

Unit Two-Lesson One : World War I and Its Settlement

Video Lecture

Brainstorming Questions

- What are the various names given to World War I?
- What were the main and immediate causes of World War I?

Competencies

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Discuss the alliance systems of the World War I;
- Jot down the main and immediate causes of the World War I;
- Point out the consequences of the war; and
- List down the terms of the Versailles and other peace treaties signed soon after the end of the War.

Lesson Overview

In this lesson , you will learn about World War I and its immediate aftermath. The alliance systems of World War I, the causes, course, and effects of the war, and the peace settlement will be discussed in detail.

1. World War I and Its Settlement

World War I, also known as the First World War, the Great War, the War of the Nations, and the War to End All Wars, was a world conflict from 1914 to 1918. No previous conflict had mobilized so many soldiers or involved so many in the field of battle. Chemical weapons were used for the first time. The first mass bombardment of civilians from the sky was carried out, and some of the century's first large-scale civilian massacres took place.

Long-term causes of World War I

A. Rival alliances: Triple Alliance vs. Triple Entente

1. In 1871: The balance of power of Europe was upset by the decisive Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the creation of the German Empire. Bismarck thereafter feared French revenge and negotiated treaties to isolate France. Bismarck also feared Russia, especially after the Congress of Berlin in 1878 when Russia blamed Germany for not gaining territory in the Balkans.
2. In 1879, the Dual Alliance emerged: Germany and Austria. Bismarck sought to thwart Russian expansion. The Dual Alliance was based on German support for Austria in its struggle with Russia over expansion in the Balkans. This became a major feature of European diplomacy until the end of World War I.

3. Triple Alliance, 1881: Italy joined Germany and Austria. Italy sought support for its imperialistic ambitions in the Mediterranean and Africa.
4. Russian-German Reinsurance Treaty, 1887. It promised the neutrality of both Germany and Russia if either country went to war with another country. Kaiser Wilhelm II refused to renew the reinsurance treaty after removing Bismarck in 1890. This can be seen as a huge diplomatic blunder; Russia wanted to renew it but now had no assurances. It was safe from a German invasion. France courted Russia; the two became allies. Germany, now out of necessity, developed closer ties to Austria.
5. "Splendid Isolation" for Britain: After 1891, Britain was the only non-aligned power and enjoyed relative security as the world's largest navy and protection by the sea as an island nation.
6. Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902): Britain sought a Japanese agreement to "benevolent neutrality" to counter the possible Russian threat in India. This signaled the end of Britain's "splendid isolation."
7. Entente Cordiale (1904): Due to the Anglo-German naval arms race, Britain and France settled all outstanding colonial disputes in Africa. France accepted British rule of the Sudan. Britain recognized French control of Morocco.
8. Triple Entente, 1907: Britain, France and Russia. It was formed to check the power of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy). It was not truly a formal alliance but one done in principle.

B. The Anglo-German arms race

- Militarism led to a belief in the inevitability of a general European war. Germany overtook Britain industrially in the 1890s. More specifically, by World War I, both Britain and Germany possessed **Dreadnoughts**—new super battleships with awesome firing range and power.

C. Imperialism led to increased tensions between the Great Powers over Africa

- Berlin Conference, 1885: Germany's late entry into imperialism led Bismarck to establish rules for carving up Africa. Germany aggressively set out to acquire colonies, sometimes coming into conflict with rival European powers.

D. Nationalism created a "powder keg" in the Balkans

- The Ottoman Empire ("the sick man of Europe") receded from the Balkans leaving a power vacuum. This was the so-called Eastern Question.
- Pan-Slavism, a nationalist movement to unite all Slavic peoples, encouraged the Serbs, Bosnians, Slovenes, and Croats to seek a single political entity in Southeastern Europe. As the southern Slavs' "big brother" to the east, Russia focused on Balkan territories in the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires after its humiliating loss in the Russo-Japanese War.

Immediate causes of World War I

June 28, 1914: Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Austrian heir to throne, was assassinated by Serbian nationalist Princip (member of the ultra-nationalist Serbian "Black Hand") while visiting Bosnia-Herzegovina. On July 28, Austria declared war on Serbia.

Course of the WWI

Soon after the declaration of war by Austro-Hungary on Serbia, Russia decided to support Serbia, even at the risk of war with Austro-Hungary and Germany. This action caused Japan to declare war against the Allied Powers. Therefore, World War I broke out between the two armed camps, i.e., the Triple Alliance (Central Powers) and the Triple Entente (Allied Powers).

The main theater of World War I was Europe. The theaters of the war were also fought far from Europe, including Africa and the Pacific Ocean. In Europe, the war was fought on two major fronts: the Western Front (Germany against the Allied Powers) and the Eastern Front (Germany against Russia).

Of the two fronts, the most important was the Western Front, where Germany put into practice the Schlieffen Plan. This war plan was designed by Von Schlieffen, who had been Chief of Staff of the German Army. The Schlieffen plan required an attack on France first by sweeping through Belgium. In the east, the Germans planned to stand on the defensive against Russia until France had been crushed, a task Germany planned to complete in six weeks. Thus, the Germans invaded Luxemburg on August 1 and Belgium on August 3. The latter invasion violated the treaty of 1839, in which the British had guaranteed Belgian neutrality. This factor caused Britain to abandon neutrality and to join the war against Germany. Germany then invaded France, and on August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany.

As both camps were in full-scale war, they sought new allies. Turkey and Bulgaria joined the central powers. The first was because of its hostility to Russia, whereas the latter was the enemy of Serbia. In 1915, Italy joined the Triple Entente because the land that Italy wanted was still occupied by Austria. Romania joined the allies in 1916 but was quickly defeated. In the Far East, Japan honored its alliance with Britain and entered the war. The Japanese quickly overran the German colonies in China and the Pacific.

Much of the First World War's combat involved trench warfare, where hundreds often died for each meter of land gained. Many of the deadliest battles in history occurred during the First World War. Such battles include Mons (Belgium), Tannenberg (Germany), Marne (France), Ypres (Belgium), Gallipoli (Turkey), Verdun (France), Jutland (Denmark), Somme (France), and Amiens (France). Artillery was responsible for the largest number of casualties during the war. The First World War also saw the use of chemical warfare and aerial bombardment, both of which had been outlawed by the 1907 Hague Convention. U-boats, or submarines, were first used in combat shortly after the war began. Tanks were developed and used for the first time during this war.

Two events proved decisive in the course of the war. First, the withdrawal of Russia from WWI was made because of the outbreak of the October 1917 Revolution. In December, the Central Powers signed an armistice with Russia, followed by the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty on March 3,

1918. Second, the US joined the war on the side of the Allies. In December 1916, President Woodrow Wilson of the USA attempted to negotiate with the two camps, but neither of them accepted him. When the German government continued the unrestricted submarine warfare against US commercial ships, USA declared war on the Central Powers on April 6, 1917. The Allied Powers then launched an offensive on the Central Powers, which resulted in the disintegration of the Central Powers.

The End of the War

Bulgaria was the first of the Central Powers to sign an armistice on September 29, 1918. On October 30, the Ottoman Empire capitulated. On November 3, Austria-Hungary sent demanded an armistice and terms of peace. The Armistice with Austria was granted on November 4. Austria and Hungary had signed separate armistices following the overthrow of the Habsburg monarchy. The outbreak of the German Revolution forced Emperor Wilhelm II to abdicate. A Republic was proclaimed on November 9, marking the end of the German Empire. The Kaiser fled the next day to the Netherlands, which granted him political asylum. On November 11, Germany signed an armistice with the Allies. On the eleventh day of the eleventh month, at the eleventh hour, it was official, the war was over.

Treaty of Versailles

On June 28, 1919, World War I officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Versailles was an attempt to prevent the world from going into another war. It was organized in several chapters each having different clauses.

Territorial clauses:

- France regained Alsace and Lorraine
- Eupen and Malmedy passed into the hands of Belgium
- Eastern territories were annexed by Poland which caused East Prussia to become territorially isolated.
- Danzig and Memel, former Baltic German cities were declared free cities
- Denmark annexed northern Schleswig-Holstein
- Germany lost all of its colonies and the victors annexed them

Military clauses:

- Drastic limitation of the German navy.
- Dramatic reduction of the Army (only 100,000 troops, prohibition of having tanks, aircraft and heavy artillery).
- Demilitarization of the Rhineland region.

War Reparations:

- The treaty declared Germany and its allies responsible for all 'loss and damage' suffered by the Allies and as a consequence they were forced to pay war reparations to the victors.

The effects of WWI

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

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

End to long-standing royal dynasties. Habsburg dynasty removed in Austria (had lasted 500 years). Romanov dynasty removed in Russia (had lasted 300 years). Hohenzollern dynasty removed in Germany (had lasted 300 years). Ottoman Empire destroyed (had lasted 500 years).

Shift in financial power to the United States: Europe lost its preeminent position economically that it had enjoyed for 500 years. The U.S. became the world's leading creditor and greatest producer due to the drain of Europe's resources during the war.

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

Creation of the League of Nations: The League of Nations was an international diplomatic group developed after World War I as a way to solve disputes between countries before they erupted into open warfare. A precursor to the United Nations, the League achieved some victories but had a mixed record of success.

Key Concepts and Terminology

- The Triple Alliance
- The Triple Entente
- The Schlieffen plan
- Blitzkrieg" lightning War