. Now, they reasoned, the hour had struck. But war with Serbia would require the approval of Germany. Believing that Austria was Germany's only reliable ally and that a diminution of Austrian power and prestige threatened German security, German statesmen encouraged their ally to take up arms against Serbia. Both Germany and Austria wanted a quick strike, a localized conflict, to overwhelm Serbia before other countries were drawn into the conflict.

Germany Encourages Austria

Confident of German backing, on July 23 Austria presented Serbia with an ultimatum and demanded a response within forty-eight hours. The terms of the ultimatum were so harsh that it was next to impossible for Serbia to accept them. This reaction was the one that Austria intended, as it sought a military solution to the crisis rather than a diplomatic one. But Russia would not remain indifferent to an Austro-German effort to liquidate Serbia. Russia feared that an Austrian conquest of Serbia was just the first step in an Austro-German plan to dominate the Balkans. Such an extension of German and Austrian power in a region bordering Russia was unthinkable to the tsar's government. Moreover, after suffering repeated reverses in foreign affairs, Russia would not tolerate another humiliation. As Germany had decided to back its Austrian ally, Russia resolved not to abandon Serbia.

Serbia responded to Austria's ultimatum in a conciliatory manner, agreeing to virtually all Austrian demands. But it refused to let Austrian officials enter Serbia to investigate the assassination. Having already discarded the idea of a peaceful settlement, Austria insisted that Serbia's failure to accept one provision meant that the entire ultimatum had been rejected. It ordered the mobilization of the Austrian army.

This was a crucial moment for Germany. Would it continue to support Austria, knowing that an Austrian attack on Serbia would probably bring Russia into the conflict? Determined

not to desert Austria and believing that a showdown with Russia was inevitable anyway, the German war party, with the military cajoling and persuading the civilian authorities, continued to urge Austrian action against Serbia. They argued that it was better to fight Russia in 1914 than a few years later, when the tsar's empire, which already had a huge reserve of manpower and was rapidly building strategic railroads and expanding its Baltic fleet, would be stronger. Confident of the superiority of the German army, the war party claimed that Germany could defeat both Russia and France and that Britain's army was too weak to make a difference.

On July 28, 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia. Russia, with the assurance of French support, proclaimed partial mobilization aimed at Austria alone. But the military warned that partial mobilization would throw the slow-moving Russian war machine into total confusion if the order had to be changed suddenly to full mobilization. Moreover, the only plans the Russian general staff had drawn up called for full mobilization, that is, for war against both Austria and Germany. Pressured by his generals, the tsar gave the order for full mobilization on July 30. Russian forces would be arrayed against Germany as well as Austria.

Because the country that struck first gained the advantage of fighting according to its own plans rather than having to improvise in response to the enemy's attack, generals tended to regard mobilization by the enemy as an act of war. Therefore, when Russia refused a German warning to halt mobilization, Germany, on August 1, ordered a general mobilization and declared war on Russia. Two days later, Germany also declared war on France, believing that France would support its Russian ally. Besides, German battle plans were based on a war with both Russia and France. Thus, a war between Germany and Russia automatically meant a German attack on France.

When Belgium refused to allow German troops to march through Belgian territory into France, Germany invaded the small nation, which brought Britain, pledged to guarantee Belgian neutrality, into the war. Britain could never tolerate German troops directly across the English Channel in any case, nor could it brook German mastery of Western Europe.

The Question of Responsibility

The question of whether any one power was mainly responsible for the war has intrigued historians. In assessing blame, historians have focused on Germany's role. German historian Fritz Fischer argues that Germany's ambition to dominate Europe was the underlying cause of the war. Germany encouraged Austria to strike at Serbia, knowing that an attack on Serbia could mean war with Russia and its French ally. Believing that it had the military advantage, Germany was willing to risk such a war. Hence, "her leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of general war in 1914."³

Attracted by Social Darwinist ideas that foresaw an inevitable racial struggle between

Germans and Slavs, by militarist doctrines that glorified war, and by a nationalist drive for *Lebensraum* (more living space), continues Fischer, Germany sought to become the foremost economic and political power in Europe and to play a far greater role in world politics; to achieve this goal, it was willing to go to war. Fischer supports his position by pointing to Germany's war aims, drawn up immediately after the outbreak of war, which called for the annexation of neighboring territories and the creation of satellite states, that is, imposing German hegemony over Europe. Fischer's thesis had distressed Germans for it implies that there is continuity between Germany's territorial ambitions at the time of World War I and Hitler's territorial goals—that Nazi imperialism was not an aberration in



Archives Larousse, Paris. France/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library International.

FOR MANY PEOPLE, THE DECLARATION OF WAR WAS A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION.

Few Europeans realized what a horror the war would turn out to be.

German history but coincided with the wishes of Germany's traditional ruling elite. Fischer's critics stress, however, that Social Darwinism and militarism enthralled other nations besides Germany and that this was not peculiarly German, but rather part of a general European sickness. They argue further that Germany would have preferred a limited war between Austria and Serbia and before the war had no plans to annex and dominate neighboring lands.

Historians also attribute blame to the other powers. Austria bears responsibility for its determination to crush Serbia and for its insistent avoidance of a negotiated settlement. Serbia's responsibility stems from its pursuing an aggressive Pan-Serbian policy and tolerating terrorist networks within the country, which set it on a collision course with Austria-Hungary. In 1913, Sir Fairfax Cartwright, the British ambassador to Vienna, warned: "Serbia will some day set Europe by the ears, and bring about a universal war on the Continent. I cannot tell you how exasperated people are getting here at the continual worry which that little country causes to Austria."⁴ Russia bears responsibility for being the first country to institute general mobilization, a momentous decision that turned a limited war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia into a European war; France, for failing to restrain Russia and indeed for encouraging its ally to mobilize; and England, for failing to make clear that it would support its allies. Had Germany seen plainly that Britain would intervene, it might have been more cautious. Finally blame falls on diplomats and statesmen for their ineptness and their lack of imagination in dealing with a crisis that could have been resolved without war.

Some historians, dismissing the question of responsibility, regard the war as an obvious sign that European civilization was in deep trouble. Viewed in the broad perspective of European history, the war marked a culmination of dangerous forces in European life: the belief expressed by some theorists that violent conflict was a natural, inevitable, and worthy feature of human relations and a belligerent nationalism that pitted nation against nation in a struggle for survival. It also pointed to the flaws and perils of the alliance system, which set off a chain reaction, and the failure of the European state system that glorified national

power at the expense of a common European civilization. Nor do European leaders and statesmen escape blame. Had Austro-Hungarian and Russian policymakers been more willing to compromise and less willing to risk war and had German and French officialdom tried to restrain their allies, the tragedy could have been averted.

WAR AS CELEBRATION

When war was certain, an extraordinary phenomenon occurred. Crowds gathered in capital cities and expressed their loyalty to the fatherland and their readiness to fight. Particularly in Germany, clergy, theologians, scientists, scholars, journalists, and literary figures justified the nation's participation in the war. The sentiments of a German theologian voiced in the opening stage of the war were not uncommon: "Our battles are God's battles. Our cause is sacred. . . . We are God's chosen among the nations. That our prayers for victory will be heard is entirely to be expected, according to the religious and moral order of the world."⁵

It seemed as if people wanted violence for its own sake. War seemed to offer an escape from the dull routine of classroom, job, and home and from the emptiness, drabness, mediocrity, and pettiness of bourgeois society—from "a world grown old and cold and weary," as Rupert Brooke, a young British poet, put it.⁶ To some, war was a "beautiful . . . sacred moment" that satisfied an "ethical yearning."⁷ To many people, especially youth and intellectuals, war seemed a healthy and heroic antidote to what was regarded as an unbearably decadent and soul-destroying machine age and to the bourgeois preoccupation with work, profits, and possessions. But more significantly, the outpouring of patriotic sentiments demonstrated the immense power that nationalism exercised over the European mind. With extraordinary success, nationalism welded millions of people into a collectivity ready to devote body and soul to the nation, especially during its hour of need. All believed that their country was a victim of aggression.

In Paris, men marched down the boulevards singing the stirring words of the French national anthem, the "Marseillaise," while women showered young soldiers with flowers. A participant

in these days recalls: “Young and old, civilians and military men burned with the same excitement. . . . [T]housands of men eager to fight would jostle one another outside recruiting offices, waiting to join up. . . . The word ‘duty’ had a meaning for them, and the word ‘country’ had regained its splendor.”⁸ The term *union sacrée* (sacred union) was coined to express the sense of oneness, inclusiveness, and devotion to the nation that gripped French men and women at the time.

Similarly, in Germany, “flowers were thrown at us from every window; everyone wanted to shake hands with the departing soldiers. . . . Musicians played. . . . People cried and sang at the same time. . . . Nobody could resist the ebullient feeling.”⁹ “It is a joy to be alive,” editorialized one newspaper. “We wished so much for this hour. . . . The sword which has been forced into our hand will not be sheathed until our aims are won and our territory extended as far as necessity demands.”¹⁰ Writing about those momentous days, the British mathematician-philosopher Bertrand Russell recalled his horror and “amazement that average men and women were delighted at the prospect of war. . . . [T]he anticipation of carnage was delightful to something like ninety percent of the population. I had to revise my views on human nature.”¹¹

Soldiers bound for battle and wives and sweethearts seeing them off at train stations were in a holiday mood. “My dear ones, be proud that you live in such a time and in such a nation and that you . . . have the privilege of sending those you love into so glorious a battle,” wrote a young German law student to his family.¹² The young warriors yearned to do something noble and altruistic, to win glory, and to experience life at its most intense.

The martial mood also captivated many of Europe’s most distinguished intellectuals. They shared Rupert Brooke’s sentiments: “Now God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour / And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping.”¹³ To the prominent German historian Friedrich Meinecke, August 1914 was “one of the great moments of my life which suddenly filled my soul with the deepest confidence in our people and the profoundest joy.”¹⁴ In November 1914, Thomas Mann (see “Intellectuals and Artists

in Troubled Times” in Chapter 19), the distinguished German writer, saw the war as “purification, liberation . . . an enormous hope; [it] set the hearts of poets aflame. . . . How could the artist, the soldier in the artist,” he asked, “not praise God for the collapse of a peaceful world with which he was fed up, so exceedingly fed up?”¹⁵ Besides being gripped by a thirst for excitement and a quest for the heroic, some intellectuals welcomed the war because it unified the nation in a spirit of fraternity and altruism. It was a return, some felt, to the organic roots of human existence, a way of overcoming a sense of individual isolation. War, in the view of some intellectuals, would spiritually regenerate the nation. It would resurrect glory, honor, and heroism; it would awaken a spirit of self-sacrifice and dedication and give life an overriding purpose in a world suffocating from bourgeois materialism and drabness.

Thus, a generation of European youth marched off to war joyously, urged on by their teachers and cheered by their delirious nations. It must be emphasized, however, that the soldiers who went off to war singing and the statesmen and generals who welcomed war or did not try hard enough to prevent it expected a short, decisive, gallant conflict. Few envisioned what World War I turned out to be: four years of barbaric, senseless slaughter. The cheers of deluded chauvinists, naïve idealists, and fools drowned out the words of those—principally socialists, labor leaders, pacifists, and left-leaning liberals—who realized that Europe was stumbling into darkness. “The lamps are going out all over Europe,” said British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey. “We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.”

STALEMATE IN THE WEST

On August 4, 1914, the German army invaded Belgium. German war plans, drawn up years earlier, chiefly by General Alfred von Schlieffen, called for the army to swing through Belgium

Map 18.2 World War I, 1914–1918 ▶

This map shows Europe divided into competing alliances and German advances into France and Eastern Europe once war broke out.

to outflank French border defenses, envelop the French forces, and destroy the enemy by attacking its rear. With the French army smashed and Paris isolated, German railroads—an extensive system of tracks, carefully planned by the general staff, had been constructed in the previous decade—would rush the victorious troops to the Eastern front to bolster the small force that had been assigned to hold off the Russians. Everything depended on speed. France must be taken before the Russians could mobilize sufficient numbers to invade Germany. The Germans were confident that they would defeat France in two months or less.

But things did not turn out the way the German military had anticipated. Moving faster than the Germans expected, the Russians invaded East Prussia, which led General Helmuth von Moltke to transfer troops from the French front, hampering the German advance. By early September, the Germans had reached the Marne River, forty miles from Paris. With their capital at their backs, the regrouped French forces, aided by the British, fought with astounding courage and resolve. Moreover, in their rush toward Paris, the Germans had unknowingly exposed their flank, which the French attacked. The British then penetrated a gap that opened up between the German armies, forcing the Germans to retreat. The First Battle of the Marne had saved Paris. German military planners had been denied the quick victory they had anticipated. With no side achieving a decisive victory, the war entered a new and unexpected phase: the deadlock of trench warfare.

For over four hundred miles across northern France, from the Alps to the North Sea, the opposing sides both constructed a vast network of trenches. These trenches had underground dugouts, and barbed wire stretched for yards before the front trenches as a barrier to attack. Behind the front trenches were other lines to which soldiers could retreat and from which support could be sent. Between the opposing armies lay “no man’s land,” a wasteland of mud, shattered trees, torn earth, and broken bodies. In the trenches, soldiers were reduced to a primitive existence. Sometimes they stood knee-deep in freezing water or slimy mud; the stench from human waste, rotting corpses, and unwashed bodies overwhelmed the senses; rats, made more fecund and larger by easy access to food, including decaying flesh, swarmed

over the dead and scampered across the wounded and the sleeping; and ubiquitous lice caused intense discomfort and disease, which frequently required hospitalization for several weeks. After days of uninterrupted, fearsome, earsplitting bombardment by artillery, even the most stouthearted were reduced to shivering, whimpering creatures. Unless the dugouts were fortified with concrete, soldiers rarely survived a direct hit; sometimes they were simply burned alive or torn apart and made unrecognizable by exploding shells. Artillery accounted for about 70 percent of casualties. The agonizing cries and pleas of the wounded, left to die on the battlefield because it was too dangerous to attempt a rescue, shattered the nerves of the men in the trenches. Trench warfare was a futile battle of nerves, endurance, and courage, waged to the constant thunder of heavy artillery, which pulverized both ramparts and men. And in April 1915, the Germans introduced poison gas, which added to the war’s horror. It was also butchery. As attacking troops climbed over their trenches and advanced bravely across no man’s land, they were decimated by heavy artillery and chewed up by rapid machine-gun fire from weapons that could fire 500 or more rounds a minute. If they did penetrate the frontline trenches of the enemy, they would soon be thrown back by a counterattack.

Despite a frightful loss of life, little land changed hands. The Allied generals in particular, unfeeling and totally lacking in imagination, persisted in ordering greater but still ineffective frontal attacks by masses of infantry, hoping to wear down German manpower, which was inferior to their own. Once German reserves could not replenish losses, they reasoned, a breakthrough would be possible. But this strategy achieved nothing. The generals ordered still greater attacks to end the stalemate; this only increased the death toll, for the advantage was always with the defense, which possessed machine guns, magazine rifles, and barbed wire. Tanks could redress the balance, but the generals, committed to old concepts, did not make effective use of them. And whereas the technology of the machine gun had been perfected, the motorized tanks, a newly developed weapon, often broke down. Gains and losses of land were measured in yards, but the lives of Europe’s youth were squandered by the



German soldiers leaving for the Western Front, Berlin, August 1914 (b/w photo), Haeckel, Georg (1873–1942) and Haeckel, Otto (1872–1945) / © SZ Photo/Scheff/The Bridgeman Art Library International.

TROOPS LEAVING BERLIN, 1914. “The sword has been forced into our hand,” said Germans at the outbreak of war. German troops mobilized eagerly and efficiently; here a trainload is leaving for the Western front.

hundreds of thousands. Against artillery, barbed wire, and machine guns, human courage had no chance, but the generals—uncomprehending, unfeeling, and incompetent—persisted in their mass attacks. This futile effort at a breakthrough wasted untold lives to absolutely no purpose.

In 1915, neither side could break the deadlock. Hoping to bleed the French army dry and force its surrender, the Germans, in February 1916, attacked the town of Verdun. Knowing that the French could never permit a retreat from this ancient fortress, they hoped that France would suffer such a loss of men that it would be unable to continue the war. France and Germany suffered more than a million casualties at Verdun—including some 300,000 dead—which one military historian calls “the greatest battle in world history.”

When the British opened a major offensive on July 1, however, the Germans had to channel their reserves to the new front, relieving the pressure on Verdun.

At the end of June 1916, the British, assisted by the French, attempted a breakthrough at the Somme River. On July 1, after seven days of intense, unprecedented bombardment intended to destroy German defenses, the British climbed out of their trenches and ventured into no man’s land. But German positions had not been destroyed. Emerging from their deep dugouts, German machine gunners fired repeatedly at the British, who had been ordered to advance in rows. Marching into concentrated machine-gun fire and desperately searching for a way through the still-intact German wire, few British troops ever made it

across no man's land. Out of the 110,000 who attacked, some 57,000 fell dead or wounded—most in the first hour of the assault—“the heaviest loss ever suffered in a single day by a British army or by any army in the First World War.”¹⁶ When the battle of the Somme ended in mid-November, Britain and France had suffer more than 600,000 casualties and the military situation remained essentially unchanged. The only victor was the war itself, which was devouring Europe's youth at an incredible rate.

In December 1916, General Robert Nivelle was appointed commander in chief of the French forces. Having learned little from past French failures to achieve a breakthrough, Nivelle ordered another mass attack for April 1917. The Germans discovered the battle plans on the body of a French officer and withdrew to a shorter line on high ground, constructing the strongest defense network of the war. Knowing that the French had lost the element of surprise and pushing aside the warnings of leading statesmen and military men, Nivelle went ahead with the attack. “The offensive alone gives victory; the defensive gives only defeat and shame,” he told the president and the minister of war.¹⁷

The Nivelle offensive, which began on April 16, was another bloodbath. Sometimes the fire was so intense that the French could not make it out of their own trenches. Although French soldiers fought with courage, the situation was hopeless. Still, Nivelle persisted with the attack; after ten days, French casualties numbered 187,000, including thousands of soldiers recruited from French African colonies. The disgraced Nivelle was soon relieved of his command.

OTHER FRONTS

While the Western front hardened into a stalemate, events moved more decisively on the Eastern Front. In August 1914, the Russians, with insufficient preparation, invaded East Prussia. After some initial successes, which sent a scare into the German general staff, the Russians were soundly defeated at the battle of Tannenberg (August 26–30, 1914) and forced to withdraw from German territory, which remained inviolate for the rest of the war.

Meanwhile, Germany's ally Austria was having no success against Serbia and Russia. An invasion of Serbia was thrown back, and an ill-conceived offensive against Russia cost Austria its Galician provinces. Germany had to come to Austria's rescue. In the spring of 1915, the Germans made a breakthrough that forced the Russians to abandon Galicia and most of Poland. In June 1916, the Russians launched an offensive that opened a wide breach in the Austrian lines, but they could not maintain it. A German counteroffensive forced a retreat and cost the Russians more than a million casualties.

In March 1917, food shortages and disgust with the great loss of life exploded into a spontaneous revolution in Russia, and the tsar was forced to abdicate. The new government, dominated by liberals, opted to continue the war despite the weariness of the Russian masses. In November 1917, a second revolution brought to power the Bolsheviks, or Communists, who promised “Peace, Land, Bread.” In March 1918, the Bolsheviks, to end the war, signed the punitive Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, in which Russia surrendered Poland, the Ukraine, Finland, and the Baltic provinces to Germany.

Several countries that were not belligerents in August 1914—among them the Ottoman Empire and Italy—joined the war later. That autumn, the Ottoman Turks entered the conflict as allies of Germany. Before the war, Germany had cultivated the Ottoman Empire's friendship by training the Turkish army; for their part, the Turks wanted German help in case Russia attempted to seize the Dardanelles. Hoping to supply Russia and, in turn, obtain badly needed Russian grain, the Allies did decide to capture the Dardanelles. In April 1915, a combined force of British, French, Australian, and New Zealander troops stormed the Gallipoli Peninsula on the European side of the Dardanelles. Ignorance of amphibious warfare, poor intelligence, and the fierce resistance of the Turks prevented the Allies from getting off the beaches and taking the heights. The Gallipoli campaign cost the Allies 252,000 casualties, and they had gained nothing.

Although a member of the Triple Alliance, Italy remained neutral when war broke out. In May 1915, on the promise of receiving Austrian territory, Italy entered the war on the side of the

Allies. The Austrians repulsed a number of Italian offensives along the frontier and in 1916 took the offensive against Italy. A combined German and Austrian force finally broke through the Italian lines in the fall of 1917 at Caporetto, and the Italians retreated in disorder, leaving behind huge quantities of weapons. Germany and Austria took some 275,000 prisoners.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE CENTRAL POWERS

The year 1917 seemed disastrous for the Allies. The Nivelle offensive had failed, the French army had mutinied, a British attack at Passchendaele did not bring the expected breakthrough and added some three hundred thousand casualties to the list of butchery, and the Russians, torn by revolution and gripped by war weariness, were close to making a separate peace. But there was one encouraging development for the Allies. In April 1917, the United States declared war on Germany.

American Entry

From the outset, America's sympathies lay with the Allies. To most Americans, Britain and France were democracies, threatened by an autocratic and militaristic Germany. These sentiments were reinforced by British propaganda, which depicted the Germans as cruel "Huns." Since most war news came to the United States from Britain, anti-German feeling gained momentum. What precipitated American entry was the German decision of January 1917 to launch a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare. The Germans were determined to deprive Britain of war supplies and to starve it into submission. Their resolve meant that German U-boats would torpedo both enemy and neutral ships in the war zone around the British Isles. Since the United States was Britain's principal supplier, American ships became a target of German submarines.

Angered by American loss of life and materiel, as well as by the violation of the doctrine of freedom of the seas, and fearing a diminution of prestige if the United States took no action,

President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) pressed for American entry. Also at stake was American security, which would be jeopardized by German domination of Western Europe. Leading American statesmen and diplomats worried that such a radical change in the balance of power would threaten American national interests. As German submarines continued to attack neutral shipping, President Wilson, on April 2, 1917, urged Congress to declare war on Germany. It did so on April 6.

Germany's Last Offensive

With Russia out of the war, General Erich Ludendorff prepared for a decisive offensive before the Americans could land sufficient troops in France to help the Allies. A war of attrition now favored the Allies, who could count on American supplies and manpower. Without an immediate and decisive victory, Germany could not win the war. On March 21, 1918, the Germans launched an offensive that was intended to bring victory in the west.

Suddenly, the deadlock was broken; it was now a war of movement. Within two weeks, the Germans had taken some 1,250 square miles. But British resistance was astonishing, and the Germans, exhausted and short of ammunition and food, called off the drive. A second offensive against the British, in April, also had to be called off, as the British contested every foot of ground. Both campaigns depleted German manpower, while the Americans were arriving in great numbers to strengthen Allied lines and uplift morale. At the end of May, Ludendorff resumed his offensive against the French. Attacking unexpectedly, the Germans broke through and advanced to within fifty-six miles of Paris by June 3. However, reserves braced the French lines, and in the battle of Belleau Wood (June 6–25, 1918), the Americans checked the Germans.

In mid-July, the Germans tried again, crossing the Marne River in small boats. Although in one area they advanced nine miles, the offensive failed against determined American and French opposition. By August 3, the Second Battle of the Marne had ended. The Germans had thrown everything they had into their spring and summer offensives, but it was not enough. The Allies had bent, but,



Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

WILSON AND CLEMENCEAU ARRIVE AT VERSAILLES, JUNE 18, 1919. The idealism of President Wilson (center) clashed with Premier Clemenceau's (left) determination to enhance France's security.

reinforced and encouraged by American arms, they did not break. Now they began to counterattack, with great success.

Meanwhile, German allies, deprived of support from a hard-pressed Germany, were unable to cope. An Allied army of Frenchmen, Britons, Serbs, and Italians compelled Bulgaria to sign an armistice on September 29. Shortly afterward, British successes in the Middle East forced the Turks to withdraw from the war. In the streets of Vienna, people were shouting "Long live peace! Down with the monarchy!" The Austro-Hungarian Empire was rapidly disintegrating into separate states based on nationality.

By early October, the last defensive position of the Germans had crumbled. The army's spirit collapsed as well; war-weary soldiers, sensing that the war was lost, surrendered in large numbers and refused orders to return to the front. Fearing that the Allies would invade the fatherland and shatter the reputation of the German army, Ludendorff wanted an immediate armistice. However, he needed to find a way to obtain favorable armistice terms from President Wilson and to shift the blame for the lost war from the military and the kaiser to civilian leadership. Cynically, he urged the creation of a popular parliamentary government in Germany.

But events in Germany went further than the general had anticipated. Whereas Ludendorff sought a limited monarchy, the shock of defeat and widespread hunger sparked a revolution that forced the kaiser to abdicate. On November 11, the new German Republic signed an armistice ending the hostilities.

THE PEACE CONFERENCE

In January 1919, representatives of the Allied Powers assembled in Paris to draw up peace terms; President Wilson was also there. The war-weary masses turned to Wilson as the prophet who would have the nations beat their swords into plowshares.

Wilson's Hope for a New World

For Wilson, the war had been fought against autocracy. He hoped that a peace settlement based on liberal-democratic ideals would sweep away the foundations of war, and he expressed these hopes in several speeches, including the famous Fourteen Points of January 1918. None of Wilson's principles seemed more just than the idea of self-determination: the right of a people to have its own state, free of foreign domination. In particular, this goal meant (or was interpreted to mean) the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France, the creation of an independent Poland, a readjustment of the frontiers of Italy to incorporate Austrian lands inhabited by Italians, and an opportunity for Slavs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to form their own states.

Aware that a harshly treated Germany might well seek revenge, engulfing the world in another cataclysm, Wilson insisted that there should be a "peace without victory." A just settlement would encourage a defeated Germany to work with the victorious Allies in building a new Europe. To preserve peace and help remake the world, Wilson urged the formation of the League of Nations, an international parliament to settle disputes and discourage aggression. Wilson wanted a peace of justice to preserve Western civilization in its democratic and Christian form.

Problems of Peacemaking

Wilson's negotiating position was undermined by the Republican Party's victory in the congressional elections of November 1918. Before the election, Wilson had appealed to the American people to cast their ballots for Democrats as a vote of confidence in his diplomacy. But instead, Americans sent twenty-five Republicans and only fifteen Democrats to the Senate. Whatever the motives of the American people in voting Republican—apparently their decision rested on local and national, not international, issues—the outcome diminished Wilson's prestige at the conference table. To his fellow negotiators, Wilson was trying to preach to Europe when he could not command the support of his own country. Since the Senate must ratify any American treaty, European diplomats worried that what Wilson agreed to the Senate might reject, which is precisely what happened.

Another obstacle to Wilson's peace program was France's demand for security and revenge. Nearly the entire war on the Western front had been fought on French territory. Many French industries and farms had been ruined; the country mourned the loss of half its young men. Representing France at the conference table was Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929), nicknamed “the Tiger.” Nobody loved France or hated Germany more. Cynical, suspicious of idealism, and not sharing Wilson's hope for a new world or his confidence in the future League of Nations, Clemenceau demanded that Germany be severely punished and its capacity to wage war destroyed.

Seeing Germany's greater population and superior industrial strength as a long-term threat and doubting that its military tradition would let it resign itself to defeat, Clemenceau wanted guarantees that the wars of 1870–1871 and 1914–1918 would not be repeated. The latter war had shown that without the help of Britain and the United States, France would have again been at the mercy of Germany. Since there was no certainty that these states would again aid France, Clemenceau wanted to use his country's present advantage to cripple Germany.

The intermingling of European nationalities was another barrier to Wilson's program. Because in so many regions of Central Europe there was a mixture of nationalities, no one could create a

Europe completely free of minority problems; some nationalities would always feel that they had been treated shabbily. And the various nationalities were not willing to moderate their demands or lower their aspirations. For example, Wilson's Fourteen Points called for the creation of an independent Poland with secure access to the sea. But between Poland and the sea lay territory populated by Germans. Giving this land to Poland would violate German self-determination; denying it to Poland would mean that the new country had little chance of developing a sound economy. No matter what the decision, one people would regard it as unjust. Similarly, to provide the new Czechoslovakia with defensible borders, it would be necessary to give it territory inhabited mostly by Germans. This, too, could be viewed as a denial of German self-determination, but not granting the territory to Czechoslovakia would mean that the new state would not be able to defend itself against Germany.

Secret treaties drawn up by the Allies during the war also interfered with Wilson's program. These agreements dividing up German, Austrian, and Ottoman territory did not square with the principle of self-determination. For example, to entice Italy into entering the war, the Allies had promised it Austrian lands that were inhabited predominantly by Germans and Slavs. Italy was not about to repudiate its prize because of Wilson's principles.

Finally, the war had generated great bitterness, which persisted after the guns had been silenced. Both the masses and their leaders demanded retribution and held exaggerated hopes for territory and reparations. In such an atmosphere of post-war enmity, the spirit of compromise and moderation could not overcome the desire for spoils and punishment.

The Settlement

After months of negotiations, often punctuated by acrimony, the peacemakers hammered out a settlement. Five treaties made up the Peace of Paris: one each with Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Of the five, the Treaty of Versailles, which Germany signed on June 28, 1919, was the most significant.

France regained Alsace and Lorraine, lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. The treaty also barred Germany from placing fortifications in the Rhineland. The French military had wanted to take the Rhineland from Germany and break it up into one or more republics under French suzerainty. Under this arrangement, French control would extend to the Rhine River, which was a natural defensive border; one had only to destroy the bridges to prevent a German invasion of France. With Germany deprived of this springboard for invasion, French security would be immensely improved. Recognizing that the German people would never permanently submit to the amputation of the Rhineland, which was inhabited by more than five million Germans and contained key industries, Wilson and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863–1945) resisted these French demands.

Faced with the opposition of Wilson and Lloyd George, Clemenceau backed down and agreed instead to Allied occupation of the Rhineland for fifteen years, the demilitarization of the region, and an Anglo-American promise of assistance if Germany attacked France in the future. This last point, considered vital by France, proved useless. The alliance went into effect only if both the United States and Britain ratified it. Since the Security Treaty did not get past the U.S. Senate, Britain also refused to sign it. The French people felt that they had been duped and wronged.

A related issue concerned French demands for annexation of the coal-rich Saar Basin, which adjoined Lorraine. By obtaining this region, France would weaken Germany's military potential and strengthen its own. France argued that this would be just compensation for the deliberate destruction of the French coal mines by the retreating German army at the end of the war. But here, too, France was disappointed. The final compromise called for a League of Nations commission to govern the Saar Basin for fifteen years, after which the inhabitants would decide whether their territory would be ceded to France or returned to Germany.

In eastern Germany, in certain districts of Silesia that had a large Polish population, a plebiscite determined the future of the region. Part of Upper Silesia was ceded to Poland. The settlement also

gave Poland a corridor cut through West Prussia and terminating in the Baltic port of Danzig; Danzig itself was declared an international city, to be administered by a League of Nations commission. The Germans would never resign themselves to this loss of territory that separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

The victorious nations were awarded control of German colonies and Ottoman lands. However, these nations held colonies not outright but as mandates under the supervision of the League, which would protect the interests of the native peoples. The mandate system implied the ultimate end of colonialism, for it clearly opposed the exploitation of colonial peoples and asserted independence as the rightful goal for subject nations.

Other issues revolved around the German military forces and reparations. To prevent a resurgence of militarism, the German army was limited to one hundred thousand volunteers and deprived of heavy artillery, tanks, and warplanes. The German navy was limited to a token force, which did not include submarines. The issue of war reparations caused great bitterness between Wilson and his French and British adversaries. The American delegation wanted the treaty to fix a reasonable sum that Germany would have to pay and specify the period of years allotted for payment. But no such items were included; they were left for future consideration. The Treaty of Versailles presented Germany with an open-ended bill that would probably take generations to pay. Moreover, Article 231, which preceded the reparation clauses, placed sole responsibility for the war on Germany and its allies. The Germans responded to this accusation with contempt.

In separate treaties, the conference dealt with the dissolution of the Hapsburg Empire. During the final weeks of the war, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had crumbled as the various nationalities proclaimed their independence from Hapsburg rule. In most cases, the peacemakers ratified with treaties what the nationalities had already accomplished in fact. Serbia joined with Austrian lands inhabited by Croats and Slovenes to become Yugoslavia. Czechoslovakia arose from the predominantly Czech and Slovak regions of Austria. Hungary, which broke away from Austria to become a separate country,

had to cede considerable land to Romania and Yugoslavia. Austria turned over to Italy the South Tyrol, inhabited by two hundred thousand Austrian Germans. This clear violation of the principle of self-determination greatly offended liberal opinion. Deprived of its vast territories and prohibited from union with Germany, the new Austria was a third-rate power.

Assessment and Problems

The Germans unanimously denounced the Treaty of Versailles, for in their minds the war had ended not in German defeat but in a stalemate. They regarded the armistice as the prelude to a negotiated settlement among equals, based on Wilson's call for a peace of justice. Instead, the Germans were barred from participating in the negotiations. And they viewed the terms of the treaty as humiliating and vindictive—designed to keep Germany militarily and economically weak.

When the United States had entered the war, the Germans protested, Wilson had stated that the enemy was not the German people but their government. Surely, the Germans now argued, the new German democracy should not be punished for the sins of the monarchy and the military. To the Germans, the Treaty of Versailles was not the dawning of the new world that Wilson had promised, but an abomination—a vile crime.

Critics in other lands also condemned the treaty as a punitive settlement in flagrant violation of Wilsonian idealism. The peacemakers, they argued, should have set aside past hatreds and, in cooperation with the new democratic German republic, forged a just settlement to serve as the foundation of a new world. Instead, they burdened the fledgling German democracy with reparations that were impossible to pay, insulted it with the accusation of war guilt, and deprived it of territory in violation of the principle of self-determination. All these provisions, said the critics, would only exacerbate old hatreds and fan the flames of German nationalism. This was a poor beginning for democracy in Germany and for Wilson's new world.

The treaty's defenders, however, insisted that if Germany had won the war, it would have imposed a far harsher settlement on the Allies. They

pointed to German war aims, which called for the annexation of parts of France and Poland, the reduction of Belgium and Romania to satellites, and German expansion in central Africa. They pointed also to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which Germany had compelled Russia to sign in 1918, as an example of Germany's ruthless appetite. An insatiable Germany gained 34 percent of Russia's population, 32 percent of its farmland, 54 percent of its industrial enterprises, and 89 percent of its coal mines. Moreover, they maintained that the peace settlement did not repudiate Wilson's principles. The new map of Europe was the closest approximation of the ethnic distribution of its peoples that Europe had ever known.

What is most significant about the Treaty of Versailles is that it did not solve the German problem. Germany was left weakened but unbroken—its industrial and military power only temporarily contained, and its nationalist fervor not only undiminished but stoked higher by a peace treaty that all political parties viewed as unjust, dictated, and offensive to national pride. The real danger in Europe was German unwillingness to accept defeat or surrender the dream of expansion.

Would France, Britain, and the United States enforce the treaty against a resurgent Germany? The war had demonstrated that an Allied victory depended on American intervention. But in 1920, the U.S. Senate, angry that Wilson had not taken Republicans with him to Paris and fearing that membership in the League of Nations would involve America in future wars, refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Britain, feeling guilty over the treatment of Germany, lacked the will for enforcement and even came to favor revising the treaty. Therefore, the responsibility for preserving the settlement rested primarily with France, which was not encouraging. Germany had greater industrial potential than France and, with Russia now Communist, France could not count on Russian manpower to balance Germany's much larger population. The Paris peace settlement left Germany resentful but potentially powerful, and to the east lay small and weak states—some of them with sizable German minorities—that could not check a rearmed Germany.