

World War I: Notes

You should be able to answer the following questions by the conclusion of this unit:

- What caused the Great War? (Note the causes are so numerous and interwoven that this is not a simple task)
- How did the War lead to revolution and the fall of Empires? (Pay particular attention to Russia, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire)
- How and why did war and revolution have such enormous and destructive consequences? (Check the student PowerPoint's from years past on both the US section and World section of this site)
- How did the years of trauma and bloodshed form elements of today's world? (What are the long-term impacts?)
- Understand the dynamic nature of Russian revolutionism during the WWI period. (Check the fabulous PowerPoint for this one)

World War I: Perceptions

- World War I is historically noted as a long/drawn out even fruitless struggle that saw a debt of 300+ billion dollars and over ten million dead. The war is referred to as the Great War and as an event had destructive capacities that exceed modern comprehension. The violence and mayhem were "total", they were not isolated to one country or one region and in fact altered human history through its destructive capacities. The two sides tried to wear each other down but with little success, as the war evolved into a conflict predicated on chemical and trench warfare.

World War I: The Causes

- Historians argue that World War I (here on referred to as WWI) actually saw its roots in the wake of Bismarck's realpolitik of the 1870's. As you may recall Bismarck used the notion of warfare to manipulate nations into joining alliances and in the process strengthening Germany through warfare. This policy will prove very damaging to all involved. Bismarck defeated the French in 1870 and offered the French very harsh peace terms while strengthening both Germany (Prussia) and Austria-Hungary in the process. While uniting Germany he served to create the basis for a system that was predicated on the acquisition of power and alliances. Bismarck felt that the only way to preserve peace was through the fortification of alliances. Bismarck's blueprint called for:
 - Alienation of France
 - Alliances to prevent abuse by Russia and Austria-Hungary (fighting over the dying Ottoman Empire in the Balkans).
- Bismarck's plan involved: Creation of the 1873 Conservative Three Emperors League: which linked the monarchs of Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia in an alliance against radical movements. In 1877 and 1878 the balance of power was threatened. This violated Bismarck's initiatives towards balancing power through alliances. Thus, he initiated a military alliance with Austria-Hungary, an

otherwise enemy and in the process checked the power of France and Russia. Here is the early alliance structure.

Triple Alliance (1882)	Alliance of Three Emperors (1881)
Germany Austria-Hungary Italy	Germany Austria-Hungary Russia

- Bismarck's craftiness continued when Russia backed out of the Alliance of Three Emperors, he replaced it with the German Reinsurance Treaty, which was a pact of mutual neutrality between Germany and Russia.
- Bismarck's leadership stabilized an entire generation of foreign policy initiatives for Europeans. His skillful leadership kept Europe peaceful during the post Franco-Prussian war period. However it was the same leadership that we can attribute the causes of WWI too. It is clear that when Wilhelm II made the mistake of dismissing the powerful Bismarck in 1890 that Europe's fate was sealed; it was just a matter of team. The arrangement required a powerful person to hold it together.
- Wilhelm's refusal to pursue a peaceful relationship with Russia was vital to the causality of this crisis. This provided France with a golden opportunity-ally itself with France and sandwich Germany between two powerful foes. As this alliance came to the forefront; the key immediately became England. At this time they were the worlds only "uncommitted" superpower.
- Britain's situation was near perilous; as the world seemed to be uniting in alliances around her she found that her imperial pursuits had placed her in conflict with the USA, Russia, Germany, and France. Although the conflicts were nothing compared to the perception that many nations had for Germany and her young Kaiser Wilhelm II. The key seemed to be an alliance with the developing power of the United States. The United States was an odd partner for she had been in conflict and war with Britain as recently as 1812 during which the UK burned down parts of Washington D.C. the relationships had stabilized but didn't become fully co operational until after 1902.
- The alliance picture became increasingly cloudy when powers began trading imperialistic favors. In 1904 France was willing to ally itself with Britain and overlook the aggressive British stance in Egypt in exchange for returning the favor with the French plans in Morocco.
- Germany was unwilling to stand idly by and accept this arrangement and called for the Algeciras Conference which was designed to bring global light to the French and British scheming, they came away angry and empty handed. They also came away from the conference having acquired the reputation as a dangerous global agitator who had served to alienate England, USA, France and Russia. Russia's agreement in Persia with Britain (to allow the British to absorb their sphere of commercial and political influence in Persia {Iran}) was very disheartening to the German situation, they felt highly threatened.
- German responded with a historical trend that was familiar to their roots, the age-old Prussian concept of militarism. When in danger or doubt build up your

armed forces and make others match or feel threatened in return. Thus, in 1907 Germany revolutionized their Navy making it amongst the most modern in the world. The perception of the rest of the world was the belief that Germany was mobilizing for war against the English, the world's other Naval power. England responded by temporarily abandoning the social welfare state and under the leadership of David Lloyd George spending their economic resources on military expansion.

Four main causes of WWI	
1.	1. Militarism
2.	2. Imperialism
3.	3. Nationalism
4.	4. Alliances

- The world's troubled hot spot in the earliest part of the 20th century was clearly the Balkans. The Balkans was an incredibly diverse ethnic region that was controlled by a combination of the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarians. The nations of the Balkans clamored for independence and wanted to follow the Greek model for liberation from these dying empires. What had resulted in the region was repression by both empires in an effort to hold on to their claims. Bismarck had thought he had solved this problem at the 1873 Congress of Berlin in which he personally divided up portions of the Balkans amongst the two super powers. (See 966) The ethnic mix was a time bomb waiting to explode. The Serbs were Slavic and looked to Russia to aid them in gaining independence after their annexation by Austria Hungary after 1908. The Russian support was crucial to the Serb goals, but was it available. 1912 and 1913 saw successive years during which a Balkan war broke out with the countries in the region jockeying for control over one another. The events, which saw Serbs and Bulgarians take Macedonia effectively ended the Ottoman Empire as we know it. They had now hoped that Austria-Hungary was to be next.
- The Spark: chaos broke out when the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand was touring Bosnia and their capital of Yugoslavia when ultra-radical anarchists from an organization known as the Black Hand assassinated him. (His slayer was a young man named Gvriilo Princip.) Austria-Hungary immediately and without knowledge lashed out at the Serbians and their government, and with a blank check from Germany, Austria-Hungary issued a decree that Serbia submit to Austrian control and accept blame for the assassination. The war was on with the first alliance structure in place.
 - AH declares war on Serbia 7/28/14...the two allies Germany (AH) and Russia (Serbia) are dragged into the conflict as well. Bismarck's carefully constructed paradigm of peace is falling like a set of dominoes.
 - Russia's close ally France would enter in the war on their side and be out for Revenge from Germany.
 - Ottoman's will be talked into the possibility of reclaiming her glory on the side of the German's.

- England will enter the war after the Germans initiate the Schlieffen plan; a military model designed to quickly and radically eliminate France from the war with a rapid lightning strike that would prevent the Germans from having to fight a two front war with both Russia and France. The problem was the Germans in order to invoke their plan were forced to invade France from the north and sweep through back to Berlin...in order to do so they had to go through Belgium, the German demand they be allowed to go through Belgium unmolested was denied and when the Germans invaded Belgium in August of 1914 their worst fears were realized as England immediately entered the war on the side of their close allies the Belgians.
- Reflecting on the situation it is clear the two aggressor nations were Austria-Hungary and Germany, with Serbia acting as a nationalist agitator in the cause. It was clear that Germany nor Europe were able to fill the void left by Bismarck's firing in 1890.

The Alliance System of WWI	
Triple Entente	Central Powers
Great Britain	Austria-Hungary
France	Germany
Russia	Ottoman Empire
Italy	Bulgaria
Greece	

- Simple formula for WWI: Nationalism (Arms Race/Imperialism) + Alliances=WWI

The War:

- The perception of the war was that it was going to be a short war. This was really the perception that existed in all nations call it unbridled optimism. The dream should have been shattered almost immediately when the Belgians initiated a glorious stand against the German aggressors, delaying what was viewed to be an instant defeat for the Belgians.
- Then the French followed with valiancy at the Battle of Marne during which they countered a brilliant German siege with a counter offensive that involved everyone down to the taxis of Paris! At this point the war's relative quickness proceeded to grind to a halt with the massive trench fortifications that were commonplace on the war's western front.
- As a style of warfare Trench warfare was not only remarkably in-efficient when measuring it against the true purpose of warfare advancing on the enemy and driving them back into a retreat. Both armies stand stalled and stagnant making sieges upon the other's trench. The scope of trench warfare on the European scene was incompressible ranging from Belgium to the Swiss Frontier. The warfare was then fought with mines, gas, and grenades. Loss of life was staggering (see onion piece) see information on 969. The effect on those who fought the war and lived was staggering, as they were shocked and disillusioned throughout their whole lives.

- The eastern front did not degenerate into trench-warfare, rather turned out much more lopsided as the Russians were steamrolled by the Germans and lost a staggering amount of life. The combination of Austria-Hungary and Germany was too much for the ill-equipped Russians who lost upwards of 2.5 million men during the dreadful 1915 campaign alone. Territorial gains brought new forces into the war, example Italy who switched sides in 1915. Bulgaria weighed offers from both sides to join with the Central Powers in 1915 following the lead of the Ottoman Empire.
- The Ottoman entrance into the war carried the war into the Middle East. British colonial interests in Persia (Iran), Egypt, other parts of the Arab world and India ensured its status as a “world” war. The war spread into East Asia as the battle for colonialism raged as far away as Japan.
- The conflict turned in 1917 with the US entrance into the war. The US was steadfast in their desire for neutrality through that point, however they had a dramatic change of heart, which turned the tide of war. US decision was a difficult one in large part because of the ethnic tensions and divisions of immigrants in the United States. The US finally entered into the war after two major events. The first was the Zimmerman note, a piece of intelligence intercepted by British Forces in 1917 which was sent by Germany’s state department leader Edward Zimmerman to the president of Mexico promising him a re-coup of lost lands from the United States when the war in Europe was decided and the US was not in it because Mexico had declared a war on them and kept them busy in the Western Hemisphere. Obviously that didn’t occur. The second was (1915) the sinking of the Lusitania by German submarines or U-Boats. These U-Boats proved deadly for they were a brand new phenomenon, for which little defense was available. The sinking of the Lusitania a luxury liner loaded with American citizens put America on guard about her freedom of the seas. The German intrusion upon this right continued until 1917 when the US finally entered the war. This German “sub warfare against commerce” was too much to tolerate.
- Mobilizing for the war at home: common denominators?
 - Building Nationalism: propaganda very effective in this arena.
 - Economic strategies: loosening economic controls on competition in non-capitalist economies.
 - Economic planning: rationing, economic planning
 - Imperial participation: Britain had the greatest advantage here with India participating very intensely.
 - Women: women began fulfilling roles in Industry in the absence of men.
 - Curbing and monitoring agricultural production for the state.
 - Germany and US the example.

The Social Impact:

- The war’s social impacts were numerous. Class distinctions became less, economic and social growth increased for women and minorities. Labor unions provided huge gains for industry after the war with their intense participation and loyalty. The loss of men was phenomenal forcing women to take a greater role in society.

Growing Political Tensions:

- Wars, can either be a blessing for a nation stabilizing it behind the forces of nationalism or it can be a disaster in the wake of defeat and the sting of reverse nationalism and social sanctions like censorship. The European situation was split; many nations had positive gains from the war such as France and Britain. The German and Austro-Hungarian results were not as compelling as the war carried on and losses and nationalism mounted. The Reichstag began voting against war funding behind socialists and Catholics. The results in Russia were unspeakable, which you will see.

The Russian Revolution:

- [See PowerPoint](#)

The Peace Process and conclusions:

- World War I began in 1914. The war emerged out of Europe's old problems. The militarism best emphasized by Prussia/Germany but practiced by all. The Nationalism of Europe, which had been running wild since the French Revolution of 1848, it had inspired feelings of independence and greatness amongst all peoples of Europe. Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were ruling over places that had little in common with their cultural heritage and the violence between empires like Austria-Hungary and neighboring Serbia were proof of this phenomenon. The British had led a dramatic movement towards global imperialism. This movement would not stop until "The sun never sets on the British Empire". The war for colonies was in full force. Europe was interwoven into a system of alliances so intricate and complex that the states involved hardly knew who their respective allies were.

Out of these causes came a spark, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June of 1914. This minor political assassination of the unpopular heir of the Austro-Hungarian Empire gave them the excuse they needed to take care of insurrection in Serbia with full force. The assassination of Ferdinand was by no means a cause of the war, but it did provide a spark that put the wheels in motion for the most deadly confrontation that mankind has ever seen. A war fought in trenches in France, in the air over Germany and in the cold seas of the North Atlantic. All in all the war spanned 6 continents and claimed 50 million lives by some accounts.

Little did we know at the time that the War which ended in 1914 would set in motion a string of events so terrible that it will envelop us today, nearly 90 years after the guns of August came to a deafening silence. The Germans/Austro-Hungarians will be turned back in their efforts by a tired band of Europeans and some eager young doughboys from the burgeoning power from across the Atlantic. The war's peace would be settled at a conference in Versailles. Little did we know that the peace established after this devastating war would prove worse than the fighting that reached during it.

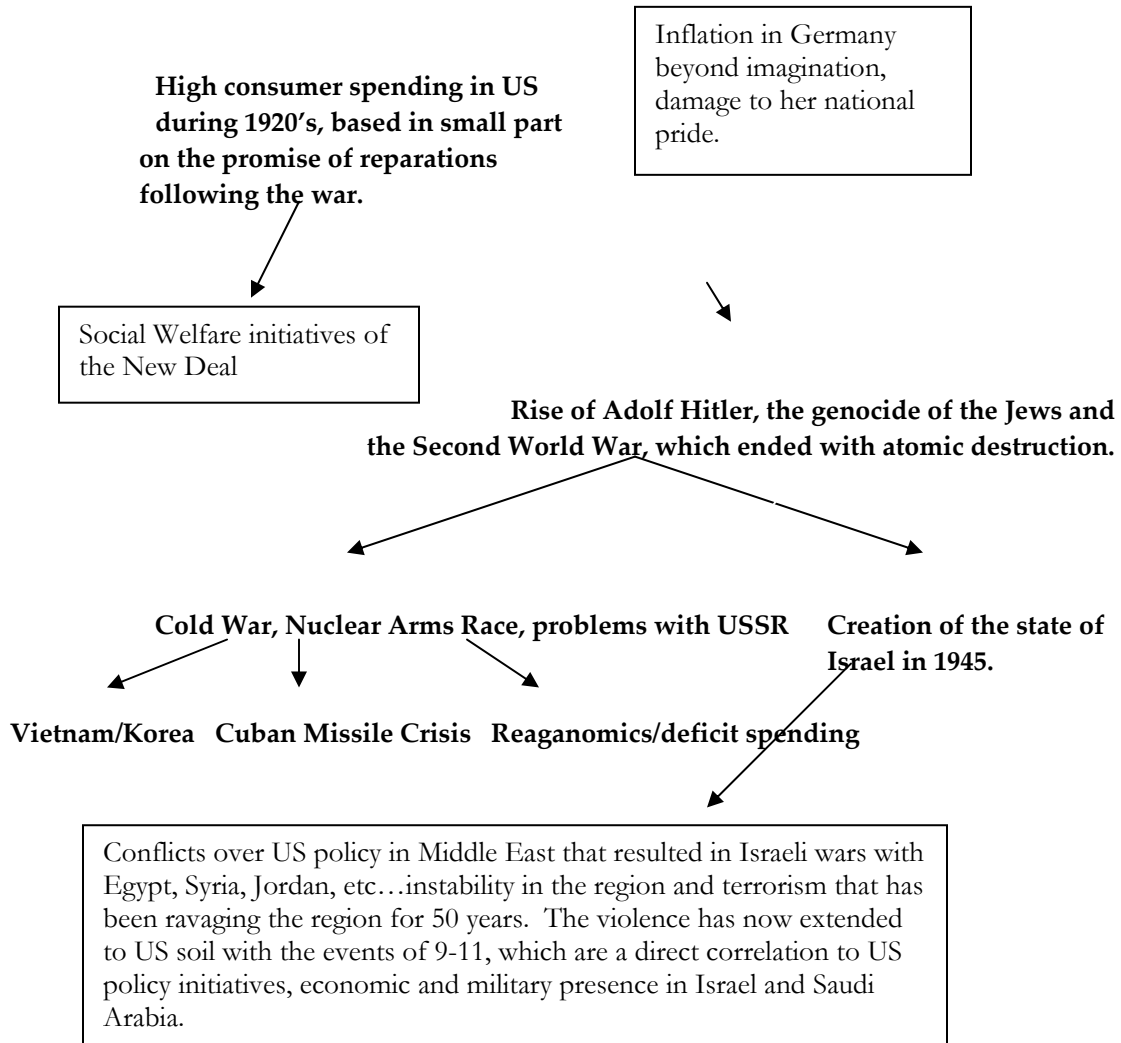
Versailles was a stage for the idealism of Woodrow Wilson and his counterparts David Lloyd George of England, Georges Clemenceau of France and Vittorio Orlando of Italy. Wilson came to the peace conference at the lavish palace armed with a dream, a dream of ending war for all time by declaring a "peace without victory". Wilson's dreams would be short lived as his idealistic agenda for peace the 14 points will be criticized and watered down both at home and abroad by the fact that the European powers were out for vengeance against Germany and no matter what this professorial president had to say there would be no peace without victory. Clemenceau whose nation had been punished for decades if not centuries by their neighbors to the East levied the argument that the war had not been fought on US soil, but on French soil. Wilson and his 1 year entry into the war could not comprehend the torture of decades of abuse at the hands of Prussia and Germany, thus his idealism would have no place at the peace table.

Noticeably absent from the peace table were the Russians. They had drawn the ire of the western nations with their momentous decision to withdraw from WWI with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The treaty would give Russia something they had not a chance at during the war; survival and a chance to eat for its populous. The west failed to acknowledge the Russian need for peace in 1917 and despite her 3 hard years of fighting, a death toll that exceeded the other powers combined she was absent from negotiations at the table. Hard feelings would be felt into the 1980's.

The terms of Peace. Germany was to be punished severely. She would have 33 billion dollars (1919) figure levied against her, a figure so astronomically ridiculous it would have been impossible to repay under any conditions. It was forced to take blame for the war, she lost land, she lost pride and she lost the ability to industrialize in the wake of disaster. The German economy in the post war period crumbled under the wake of inflation, unpaid war debts and the reparations imposed on her by Versailles. Germany was in dire straits by 1930. When the Great Depression surfaced Germany was in total economic ruin, inflation so high that bread cost millions of marks. Germany would listen to any solution to drag her out of her economic misery. The voice that emerged is a voice that can never be silenced.

Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany on two promises. First, he would restore her economy and bring bread to German tables. He succeeded in both, however the price for success was an atrocity that the world can never forget. What follows is a flow chart explaining how the settlement of Versailles is indirectly responsible for nearly every tragedy that has rocked the 20th century.

Versailles:



Note: this doesn't even explain unresolved land issues that will lead to conflicts in the Balkans and beyond. Nor does it consider the snubbing of Ho Chi Minh an aspiring Vietnamese politician who turns to communism in the wake of the snub at Versailles.