

UNIT 1 CONFLICT AND CHALLENGE: THE WORLD OF 1919

TREATY OF VERSAILLES ESSAY

Question: To what extent was the Treaty of Versailles a fair and reasonable treaty?

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Evaluate the treaty by identifying and explaining which terms are fair and reasonable and which terms were not fair and reasonable. Indicate in the thesis which terms are fair and reasonable and which terms are not fair and reasonable. State your position whether the treaty overall is fair or not at the end of the thesis.

Chart

Use the chart provided to evaluate the terms of the treaty.

Organization and Structure of the Essay

Refer to the handout *History 12: The Essay* regarding the structure and organization of the essay.

Documentation of the Sources

Since you are obtaining and using ideas and information from various sources you must identify these sources in your essay. This is known as documentation of sources and involves *in-text citations* **and** a *works consulted*. If you do not document your sources it will result in plagiarism and consequently the essay will not be accepted.

▪ In-text Citations

The information obtained and used from sources must be written in your own words – this is called paraphrasing. Ideas and information obtained from the sources used in the essay whether paraphrased or “direct quotes” must be documented using *in-text citations* to avoid plagiarism. This involves placing the author(s) last name and page number of the source in brackets at the end of the sentence where you used the information.

▪ Works Consulted/Cited

All the sources consulted and used to obtain ideas and information must be listed on a separate page at the end of the essay under the heading *works consulted/cited* (formerly known as the bibliography).

Use Son of Citation Machine web site to complete the works consulted:

<http://www.citationmachine.net/>

Marking Criteria for the Essay

A 100% or 93%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts demonstrate an excellent understanding of the topic • evidence is thorough, accurate, relevant, valid with minor exceptions • thesis sentence is effectively developed and identifies major points • conclusion contains an effective reference to the thesis and clincher • writing style is effective (tone, sentences, vocabulary, etc.) • transitions, organization and sequence of ideas are effective • contains minor writing errors (spelling, punctuation, sentences, grammar)
B 85% or 79%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts demonstrate a very good understanding of the topic • evidence is generally thorough, accurate, relevant, valid • thesis sentence clearly states the purpose and identifies major points • conclusion contains a competent reference to the thesis and clincher • writing style is effective (tone, sentences, vocabulary, etc.) with one or two exceptions • transitions, organization and sequence of ideas are effective with one or two exceptions • contains a few writing errors (spelling, punctuation, sentences, grammar)
C+ 72%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts demonstrate a good understanding of the topic • evidence is mostly thorough, accurate, relevant, valid but inconsistent • thesis sentence states the purpose • conclusion contains a useful reference to the thesis and clincher • writing style is effective (tone, sentences, vocabulary, etc.) with some exceptions • transitions, organization and sequence of ideas are effective with some exceptions • contains some writing errors (spelling, punctuation, sentences, grammar)
C 66%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of the topic • evidence is adequate but not thorough, accurate, relevant, valid throughout • thesis sentence states the purpose but it is not clear and does not identify major points • conclusion does not contain an effective reference to the thesis or clincher • writing style is satisfactory (tone, sentences, vocabulary, etc.) • transitions are weak or missing, the organization of ideas is not logical or the sequence of ideas ineffective • contains writing errors (spelling, punctuation, sentences, grammar)
C- 59%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts demonstrate a limited understanding of the topic • evidence is limited and not thorough, accurate, or relevant • thesis sentence does not clearly state the purpose or is not identifiable • conclusion does not contain an effective reference to the thesis and clincher • writing style is not inadequate (tone, sentences, vocabulary, etc.) • transitions are weak or missing, the organization of ideas is not logical and the sequence of ideas is ineffective • contains several writing errors (spelling, punctuation, sentences, grammar)
F 49%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts demonstrate an inadequate understanding of the topic • evidence is not adequate, valid, relevant, accurate • thesis sentence is not identifiable • conclusion does not contain a reference to the thesis and clincher • writing style is ineffective (tone, sentences, vocabulary, etc.) • transitions are missing and the organization and sequence of ideas are ineffective • contains many writing errors (spelling, punctuation, sentences, grammar)
I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the essay cannot be assessed as it is incomplete

ESSAY STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

An **essay** is a composition with a thesis, point of view or argument. It contains an **introduction**, **body**, and **conclusion**.

Introduction

The introduction contains an **attention-getter or opening invitation**, **background information**, and **thesis sentence**.

❖ **Attention-getter/opening invitation**

The introductory paragraph begins with one or more sentences referred to as the **attention-getter or opening invitation**. The purpose of the attention-getter or opening invitation is to get the reader's attention and introduce the issue or topic. The attention-getter or opening invitation may be a question, quote, statistics, description of a scene, etc.

❖ **Background Information**

After the attention-getter or opening invitation, provide **background information** about the issue or topic. The information may specific or general details related to the issue or topic and should not be repeated in the body of the essay. The purpose is to provide an effective transition between the attention-getter/opening invitation and the thesis statement.

❖ **Thesis Sentence(s)**

The **thesis sentence(s)** indicates the main idea, point of view or argument of the essay. The thesis sentence also identifies the **major points** that support the main idea, point of view or argument that will be developed in the body of the essay. The thesis sentence is the last sentence in the introductory paragraph.

Body

❖ **Middle Paragraphs**

The **middle paragraphs** contain the major points and evidence that support the main idea, point of view, or argument indicated in the thesis sentence. The number of major points identified in the thesis sentence will determine the number of paragraphs in the body of the essay. For example, if three major points are identified in the thesis sentence then the body of the essay will have a minimum of three paragraphs (one major point per paragraph). The body of the essay must contain a **minimum** of three paragraphs.

Conclusion

The conclusion contains a **reference to the thesis sentence** and a **clincher**.

❖ **Reference to the Thesis Sentence**

The concluding paragraph begins with a **reference to the thesis sentence**. Reword the thesis sentence but avoid repeating it. The purpose of the reference to the thesis sentence is to remind the reader of the thesis sentence and that all the major points have been addressed. The reference to the thesis sentence may be one or more sentences.

❖ **Clincher**

Following the reference to the thesis sentence is the **clincher**. The clincher is the final word on the issue or topic. The purpose of the clincher is to bring the essay to an effective end and provide the reader with a sense of completion. The clincher may be a solution, proposal, lasting thought or final impression, etc. The clincher is the last sentence of the concluding paragraph.

Documenting Sources – MLA In-Text Citations and Works Consulted/Cited

In-Text Citation

In MLA style, referring to the works of others in your text is done by using what is known as **parenthetical citation**. This method involves placing relevant source information in parentheses after a **quote** or a **paraphrase**.

The **in-text citation** is a brief reference within your text that indicates the source you consulted. It should properly attribute any **ideas, paraphrases, or direct quotations** to your source and should direct readers to the entry in the list of **works cited**. An in-text citation is the **author's name and page number in parentheses** or just the page number if the author is named in the sentence.

Examples of In-Text Citations

Imperialism is "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (**Said p.9**).

OR

According to Edward W. Said, imperialism is defined by "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (**p.9**).

Example of Work Cited

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Knopf, 1994.

Examples of In-Text Citations

Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was marked by a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (**p.263**).

Romantic poetry is characterized by the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (**Wordsworth p.263**).

Wordsworth extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (**p.263**).

These citations tell readers the information in the sentence can be located on page 263 of a work by Wordsworth. If readers want more information about this source, they can turn to the works cited page and they would find the following information:

Example of Works Cited

Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*. London: Oxford UP, 1967. Print.

Evidence can be cited in three different ways:

- “quote” (word for word)
- paraphrase (use your own words)
- including the author’s name (or source) in the sentence

Examples of Citing Evidence – Quote, Paraphrase, Author’s Name

- “Quote”

“Austria was more responsible for the immediate origin of the war than any other power” (Fay p.180).

- Paraphrase

Austrian Foreign Minister Berchtold drafted the ultimatum to Serbia with the intention Serbia would reject it and therefore give Austrian an excuse to attack (Fay p.180).

- the author’s name or source in the sentence

According to Fay, Austria wanted a “local” war with Serbia only but was prepared to drag the rest of Europe into war (p.180).

Works Consulted/Cited

List all the sources used to obtain the evidence at the end of the essay in a works cited page. All entries in the works cited page must correspond to the works cited in your main text.

The works cited entry should include the following information and the elements should be listed in the following order and followed by the punctuation mark shown:

- **author.**
- **title of source.**
- title of container,
- other contributors,
- version,
- number,
- **publisher,**
- **publication date,**
- **location.**

❖ Refer to *The Purdue OWL* for explanation and examples <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Example of Works Cited

Fay, Sidney Bradshaw. “Origins of the World War”, *32 Problems in World History*, Edited by E. Fenton, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964, New Jersey.

Citation Machine <http://www.citationmachine.net/mla>

The Purdue OWL. Purdue U Writing Lab, 2016. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Documenting Sources – When to Cite

Citing sources is necessary to avoid plagiarism which occurs when information or idea is used from a source directly (“quote”) or indirectly (paraphrase) without acknowledging the source.

When to cite sources

You must cite the source when ...

- ... you use someone’s opinion or interpretation
- ... you use someone’s idea(s)
- ... you use facts that are not common knowledge (see below)
- ... you use information that you are not familiar with or have no previous knowledge of
- ... you use certain statistics (exceptions apply)

When citing a source is not necessary

You do not have to cite a source if ...

- ... if the information is well known, not in dispute or common knowledge
- ... if the information is available in certain sources such as dictionaries
- ... if the information and statistics is available in several sources and does not vary from source to source

Use these sources to obtain evidence for the essay. Evidence obtained from the sources must be identified or cited using MLA style *in-text citation* and a *works consulted/cited*.

Sources already provided in class:

- 32 Problems in World History - Origins of the World War – S. B. Fay (*Article 231*)
- German Responsibility for the Outbreak of the War - Raffael Scheck (*Article 231*)
- Just don't ask me who started the first world war? - Margaret MacMillan (*Article 231*)
- Historiography of the Causes of World War One - www.johndclare.net (*Article 231*)
- International Affairs 1890-1939 – Ch 5 The Treaty of Versailles – R.N. Rundle (*terms*)
- Twentieth Century Viewpoints - Was the Treaty of Versailles fair and reasonable? p.62-64 (Keynes vs Birdsall) - D. Quinlan, et al (*territory, military, reparations*)
- Why was there opposition in Germany to the Treaty of Versailles? - www.johndclare.net (*German point of view*)
- The War Guilt Clause - William Keylor (*Article 231*)
- An impossible Task - Margaret MacMillan (*Article 231, territory*)
- The Big Four: Peacemaking in Paris in 1919 - Alan Sharp (*all, critique of Keynes*)
- Global Forces - Chapter 2 The First World War p.22-25 - E. Mitchner and R. Tuffs
- Global Forces - Chapter 3 Reconstruction of Europe p.39-40 - E. Mitchner/R. Tuffs
- Twentieth Century History - Chapter 11 Make Germany Pay p.47-50 - Tony Howarth

Sources in this booklet:

- Versailles and Peacemaking - Ruth Henig (*general overview*)
- Treaty of Versailles: Was Germany Guilty - Antony Lentin (*general overview*)
- The Treaty of Versailles and its Consequences - James Atkinson (*military, territory, reparations, Article 231*)
- The Weimar Republic: The Treaty of Versailles - Raffael Scheck (*League of Nations, territory, military, reparations*)
- Ending the War to End All Wars - Margaret MacMillan (*Article 231, reparations*)
- Lesson from History? The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 - Margaret MacMillan (*all*)
- Interview: Margaret MacMillan - www.pbs.org (*colonies, territory, reparations*)
- Was the Treaty of Versailles fair? Hopkins vs Curtis (*Article 231, military, reparations, colonies*)

Web Sites:

- Debate.org - Was the Treaty of Versailles Fair?
 - <http://www.debate.org/opinions/was-the-treaty-of-versailles-fair-to-germany-which-of-the-allied-leaders-did-you-most-agree-with-which-of-the-provisions-was-the-most-fair-how-about-unfair>
- John Maynard Keynes
 - The Economic Consequences of the Peace
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15776/15776-h/15776-h.htm>
- The Peace Settlements: The Treaty of Versailles
 - <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/the-treaty-of-versailles/>

Versailles and Peacemaking

By Dr Ruth Henig

Last updated 2011-03-10



'Should the Treaty of Versailles punish or rehabilitate Germany?' Dr Ruth Henig examines the question that divided the Allies at the end of World War One.

The American liberal peace programme

The peace settlement was drawn up at the end of a long and gruelling war which cost over eight million lives and, according to one estimate, around 260 billion dollars - or to put it another way, over six times the sum of all the national debt accumulated in the entire world from the end of the 18th century to 1914.

When press reports about Wilson's Fourteen Points first reached Germany, the American peace programme was indignantly dismissed...

The expectation of both the Allies and the Central Powers was that the costs of the war would largely be recouped from the losers. Furthermore, both sides planned to exploit their victory by inflicting territorial losses and military limitations on the enemy, and confiscating a sizeable chunk of their economic and industrial resources.



Wilson: progressive liberal? ©

However, such ambitions did not accord well with the peace programme being drawn up in the United States in the course of 1918. The **Fourteen Points**, delivered by the President of the United States to the American congress in January 1918, and his subsequent addresses represented an ambitious and idealistic bid by Woodrow Wilson to seize the initiative on behalf of the United States and to offer moral leadership to the world in the ensuing peace negotiations.

When press reports about Wilson's Fourteen Points first reached Germany, the American peace programme was indignantly dismissed by conservatives as being a 'front for imperialistic conquest' and striking a note of victory which was 'hardly appropriate to Germany's unprecedentedly promising military situation' in early 1918. In stark contrast to Wilson's peace proposals, the Germans concluded an extremely harsh treaty with Russia at Brest Litovsk in March 1918, and turned their attention to a final, all-out push to break the Allied lines on the Western Front.

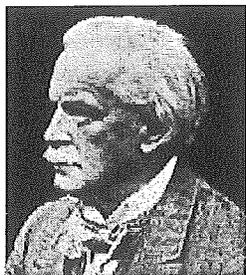
But victory did not materialise. Instead, by August of 1918 the German High Command were facing defeat. Now Wilson's peace proposals looked very attractive, compared to the terms likely to be put forward by French or British leaders. The High Command hastily summoned political leaders from the German Reichstag to put their weight behind a new civilian government under Prince Max von Baden, and to agree to pursue peace negotiations with Wilson based on the Fourteen Points. The cynical calculation was that a new civilian government would secure a more lenient peace than would be offered to German military leaders.

Challenges to Wilson

While Wilson negotiated the terms of a ceasefire with German representatives, the Allied powers were left waiting on the sidelines. Wilson's reluctance at this stage to consult with British and French leaders did not augur well for a peace process which would inevitably involve complex political and territorial negotiations involving many countries. Nor was he willing to compromise with his critics in the United States.

There were many Republicans and even some prominent Democrats who did not support Wilson's liberal peace programme...

There were many Republicans and even some prominent Democrats who did not support Wilson's liberal peace programme, calling instead for a peace of retribution and for an armistice with Germany of 'unconditional surrender'.



Lloyd George won a landslide victory with his bid to make the Germans 'pay' ©

In the American mid-term elections held in November 1918, the American people voted not for Wilson and his peace programme but for his Republican opponents, resulting in a Republican-dominated Senate and a Republican majority in the House of Representatives.

Thus serious doubts were raised even before the armistice had been signed, and weeks before a peace conference could convene, as to whether any peace settlement based on Wilson's Fourteen Points would be ratified by the American Senate.

This serious challenge to Wilson within the United States increased the determination of the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and the French Premier, Clemenceau, to push forward the demands of their own electorates. Lloyd George won a crushing election victory in Britain in December, 1918, under the banner of 'making the Germans pay'. French opinion was even more vociferous in calling for security against future German aggression and for reparations for all the damage caused by the Germans in northern France.

The Great War came to an end on 11 November 1918, the date when the Germans signed an armistice and agreed to peace negotiations on the basis of the Fourteen Points. Their interpretation of these points was extremely broad, encompassing plebiscites in Alsace and Lorraine and on the German-Polish border to reflect Wilson's call for self-determination, and arguing that German Austrians, if they wished, should be allowed to unite with Germany.

German officials were not slow to recognise that Wilson's principles and 'new diplomacy' could be turned to Germany's advantage, and used to justify territorial gains in Europe, even in the face of military defeat.

Negotiations begin

The scene was thus set for gruelling peace negotiations, which began in Paris in early January 1919. The leaders of



The Big Four, from left: Lloyd George, Orlando, Clemenceau and Wilson ©

32 countries, representing between them some three-quarters of the world's population, together with large numbers of advisers and scores of journalists descended on the French capital. Passions ran high and it took time to impose order on the proceedings.

...after weeks of tortuous negotiations, a peace was finally hammered out and presented to the Germans...

Discussions about possible peace terms were repeatedly interrupted by urgent political and military crises revolving around the renewal of the armistice with Germany, the threat of the spread of Bolshevism and continuing fighting in eastern Europe. There was an assassination attempt on the French premier, Clemenceau.

Both Lloyd George and Wilson had to return home part-way through the conference to attend to urgent parliamentary business. Orlando of Italy stormed out in late April. But after weeks of tortuous negotiations, a peace was finally hammered out and presented to the Germans on 7 May.

Compared to the treaties which Germany had imposed on defeated Russia and Romania in 1918, the Treaty of Versailles was quite moderate. It stripped Germany of just over 13 per cent of its territory, much of which, in the shape of Alsace and

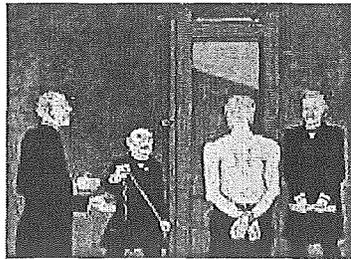
Lorraine, was returned to France. It also reduced Germany's economic productivity by about 13 per cent and its population by ten per cent. Germany lost all of its colonies and large merchant vessels, 75 per cent of its iron ore deposits and 26 per cent of its coal and potash.

Germany was to pay substantial reparations for 'civilian damage', because it was held responsible, along with its allies, for causing the war with its heavy losses. However, a definite sum was not specified in the treaty, but would be decided upon after the conference by a specially-appointed Reparations Commission. In 1921, the sum of £6,000 million was set, but this was further reduced in subsequent years. Germany's army and navy were drastically cut in size, the army to 100,000 long-serving volunteers, and the country was forbidden to have an air force.

Despite these terms, Germany retained a strong economic, industrial and territorial position at the heart of Europe, with a vigorous and expanding population of 66 million. The peace settlement left it in a potentially dominant position in Europe, wounded but not seriously hurt. This outcome reflected the aim of the United States and the allied powers at Paris, which was not to crush Germany or to break up the new empire, but rather to contain the country's military power.

Germany incensed

It was the settlement in eastern Europe which most incensed the Germans, since the German army, though ultimately defeated in the west, had been victorious on the eastern front. German leaders attacked the territorial



German cartoon: Versailles sends Germany to the guillotine ©

losses to the new Polish state in the shape of the 'Polish corridor' and Upper Silesia, the prohibition on Anschluss or union with Austria, and the incorporation of large numbers of former Habsburg Sudeten Germans into the new state of Czechoslovakia as violations of Wilson's promises.

Danzig... was established as a free city under the League of Nations...

As a result of their bitter protests, the port of Danzig, with its close-on half a million German inhabitants, was established as a free city under the League of Nations rather than being ceded to Poland.

In addition, the population of Upper Silesia was to be given the chance to vote in a future plebiscite on whether they wished to remain in Germany or become a part of the new Polish state.

Other revisions were also built into the treaty. The Rhineland was to be occupied for 15 years, but troops were to be progressively withdrawn at five-year intervals provided Germany carried out the treaty terms. The inhabitants of the Saar basin were to be offered a plebiscite after 15 years to establish whether they wished to return to Germany, join France or remain under the supervision of the League of Nations. And in due course it was assumed that Germany would be admitted to the newly created League of Nations.

A stab in the back

Inevitably, it proved impossible to frame a treaty which would both satisfy the demands of the French and British populations for a punitive treaty and comply with German conceptions of a fair and 'Wilsonian' peace. The



German cartoon: Wilson goes to meet his master in hell ©

Allies constructed the peace settlement on the assumption that while the Germans would not like many of the terms, they would accept them as the inevitable consequence of defeat.

But large sections of the population in Germany did not believe that their country had been honourably defeated on the battlefield. They believed in the rumours sweeping across Germany that the push for victory of their valiant troops on the Western Front had been sabotaged by traitors and pacifists at home who had spread disaffection and revolution.

This 'stab in the back' had prevented the gallant soldiers from securing the victory which was almost in their grasp. Thus a treaty which not only confirmed German defeat, but which, in clause 231, justified its demands for punitive war costs by laying the blame for the outbreak of the war firmly on German shoulders, was bound to provoke fury. Germany was a country which saw itself as having been encircled by France, Russia and Britain in 1914 and provoked into war.

In the frenzied post-war atmosphere, politicians from all parties agreed that the treaty, and in particular its despised 'War Guilt' clause, was vindictive, unfair and impossible to execute. They portrayed it as an unjust peace, and appealed to progressive forces across Europe to help them to revise it.

Such tactics were extremely successful in dividing the victorious coalition which had defeated Germany and negotiated the peace. Within a year, the United States Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles and signed a separate peace with Germany, leaving Britain and France bitterly opposed over how to proceed. While British leaders now sought further revisions to the treaty in a bid to conciliate Germany, France demanded strict enforcement of the terms.

It was the total failure of the victorious powers to work closely together after 1919 to contain German power, rather than the specific terms of the peace settlement, which was one of the contributing factors to the outbreak of a second world war 20 years later.

Find out more

Books

The Origins of the Second World War in Europe by P Bell (Longman, 1986)

The Treaty of Versailles edited by M Boemeke, G Feldman & E Glaser (Cambridge UP, 1998)

Peacemakers by Margaret MacMillan (John Murray, 2001)

Versailles and After by R Henig (Routledge, 1995)

The Versailles Peace Settlement by A Lentin (The Historical Association, 1991)

Land and Power: British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-19 by H Nelson (David and Charles, 1971)

The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris by A Sharp (Macmillan, 1991)

Links

The Treaty of Versailles In full, from the World War One document archive.

learn.co.uk A wealth of information from learn.co.uk about World War One and the issues dominating the peace conference.

Trenches on the web A vast amount of World War One material.

About the author

Dr Ruth Henig is a Senior Lecturer in modern history at Lancaster University, and author of several books and pamphlets on 20th-century international history.

Treaty of Versailles: Was Germany Guilty?

By [Antony Lentin](#) ^[1] | Published in [History Today](#) ^[2] | [Volume: 62 Issue: 1](#) ^[3] | [2012](#) ^[4]

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[First World War](#) ^[7] | [Interwar period](#) ^[8] | [Europe](#) ^[9]

The Treaty of Versailles, negotiated by the fractious Allies in the wake of the First World War, did not crush Germany, nor did it bring her back into the family of nations. Antony Lentin examines a tortuous process that sowed the seeds of further conflict.



Crowds line the streets of Berlin as German soldiers return, hailed as 'undefeated', at the end of the war, 1918. Corbis/Stapleton Collection

Nearly a century on, perceptions of the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles still bear the imprint of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* by John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), which became a bestseller in the wake of the conference. Bitter fruit of Keynes' own experience as a delegate in Paris, the book condemned what he branded 'the Carthaginian peace'. The expression was suggested to Keynes by the South African delegate, General Jan Smuts (1870-1950), who referred to the peace concluded in 201 bc after the Second Punic War, when Rome stripped Carthage of its army, navy and overseas possessions and imposed a 50-year indemnity. Otherwise Carthage was left independent and able to recover economically, which eventually it did. Keynes actually seems to have been thinking of the 'peace' of 146 bc, when, after the Third Punic War, the Romans slaughtered the inhabitants of Carthage or sold them into slavery, annexing what remained of Carthaginian territory. In *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* Keynes quoted and endorsed the German view that the Treaty of Versailles signalled 'the death sentence of many millions of German men, women and children'.

The book was widely translated, has never been out of print and has never lost its authority. Its success may be attributed to Keynes' reputation as an economist and the brilliance with which he conveyed the disenchantment shared by many of his colleagues in the British delegation. Neither the acute and prophetic analysis published soon after, Jacques Bainville's *Les conséquences politiques de la paix* (1920), which has never been translated into English, nor the detailed refutation of Keynes by Etienne Mantoux, *The Carthaginian Peace or The Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes* (1944), succeeded in stemming its influence, though while none of Keynes' predictions were realised almost every one of Bainville's were. More recent research contained in two collections of scholarly papers has fared little better. William Keylor, in his contribution to *The Treaty of Versailles 75 Years After* (1998), and Zara Steiner in 'The Treaty of Versailles Revisited', published in *The Paris Peace*

Conference, 1919: Peace without Victory (2001), strove to correct what Steiner calls 'the misused image of the "Carthaginian" peace'. In *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919-1933* (2005) Steiner repeats that 'the traditional view' of Versailles 'needs to be abandoned'. But still historians have failed to break the Keynesian spell. Is the accepted image wholly illusory, or does it express an aspect of the truth about the peace treaty?

After the 'war to end war' extravagant hopes were raised by the Paris Peace Conference, the first and greatest 'summit conference' of modern times. Even before the conference opened President Woodrow Wilson, en route from the United States, feared that it might end in 'a tragedy of disappointment'. At its height, more than a thousand statesmen, diplomats and their staff, representing some 30 nations, were engaged in the business of peacemaking. The British delegation alone numbered over 200. Among them was Harold Nicolson, a junior diplomat who later published another classic of disillusionment, *Peacemaking 1919* (1933). Nicolson recalls the conference resembling 'a riot in a parrot-house'. Fifty-two commissions met in 1,646 sessions to draft reports on subjects ranging from prisoners of war to undersea cables, from the internationalisation of the Kiel Canal to responsibility for the war, all incorporated in a treaty extending to 15 chapters and 440 clauses.

The conference eclipsed any other in the scope of the responsibilities it undertook, with the frontiers of a new Europe of nation states to delineate and treaties to conclude with Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as with Germany. But progress suffered badly from the want of a basic organisational plan. Both Wilson and the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, mistrusted traditional diplomacy, which they believed had contributed to the outbreak of the war. They and the French premier, Georges Clemenceau, insisted on keeping both the shifting agenda and the conduct of negotiations in their own hands.

Wilson sought to establish the League of Nations, his panacea for world peace, as part and parcel of the peace treaties. The opening weeks of the conference were devoted to drafting the constitution, or Covenant, of the League. At the same time a council consisting of the five Allied leaders (of France, Britain, the US, Italy and Japan) and their foreign ministers sat through lengthy presentations of territorial claims from spokesmen of the new states. Clemenceau's object was above all to ensure the future security of France against Germany, which he was sure would be intent on revenge. For Lloyd George the priority was reparations, which turned out to be the most time-consuming and divisive of all the problems faced.

Nicolson thought the lack of a systematic agenda vitiated the conference from the outset. Instead of getting to grips with the long-term challenge of Germany, the peacemakers found themselves struggling to cope with the distracting sideshows of a dozen minor wars and several sporadic and short-lived Communist revolutions. At the same time they were under domestic pressures from what Lloyd George called 'the too fierce ardour of an expectant public'. He himself had done much to fan the flames with his electoral pledges to 'make Germany pay' and had to return periodically to London to face raucous backbenchers in his Conservative-dominated coalition. Wilson, too, returned temporarily to Washington for the opening session of a Congress dominated by his isolationist Republican opponents, whose suspicions of the League of Nations he failed to allay. Clemenceau was also briefly out of action when an assassination attempt left a bullet in his chest.

- [Video: The Treaty of Versailles & the End of the First World War](#) ^[10]

Not until the end of March 1919 – fearing that the example of Bolshevism in Russia might prove irresistible to a volatile Europe craving stability, work and bread – did Lloyd George, Wilson, Clemenceau and, to a lesser extent, Prime Minister Orlando of Italy, attempt to grasp the nettle of peace with Germany in 'a race', said Wilson, 'between peace and anarchy'. Accompanied only by interpreters and advisers and meeting daily in 145 private sessions between late March and June, they took all the main decisions themselves as the Supreme Council or 'Big Four': 'Four men', said Lloyd George, 'endeavouring to make the world spin round the way it should'.

It was from these closed sessions in stuffy rooms across six weeks of intensive bargaining that the treaty with Germany emerged as a set of improvised arrangements between Allies with different and often conflicting aims on such contentious territorial issues as Danzig, the Saar and the Rhineland, over which they deliberated at length. At various times one or other would stalk out of the room, threaten to leave the conference, or in Orlando's case, to do so: the Big Four became the Big Three. 'How did you get on?' Clemenceau was asked after one stormy session with Wilson. 'Splendidly', he replied. 'We disagreed about everything.' On another occasion Clemenceau came close to blows with Lloyd George, whom he accused, not without cause, of serial duplicity. Wilson, exasperated at the demands of both Clemenceau and Lloyd George, ordered the SS *George Washington* to prepare for his early return. They all stuck it out – Orlando came back in the end – accepting that compromise was inevitable if the conference was not to collapse; but the compromises reached only after immense difficulty and heart-searching were between the Allies, not between them and Germany.

The whole package of terms was approved unamended by the Big Three without adequate co-ordination or review in order to meet a self-imposed deadline of May 7th for presentation to the Germans. Even on May 6th the details of these 'preliminaries of peace' had not been collated in a single document and assorted sections

were still passing to and from the printers. No one had read them in full let alone discussed their cumulative effect. 'I hope', said Wilson ingenuously, 'that during the rest of my life I will have enough time to read this whole volume.' Lloyd George admitted that he only received a complete copy at the last moment. 'I don't think in all history this can be matched', commented Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

In his 14 Points Wilson had pledged himself and the Allies to a 'peace of justice'. This required the implementation in Europe of the principle of national self-determination through the creation of nation states and the establishment of a 'new world order', as Wilson called it, based on the League of Nations and the re-ordering of international relations under the rule of law. This vision had to be reconciled with the demands of allies who had lavished blood and treasure for most of the war, while America remained profitably neutral. They were not going to be talked out of compensation, security and gains at the expense of a still powerful Germany, which had defeated Russia and come close to victory.

The Treaty of Versailles confiscated all of Germany's overseas possessions and at least a tenth of her territory, population, agricultural land, coal, iron and steel. It reduced her army of half a million conscripts to a volunteer defence force of 100,000 and her fleet to little more than a coastal command. It saddled Germany with liability for a vast yet unquantified reparations debt, which it was reckoned would take a generation or more to discharge. To compensate France for the deliberate destruction of her coalmines it transferred the coal-rich Saarland to her for 15 years. All German territory on the left bank of the Rhine and a 50-kilometre strip on the right was declared a demilitarised zone, barred to German troops in perpetuity and placed under Allied occupation for a dozen years.

The Treaty also imposed what the Germans called *Schmachparagrafen*, 'clauses of shame', notably the projected trial of the ex-Kaiser for 'a supreme offence against international morality' and Article 231, which asserted Germany's liability for the loss and damage caused by her 'aggression'. The Germans immediately denounced this as a 'war guilt clause', which stamped the entire treaty with the intolerable character of a *Schandvertrag* or 'treaty of shame'.

Versailles was a dictated peace, or *Diktat*. A German delegation was summoned to Versailles to receive, though not to negotiate, the draft conditions on May 7th. Two reluctant envoys were sent from Berlin to sign the final treaty on June 28th at the Palace of Versailles, in the same Hall of Mirrors where the German Empire had been proclaimed in 1871. These were the only occasions on which the Germans were allowed to make an appearance. But this had not been the original plan. The conference had opened in January as an inter-Allied gathering, assembled to agree a common policy and to formulate initial demands for subsequent discussion at a full congress with Germany in accordance with the norms of European diplomacy. By early March, however, it was apparent that agreement even among the Allies would be difficult. Hence negotiation with Germany was ruled out for fear that it would lead to unravelling hard-won decisions. Accordingly on May 7th the terms were formally presented to the Germans on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis at the Hotel Trianon at Versailles. Here Clemenceau, as president of the conference, set the tone with an uncompromising declaration of intent. 'The time has come for a heavy reckoning of accounts', he told the Germans. 'There will be no verbal discussion, and observations must be submitted in writing.'

The German delegation had one opportunity to represent the Weimar Republic and to show the Allies, who knew little about the new Germany, a human face. Unfortunately the head of the delegation, the foreign minister, Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, made a poor impression. 'A most sinister-looking person', wrote one observer, 'an incarnation of the whole Junker system.'

Worse still was Brockdorff-Rantzau's presentation, delivered seated in a rasping tone and defiant manner. Far from persuading the Allies, its effect, as recorded by Philip Kerr, Lloyd George's secretary, was to provoke their united antipathy:

At the start everybody felt a little sympathy with the Hun, but by the time Brockdorff-Rantzau had finished, most people were almost anxious to recommence the war.

'Insolent beyond description', said Lloyd George. He 'felt he could get up and hit' Brockdorff-Rantzau. Wilson



In this 1919 cartoon, France is avenged for its loss of the Franco-Prussian War by the terms of the peace treaty. Mary Evans Picture Library

agreed that it was 'the most tactless speech I have ever heard'. Clemenceau kept his temper 'but his face became red with anger'. The count's demeanour and conduct gave the fatal impression that the new Germany was not so different from the old. Six weeks later this impression seemed to be confirmed when the German High Seas Fleet, interned at Scapa Flow under the terms of the Armistice, scuttled itself. The peacemakers saw this as proof of perfidy and it further hardened their attitude. Wilson spoke for all in demanding from Germany 'an unequivocal decision ... to sign or not to sign'.

Rather than sign, Brockdorff-Rantzau, his fellow delegates and the first government of the Weimar Republic resigned. In the words of the outgoing chancellor, Philip Scheidemann: 'What hand would not wither that binds itself and us in these fetters?' A new cabinet was formed and the constituent assembly at Weimar approved its recommendation to accept the treaty under pressure of the ongoing Allied blockade, the threat of an Allied march on Berlin and the fear that the Bismarckian Reich, not yet 50 years old, would disintegrate as its component states made separate peace with the advancing Allies. Friedrich Ebert, president of the republic, announced the government's decision to sign, 'yielding', as he said, 'to overwhelming force, but without on that account abandoning its view in regard to the unheard-of injustice of the Treaty'. This emphatic reservation explains much about the sequel.

Brockdorff-Rantzau described the treaty as a 'death sentence'. Clemenceau's view was: 'If only we could get rid of Germany, there would be peace in Europe.' The point, as the peacemakers acknowledged, was that they had no intention of breaking up the German Reich. 'We do not wish to destroy Germany,' Wilson confirmed, 'and we could not do so if we wished.' German prosperity was essential if reparations were to be paid and Lloyd George warned against killing the goose that he hoped would lay the golden egg. He wanted Germany to remain a political counterweight to France and to resume her prewar role as Britain's chief trading partner.

Clemenceau was too much a realist to argue for putting the clock back to 1870 by a partition of Germany. Yet five times since 1814 the Germans had invaded France. Clemenceau himself had witnessed the defeat of 1870. French casualties in the First World War were the highest of all belligerents in proportion to the population: one in four Frenchmen between 18 and 27 had perished. Clemenceau sought 'physical guarantees' to prevent yet another invasion of France's eastern frontier. For in that event, warned Marshal Foch, France was doomed unless the Rhineland was annexed to France or at least detached from Germany. Clemenceau championed this policy and abandoned it only after opposition from Wilson and Lloyd George to such a violation of national self-determination, the creation, warned Lloyd George, of 'Alsace-Lorraine in reverse'. This left unsolved a chronic problem of security for a France of 40 million facing a Germany half as populous again, with a higher birthrate. By 1940 there would be twice as many Germans of military age as Frenchmen. 'This is not peace', predicted Foch. 'It is an armistice for 20 years.'

How 'Carthaginian', then, was the treaty? Northern Schleswig was returned to Denmark after a plebiscite, to restore land taken by Prussia in 1864; Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, as stipulated in the eighth of Wilson's 14 Points, to repair 'the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871'; and the province of Posen, West Prussia and the Polish Corridor were transferred from Germany to the independent Polish state whose creation was pledged in Point 13. These losses left Germany a smaller but more homogenous state; they also left a legacy of bitterness. The Polish frontiers in particular were resented, cutting off East Prussia from the Reich, the Polish Corridor forming an intervening wedge of now alien territory. Germans from Posen and the Corridor, formerly the masters there, now found themselves under Polish rule. Most voted with their feet and moved to Germany proper. Those who remained formed a disgruntled and troublesome minority.

Germany had lost the war in the sense that, with the successive collapse of Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria-Hungary in the autumn of 1918, its high command accepted that victory was no longer possible and that Germany must make peace while she still could on the relatively liberal terms offered by the 14 Points. Yet at the Armistice German troops, victorious in the east, still occupied French soil and most of the continental landmass from the Belgian coast to the Caspian. No Allied soldier had entered Germany except as a prisoner of war and even though the terms of armistice made Germany powerless to resume hostilities, there was little sense of defeat. In Berlin German not Allied troops marched past the Brandenburg Gate, to be greeted by President Ebert as heroes returning 'undefeated from the battlefield'.

The war weakened Germany far less than Germany had weakened her continental adversaries. Unlike much of Belgium, north-east France, Poland and the Balkans, German territory was virtually unscathed, infrastructure unimpaired and industry poised to outstrip that of its ex-enemies. By 1921 Germany was producing three times as much steel as France. Strategically, Germany was much advantaged. Gone were the two empires blocking her expansion to the east and south: the Russian Empire, broken by German arms and now convulsed in revolution and civil war, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had splintered into its constituent nationalities at the end of the war. From Finland to the Black Sea, across territories recently under her sway, Germany was now flanked by a string of new 'succession-states', weak, overstretched and vulnerable. Most contained disaffected minorities, including Germans. Far from combining, as Clemenceau hoped, to encircle and contain Germany these new states were constantly at odds between themselves and with both Germany and Russia

over disputed boundaries and populations. The Balkans remained a byword for instability, but now the whole of Central and Eastern Europe was fragmented, enhancing the relative strength of Germany.

Wilson repudiated what he called 'the great game, now forever discredited, of the balance of power'. Clemenceau disagreed. He knew that without powerful allies France would have lost the war. The new states on which France now depended to counterbalance Germany in the east – principally Poland and Czechoslovakia – were no substitute for her wartime alliance with imperial Russia. Clemenceau sought to maintain British and US solidarity with France, but America was soon to reject the treaty and wash its hands of military commitments. In return for Clemenceau's abandonment of a strategic frontier on the Rhine, both Wilson and Lloyd George signed supplementary treaties guaranteeing France against future German aggression. Yet Wilson did not even submit his for approval by the Senate, while Lloyd George evaded his by a surreptitious amendment on the eve of signature making its validity dependent on ratification of its American counterpart. Within months, France, bereft both of her two main allies and of the Rhineland, sensed that despite victory in 1918 her long-term security was precarious as never before.

National self-determination created fresh trouble-spots. The most contentious issues related to Germany and arose from the territories ceded to Poland. To provide Poland with the 'free and secure access to the sea' promised in the 14 Points, the German port of Danzig was to be administered by the League of Nations as a so-called 'Free City'. The Sudeten fringe of Bohemia contained over two and a half million Germans but was incorporated within Czechoslovakia, as essential to her strategic and economic wellbeing. Austria was a wholly German state of seven millions, but Austro-German unification, or *Anschluss*, was prohibited since it would have made Germany even larger than in 1914. True, neither Austria nor the Sudetenland, both Habsburg dominions, had belonged to Bismarck's Germany, but the fact remained that Sudetenlanders and Austrians wished to unite with the Reich, while the Allies themselves had placed national self-determination at the heart of peacemaking. There was resentment in Germany that the self-determination granted to others was denied to fellow-Germans just across its borders.

Reparations, even when scaled down, helped to keep grievances alive. Periodic crises over German defaults provoked Allied military incursions beyond the Rhine, culminating in 1923 with the French occupation of the Ruhr. Versailles was also blamed, inaccurately but obsessively, for Germany's home-grown ills: for inflation, a consequence of the war rather than of the peace; for hyperinflation, unleashed by the German government's reckless issue of paper money during the Ruhr crisis; and for the six million Germans thrown out of work by the Great Depression of 1929. Even before the Wall Street Crash, on Germany's national day of mourning to mark the 10th anniversary of Versailles, an official manifesto stressed that the war-guilt clause 'leaves our people no peace of mind'. Demands for the evacuation of the Rhineland, the return of the Saar and revision of the Polish frontiers increased in stridency.

In their written observations on the treaty, the only form of communication with the Allies permitted to them at the conference, the Germans stressed the contractual nature of the pre-Armistice agreement of November 5th, 1918 under which the 14 Points and Wilson's supplementary Principles and Particulars constituted the legal basis of the 'Wilson peace', as they called it, invoking his promises of a peace characterised by 'impartial justice for all the parties in the war', by 'open covenants of peace, openly arrived at', by their 'free acceptance ... by the people involved' and by 'even-handed and dispassionate justice for Germany'. Wilson, harrowed, worn down and ill from the continual strains of the conference, concluded by March 1919 that Germany deserved a hard, deterrent peace in view of her 'very great offence against civilisation' and that the League of Nations would iron out injustices.

Many in the British delegation were unconvinced. 'Are we making a good peace?' Nicolson wrote in his diary in early March. Smuts remonstrated with Lloyd George at the end of the month, instancing the separation from Germany of Danzig, the Polish Corridor and the Saarland. 'Are we in our sober senses', he asked, 'or suffering from shellshock? What has become of Wilson's 14 Points?' The German observations confirmed his own:

They raise the point to the very forefront which I have always considered vital, viz., that we are bound ... to make a Wilson peace – that is, one within the four corners of the Wilson Points and speeches.



Under the terms of the treaty Danzig's majority German population came under Polish rule. Nazi Germany's first act of the Second World War was to reclaim the city. Getty Images/Hulton Archive

Smuts pleaded for radical revision and 'appeasement' – concessions from strength and the removal from the treaty both of major grievances and gratuitous 'pinpricks'.

Misgivings at Paris were matched by unease among opinion-formers in Britain. 'The fundamental question', declared the *Manchester Guardian*, on May 8th, 'is whether we desire a peace of appeasement or a peace of violence'. A fortnight later, Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, contemplated issuing a public pronouncement. He wrote to Lloyd George that the effect of the treaty was 'to ask impossibilities', a view in which the primate was confirmed by letters he was receiving from 'weighty and trustworthy people'. He besought the prime minister to bring home a peace 'such that we can ask God's blessing upon it'.

Disillusion intensified among the British delegates. 'If I were the Germans', wrote Nicolson, 'I shouldn't sign for a moment.' Keynes resigned in protest and returned to England to write *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Smuts put his finger on the cardinal error of the conference and the fundamental flaw of the treaty. 'For the sake of the future', he warned Lloyd George, the Germans 'should not be made to sign at the point of the bayonet ... The Treaty should not be capable of moral repudiation by the German people hereafter'. The Allies 'should as far as possible carry the German delegates with us' and 'we should listen to what they have to say'. He proposed the appointment of three Allied representatives 'to meet them in oral discussion' and go through the treaty 'as a whole'. In this way it would be purged of 'all appearance of one-sidedness and unnecessary dictation' and its 'moral authority' would be 'all the greater and more binding'.

A most significant episode in the conference took place in Paris over the weekend of Friday May 30th to Sunday June 1st at a series of meetings chaired by Lloyd George of the British Empire delegation together with most of his coalition colleagues, summoned from London. The purpose of the gathering was to reconsider the treaty in the light of the German observations, which had made a profound impression.

The counterproposals offered unilateral German disarmament; the voluntary cession to France of Alsace-Lorraine, subject to a plebiscite; Poland to gain most of the province of Posen with rights of access to German ports under international guarantees; free deliveries of coal to France and Belgium; direct assistance in repairing the devastated areas and an offer on reparations of £5 billion. It required the establishment of a neutral enquiry into war guilt and Germany's immediate admission to the League. The offers were contingent on major concessions, but they were also open to negotiation. For H.A.L. Fisher, historian and minister of education, who took part in these final discussions, they were 'the most brilliant treaty that victors had ever imposed upon conquered'.

Issues of greatest concern, which Lloyd George was authorised to re-open with Wilson and Clemenceau, were Poland's frontiers and the occupation of the Rhineland. It was agreed that reparations should also be reconsidered and that Germany should join the League. Lloyd George failed, however, to persuade Wilson and Clemenceau. The most he was able to obtain was their agreement to plebiscites in Silesia and other areas assigned to Poland, concessions which Smuts dismissed as 'paltry' by comparison with the radical revision he thought necessary.

'Appeasement' – a readiness to address recognised grievances – took firm root at the conference. Almost to the last Smuts was determined not to sign the treaty; when he did, he issued a statement regretting that the promises of 'a new international order and a fairer, better world are not written in this treaty'. A month before, many of the British foreign office delegates in Paris had met to found what became the Royal Institute of International Affairs. This inaugural meeting was held in an avowed spirit of revisionism. 'There is no single person in this room', its chairman, Lord Robert Cecil, declared, 'who is not disappointed with the terms we have drafted.'

Far from being a Carthaginian peace, the Treaty of Versailles is better understood in the words of Jacques Bainville, as 'too mild for its severity'. 'Undoubtedly very severe indeed', as Woodrow Wilson agreed, it neither crushed Germany nor conciliated her. It was a dictated peace which no German could accept as fair or morally binding and which the victors lacked the will to enforce. It gave Germany cause for resentment while leaving her the wherewithal to obtain revenge. Its principal sanction, the occupation of the Rhineland, would come to an end just when Germany would again become formidable.

In both Germany and Britain, however, the *perception* of a Carthaginian peace as ruinous and vindictive was of no less significance than the reality. While ultimately energising Germany, it engendered in Britain a sense of guilt that sapped the will to uphold a treaty felt to be unjust. As late as February 1939 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who 20 years before had derided the 'appeasers' of 1919, now acknowledged that Versailles had given the Germans 'good cause to ask for consideration of their grievances'. Keynes' book uncorked a genie that no one has succeeded in putting back in the bottle, or can succeed, since its undeniable presence at the conference produced the psychological consequences of the peace.

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George and Versailles and a biography of Lord Sumner. He is currently working on *The Rise and Fall of Sir Edgar Speyer* for Haus.

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Alan Sharp looks at the factors shaping national policies in the weeks preceding the Paris Peace Conference, when the failure of the victorious allies to agree on aims and a process for negotiations with the Germans resulted in a 'tragedy of disappointment'.

Two Cheers for Versailles [12]

Mark Mazower looks back to the much maligned Versailles Treaty and finds we still live in the continent it created.



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The Treaty of Versailles and its Consequences

PDF Version

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Europe Between the Wars
Dr. Julián Casanova
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World War I had brought about unprecedented human suffering in European history. Whole societies of nearly every nation in the continent were either directly or indirectly affected by the war. Of the 60 million European soldiers who were mobilized from 1914 – 1918, 8 million were killed, 7 million were permanently disabled, and 15 million were seriously injured. ¹ Germany lost 15.1% of its active male population, Austria-Hungary lost 17.1%, France lost 10.5%, and Britain lost 5.1%. ² Not only were soldiers affected by the tragedies of the war, but civilians were affected also. It is estimated that approximately 5 million civilians died due to war-induced causes. The birth rate sharply declined during the war period as well. ³

Finally, on 11 November 1918, after four years of war, an armistice based on United States' President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" was agreed to by Germany. The Treaty of Versailles, however, sharply differed from Wilson's points, and Germany, who felt betrayed, denounced the treaty as "morally invalid." ⁴ What made the post-war peace so difficult to attain, was not simply the terms themselves or the lack of enforcement. The political environment also has to be looked at as playing an important role in the inability of the Allies to forge a lasting peace. Henig argues that "the peace conference was held at a time of unprecedented political, social, economic and ideological upheaval. Any peace settlement would have to operate within highly unstable international and domestic environments... [and] this international instability made the attainment of a lasting peace so difficult." ⁵

The goal following World War I was to restore European stability and maintain everlasting peace. However, these goals were recognized by all of the leaders as not easily achievable. French Prime Minister Clemenceau commented on the day the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, "We have won the war: now we have to win the peace, and it may be more difficult." ⁶ The French politician Marshal Foch, as the Versailles Treaty was being signed, stated rather prophetically, "This is not peace; it is an armistice for 20 years." ⁷

Indeed, Foch was absolutely correct. The Versailles Treaty did little to shape any sort of long-term peace from the results of World War I. Instead, the treaty, hastily put together, was vague, exposed the

Allies' inability to cooperate toward an agreement, and fueled German nationalism from resentment over her treatment by the Allies in the treaty. Hobsbawm argues that "the Versailles settlement could not possibly be the basis of a stable peace. It was doomed from the start, and another war was practically certain."⁸ The principle reasons for the failure of the Treaty of Versailles to establish a long-term peace include the following: 1) the Allies disagreed on how best to treat Germany; 2) Germany refused to accept the terms of reparations; and 3) Germany's refusal to accept the "war-guilt" clause, Article 231, led to growing German resentment and nationalism.

The Versailles Peace Conference exposed the ideological rift growing between the Allies. Throughout Versailles and After, Henig argues that Britain and France had "contradictory viewpoints"⁹ regarding the treatment of Germany. While public opinions of both nations were strongly in favor of seeing Germany pay to the fullest extent, only France saw Germany as a potential threat to the future security of European stability. Thus, while Britain saw Germany as a "barrier-fortress against the Russians"¹⁰ and an economically strong nation with which to engage in international trade, the French viewed Germany as a threat to French security. France feared that not levying harsh enough penalties upon Germany would only make her stronger and she would eventually rise up against France in revenge. So while the British felt that the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh on Germany, France felt as though it were not harsh enough.

One aspect to deal with was German disarmament. Kitchen explains that "there was general agreement that Germany should be disarmed but considerable differences about how this should best be achieved."¹¹ Eventually, the Allies came to an agreement regarding the new state of the German military. The German navy was to be limited to 15,000 officers and men, six battleships, six light cruisers, twelve destroyers, and twelve torpedo boats; meanwhile, the army was to be restricted to 100,000 men who would be obliged to enlist for twelve years.¹² The preamble of the military section of the treaty with Germany suggests that Germany was to be disarmed "in order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations."¹³ This is all well and good, except the Germans never abided by this part of the treaty. One of the most crucial omissions of this section was the absence of time limits, which undoubtedly worked in Germany's favor.¹⁴ No one could possibly expect Germany to be disarmed forever. The treaty, however, offered no hint as to how long the disarmament should last. This, therefore, was one of the parts of the treaty that Germany continually abused and disobeyed out of bitterness.

As it appeared that Germany would not abide by the disarmament policy for good, France began to worry, and for good reason. They had been unable to secure an alliance with Britain or the United States. Britain's military budget had taken severe cuts and her government was more interested in securing her extra-European overseas colonies than in aiding her intra-European allies, such as France. Britain, unlike France, never seriously expected Germany to become a threat to the peace effort.¹⁵ But there was the looming threat: "the Treaty of Versailles had left [Germany] largely intact, with a population almost double that of France, and with no powerful east European neighbours."¹⁶

Negotiations regarding the territorial claims also sparked heated debate among the Allies. In fact, the entire peace conference almost ended early when France began to demand that an independent Rhineland and Saar come under French occupation. While France argued that she wanted the western German frontier to end at the Rhine for security reasons, British Prime Minister Lloyd George feared that this would most likely result in a future conflict between the two states.¹⁷ Henig puts the

situation best by saying, “While the British government saw 66 million potential German customers, the French government trembled at the prospect of 66 million German soldiers and possible invaders.”

¹⁹ France and her Allies eventually came to a painful compromise that the Rhineland would be occupied by Allied troops for 15 years and free of German forces for an unspecified period of time.

Another issue of significant note is how the Allies dealt with the war reparations that Germany owed. One of the major questions regarding the reparations was the following: should Germany be held accountable for what she owed to the Allies or should she be held accountable for what she could afford to pay? But even answering these questions became difficult to answer. For instance, for how much was Germany accountable? Was Germany to pay for all of the damage assessed? And how was the damage assessed? Were the damages to include government costs such as war pensions? France felt that Germany should “cover the costs of restoration of invaded territories and repayment of war debts [and that] a long period of stiff repayments ... would have the added advantage of keeping Germany financially and economically weak.”¹⁹ Britain, on the other hand, was concerned with the revival of international trade and knew that if Germany was heavily in debt with the Allied Powers, she would not be able to purchase British goods in sufficient quantities.²⁰ Because of all of the ambiguities involving the war reparations, an exact monetary figure owed by the Germans to the Allies was never included in the Treaty of Versailles.

For Germany, the terms of reparations eventually arrived at by the Reparations Committee were unacceptable. The German delegates viewed the economic sanctions as being far too harsh. The final telegraphed communication from the German National Assembly to the Allies in Versailles stated, “The government of the German Republic in no wise abandons its conviction that these conditions of peace represent injustice without example.”²¹ The British economist John Maynard Keynes wrote in 1920 *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* in which he argues that the German economy would be destroyed by the post-war Versailles Treaty. Kitchen claims that according to Keynes, “a series of treaties which overlooked the really important issues of economic recovery, food, fuel, and finance would further exacerbate the situation.”²² The fact of the matter is that Germany never felt as though they were defeated in World War I. Therefore, they had a hard time accepting the fact that they should have to pay for anything. Keynes’ work provided German supporters with all the arguments they needed against the reparations and reconstruction efforts of the Versailles Treaty.

Keynes refers to the economic terms as “outrageous and impossible.”²³ France, who pushed for harsher German punishment and reparation levels more than any other Allied Power, wanted the reparations to seriously cripple the German state. Sally Marks in *The Illusion of Peace* states that the treatment of reparations by both sides was “the continuation of war by other means. ... Reparations became the chief battleground of the post-war era, the focus of power between France and Germany over whether the Versailles Treaty was to be enforced or revised.”²⁴ But were the reparations really so economically damaging? Or was that a farce created by Keynes and supported by the German government who wished to avoid further punishment and humiliation? This will be discussed more in upcoming pages.

Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, which laid the blame for World War I solely on the shoulders of Germany, remains to this day a subject of intense emotional debate among Germans:

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and

Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

Henig argues that “this clause, known as the ‘war-guilt’ clause, more than any other in the entire Treaty of Versailles, was to cause lasting resentment in Germany.”²⁵ The Treaty presented to the German delegates at Versailles was a harsh break from the promise of a treaty based on Wilson’s “Fourteen Points.” The Germans felt betrayed by the treaty presented to them and resented the manner in which the Allied Powers were treating them. Because of this seemingly harsh treatment, “every party in Germany, from the Communists on the extreme left to Hitler’s National Socialists on the extreme right, concurred in condemning the Versailles Treaty as unjust and unacceptable.”²⁶ As James argues, Versailles was indeed “the unifying bracket that clamped German politics together.”²⁷

Thus, the war-guilt clause and the reparations demanded from Germany did little more than to add fuel to the fire that was growing German resentment and nationalism. Hobsbawm even goes as far to say that the war-guilt clause “proved to be a gift to German nationalism.”²⁸ Marks argues that “the peace left Germany both powerful and resentful.”²⁹ It is quite possible, in fact, that Germany was actually more powerful in 1919 than she was in 1914, especially if one takes into account the deep-seated feelings of resentment that she housed toward her enemies, especially France and Britain.

Despite Germany’s claim that the terms of the treaty were far too harsh, most historians today agree that the terms, in fact were “relatively lenient.”³⁰ Henig alludes to this earlier in her book, when she concludes that “the Treaty of Versailles was not excessively harsh on Germany. . . . It deprived her of about 13.5% of her territory, 13% of her economic productivity and about 7 million [or 10%] of her inhabitants.”³¹ Theoretically, the Allies could have dealt Germany much harsher blows. Then again, unable to effectively enforce this treaty, a harsher one would not have been able to lead Europe any closer to peace.

As Foch predicted, the Versailles Treaty was indeed only a 20 year armistice for the European powers. The inability of the Allies to agree on how to deal with Germany, the main war-time aggressor, led to her regain of economic and political strength in the 1920s and 30s. The Second World War, which broke out in 1939, was waged by Germany against the Allies to exact revenge and to finish what could not be completed by World War I. Mazower refers to World War II as “a bloody reopening of accounts by extreme nationalists wishing to revise the Versailles settlement by force.”³² The Germans had always resented the terms and conditions of the treaty. Now, with the onset of World War II, Hitler appeared to their chance at avenging the wrongdoings set in place by the peace negotiations twenty years earlier.

Thus, the Treaty of Versailles failed to bring about everlasting European stability and peace for which the Allied Powers’ governments had hoped. The treaty was put together in haste and the Germans refused to sign it because it treated them, or at least they thought so, too harshly in light of what they had been promised (i.e. a mild treaty resembling Wilson’s “Fourteen Points”). For years afterwards, the Allies and Germany struggled through revision after revision of the treaty until the treaty could bend no more in 1939, with the outbreak of World War II as Germany invaded Poland.

What stopped the Treaty of Versailles from ever approaching success, however, was not the terms of the treaty, argues Henig, but rather the reluctance to enforce the terms by the Allies. They were naïve to assume that Germany would cooperate with the treaty terms by themselves. “Thus within a year of

the peace conference, the victorious alliance which had defeated Germany and negotiated a set of peace terms had crumbled away. It was this critical collapse, rather than the provisions of the peace terms themselves, which ensured that the Treaty of Versailles was never fully accepted or enforced. Negotiations at the peace conference exposed the divisions between the victorious powers and opened the rifts.”³³ The Allies were strong enough to win the war, but not strong enough to secure the peace.

Revision after revision, therefore could not fix what was doomed to failure. In 1939, the Versailles Treaty was proved to be an ultimate failure as the World War continued after the 20-year armistice.

ENDNOTES

1. M. Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars* (New York: Longman, 2000), p. 22.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*, p. 23.
4. R. Henig, *Versailles and After: 1919 – 1933* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 67.
5. *ibid.*, p. 69.
6. *ibid.*, p.31.
7. *ibid.*, p. 52.
8. E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 34.
9. Henig, p. 1.
10. *ibid.*, pp.8-9.
11. Kitchen, p. 8.
12. *ibid.*
13. Henig, p. 19.
14. *ibid.*
15. *ibid.*, p. 43.
16. *ibid.*, p. 52.
17. *ibid.*, p. 23.

18. *ibid.*, p. 70.
19. *ibid.*, p. 20.
20. *ibid.*
21. A.M. Luckau, *The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 112.
22. Kitchen, p. 1.
23. Henig, p. 50.
24. *ibid.*, p. 63.
25. *ibid.*, p. 21.
26. Hobsbawm, p. 36.
27. H. James, *Weimar: Why did German Democracy Fail?*
28. *ibid.*, p. 98.
29. Henig, p. 59.
30. *ibid.*, p. 61.
31. *ibid.*, p.30
32. M. Mazower, *Dark Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 212.
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D: The Weimar Republic

D.1. The Treaty of Versailles

Versailles and German expectations:

The Treaty of Versailles is one of the most controversial international agreements. Many observers -- politicians and historians -- have tended to blame the rise of the Nazis on Versailles, following the dictum of an eminent democratic German politician. When asked about the ultimate reasons for the failure of the democratic Weimar Republic, he replied: "Versailles and Moscow." By "Moscow" he meant that subversive communist activity guided by the Russian Bolshevik government had undermined democracy in tandem with the Nazis. By mentioning "Versailles" he claimed that the peace treaty had had detrimental effects on the viability and domestic authority of the German democracy.

The French, on the other side, felt disappointed by the treaty. They had hoped to weaken Germany more, maybe to dissolve it. To them, the treaty did not seem harsh enough.

In general, it has seemed that the treaty was either too harsh or too mild. It was too harsh to reconcile Germany with its former war enemies and to integrate it into a lasting peaceful postwar order, and it was too mild to weaken Germany so as to make it impossible for it to ever again become a great power. The picture that emerges today after more intensive research is more complex and differentiated than that, but Versailles nevertheless remains both a highly ambivalent and crucial station in German history. The actual peace terms harshly disappointed the Germans, who felt that they radically contradicted the promises Wilson had made to the prerevolutionary German governments. The Germans, for right or wrong, felt betrayed by Wilson and the United States.

If we compare German expectations and the terms of Versailles, we cannot overlook sharp discrepancies. Instead of a negotiated peace in which Germany would be a significant, if not equal, partner, the treaty gave practically no room for German input and resembled more a dictate than a real peace settlement. Instead of admitting the new democratic Germany into the community of democratic nations, the Allies ostracized the vanquished nation. They even took pains to humiliate its national consciousness. Germany was -- for the time being -- not allowed to join the newly founded **League of Nations** and remained a pariah in the postwar order. Instead of a peace of reconciliation the Germans received a peace of submission and punishment. The principle of **national self-determination**, instead of being respected as a general rule, was always applied if it weakened Germany and its former allies but never where it would have benefited them.

Wilsonian ideology seemed to have covered traditional ruthless power politics with a moralistic glaze. How did this momentuous discrepancy come about? Were the Germans really betrayed? Should they ever have believed in a milder peace settlement?

Wilson's Fourteen Points:

Let us now see how this misunderstanding came about. On 8 January 1918 Wilson offered Congress an outline for a moderate peace in Europe. He was prompted to do so by the critical condition of the Entente after the Russian defeat. In France and Britain war-weariness became stronger, and it seemed irresponsible to many political minds that war should be continued for aggressive French and British war aims. Wilson thus hoped to placate moderate opinion in the Entente and at the same time suggest to the Germans that they could expect a peace settlement that would not destroy their state but give

them a chance to survive as a major nation.

The principles Wilson articulated in his Fourteen Points were above all: economic and political equality of all nations (against satellite states, as in German-dominated Eastern Europe, and for the restoration of Belgian independence). Wilson further demanded that Europe be reorganized along lines of nationality. This idea implied the German loss of Alsace-Lorraine and the creation of a truly independent Polish state that would have to receive access to the Baltic Sea at the expense of some German territory. Concerning war reparations, Wilson asked that they be limited to repairing the damage done by invading troops (Germans in Belgium and France).

Further, Wilson encouraged democratization. He announced that the Allies would speak seriously only to "true" representatives of the German people. (He sometimes doubted, however, that the German democrats would really be the true representatives of the German people; the Kaiser's generals seemed to be quite popular.) But Wilson made it clear that Germany would be allowed to gain a place in a new, liberal world order if it was willing to respect his principles and to forego its own expansionist or hegemonial aims. The restoration of Belgium was a "must" on the American list; Alsace-Lorraine and the Polish corridor were merely conditions that "should" be met.

It was on the basis of these fourteen points that the German government had asked to open negotiations for a truce in October 1918. Wilson's answers had generally confirmed the fourteen points but put heavier emphasis on Alsace-Lorraine and the Polish corridor. One factor the Germans tended to ignore, however, was the persistence of French and British war aims. Wilson was maybe the strongest member of the Entente, but the French had more of a stake in Europe than the United States. Georges **Clémenceau**, the French prime minister, did not take Wilson's claims seriously. He joked that the Good Lord had managed with ten commandments, whereas Wilson needed fourteen points.

Particularly in the light of French and British expectations the German hopes for a mild peace were downright naive and betrayed a high degree of wishful thinking born of the desperation typical for the end of the war. A coalition war had ended; this meant that many different countries would voice their claims. Wilson could not conclude peace all alone. Moreover, the passions aroused by a world war, particularly in France and Britain, could not easily be transformed into feelings of reconciliation.

The peace conference:

On 18 January 1919 the leading statesmen of the victorious nations met in Paris to decide about the future of the defeated Central Powers. The choice of the opening date was a deliberate humiliation of Germany, since it was the birthday of the German Empire in 1871. Negotiations were conducted mainly between the heads of state of the United States, France, Britain, and Italy, the so-called "**big four**." They had widely differing goals.

For Wilson, the most important goal was the establishment of a League of Nations that would mediate all future conflicts between nations and make war as a means of politics unnecessary. Wilson was prompted by fears of Bolshevism. He wanted to offer a pacifist vision to war-weary Europeans, mainly the workers and the leftists. He envisioned a liberal union of free, democratic nations, based on the principle of national self-determination, as a competing model to Lenin's call for a brotherhood of socialist societies according to Marxist ideas. Wilson wanted to weaken Germany's military potential for all times, but he had nothing against a democratic Germany becoming a major economic power again and felt strongly about leaving it unified. He feared that an all too weak Germany might inspire France to strive for domination on the European continent.

To the French, security against a future German invasion mattered most. France wanted to change the

balance of power by weakening Germany's economic and demographic potential to a point that would make it impossible for Germany to overpower France. In 1914 Germany had had about twenty-five million inhabitants more than France, and German industrial production had been much more intensive than France's. In order to reduce German superiority, to reconstruct the destroyed areas, and to cover their own war debt, the French wanted high reparations.

But reparations were not sufficient, since they could only temporarily bind the German economy. The French hoped further to control Germany's western industrial heartlands and -- maybe -- to dissolve the Reich altogether. They wanted to separate the Rhineland and the Ruhr from Germany and to create a semi-autonomous state leaning toward France. Without its densely populated and highly industrialized West, Germany would find it impossible to threaten France again. As an additional safeguard against future German aggression, France hoped to build up an alliance network among the newly independent nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Poland, the so-called **cordons sanitaires**. This alliance was supposed to threaten Germany with a second front again, after France's main prewar ally in Eastern Europe, the Russian Empire, had broken down. France further wanted to secure a strong position in the Middle East in territories formerly belonging to the Ottoman Empire.

The British wanted above all to demilitarize Germany and to get hold of its battle fleet and merchant navy. They claimed their share in German reparations and demanded domination over most of Germany's African colonies. In addition to that, their interests concentrated on the Middle East (at the expense of the dissolved Ottoman Empire). Often British interests in this region contradicted ambitious French schemes. In general, the British aims were compatible with the American aims. The British believed that Germany should after a while recover as a major trade partner without ever again posing a military threat. Like the United States, Britain was also unhappy about the prospect of French predominance on the European Continent.

Italy joined the conference tables at Versailles to claim the lands it had been promised as a price for supporting the Entente, the South Tyrol (partly German-speaking Alpine valley) and the Trentino (border area with Yugoslavia; today: Slovenia). Japan merely wanted its conquest of Germany's Chinese colony ratified. In mostly secret negotiations over four months the leading statesmen drafted a treaty that they submitted to the German government in early May 1919.

The main conditions of the treaty included territorial, military, financial, and judicial elements. (For a full text of the treaty, see [Eurodocs, World War I Archive: Versailles.](#))

1) Territorial: Germany had to cede Alsace-Lorraine to France and accept an allied occupation of most of its western provinces. The **Saar** area was given to France for fifteen years. Thereafter a plebiscite should decide its future. The rich coal mines in the Saar district, however, would belong to France, and Germany would have to buy them back if the plebiscite yielded a pro-German majority. The **Rhineland** and some cities on the right bank of the Rhine were occupied by French, English, American, and Belgian troops for five, ten, or fifteen years respectively. A small border area was annexed by Belgium.

In the north a plebiscite was held to decide the fate of northern **Schleswig**, the province with a Danish minority. The result split the province into a pro-Danish and pro-German part. In the east, Germany had to give the provinces of Western Prussia and Posen to Poland, thus offering the landlocked Polish state an outlet to the Baltic Sea. Some of Upper Silesia also went to Poland, but some areas were given the right to a plebiscite (the drawing of voting districts was arbitrary, however, giving the Poles a majority wherever possible).

The city **Danzig** on the Baltic Sea became a so-called free city under the mandate of the League of

Nations. A small area in Silesia was given to Czechoslovakia and another strip of land in the north of East Prussia was put under Allied administration and was later seized by Lithuania. The loss of the territories in the east filled most Germans with even more indignation than the loss of the western lands, since the changes in the east often contradicted the principle of national self-determination: Some of the new Polish territories were settled predominantly by Germans, and Danzig was a German city.

A union of German Austria with Germany, although the declared wish of both peoples, was forbidden, and several million Germans living in Bohemia (in the **Sudetenland**) came under Czech rule, which most of them resented. (Oskar Schindler, by the way, belonged to this German minority in Czechoslovakia.)

2) Military: Germany had to disarm almost completely and was only allowed an army of 100,000 men. Germany had to demilitarize a 50-kilometer zone on the right bank of the Rhine and was forbidden to own military airplanes, submarines, tanks, heavy artillery, and poison gas. The navy was limited to a few small ships. The existing German battle fleet would have to be given to Britain along with all merchant ships (the British got the merchant ships, but Tirpitz's "proud" battle fleet scuttled itself in June 1919). An **Inter-Allied Military Control Commission (IMCC)** was granted large powers to supervise and control German disarmament. Germany was to be disarmed and left only with minor armed forces that could be used to repress domestic unrest but were inferior in combat even to the Polish army. The Treaty of Versailles stated, however, that German disarmament should precede disarmament all over the world. But the victors of the world war, of course, were in no hurry to disarm themselves.

3) Financial: The Entente, and the French, in particular, had always claimed that the Germans would have to pay not only for the damage done in the occupied regions but also for most of the Entente's war expenses. To justify such an enormous claim the Entente argued that Germany and its allies had started the war and were thus responsible for all of their enemies' costs and damages. The sum of reparations and the modes of payment were not specified initially since the Entente powers could not agree on how much Germany could pay and on the way they wanted to divide reparations among themselves. Germany thus had to sign a blank check and expect an astronomic sum to be paid over many decades.

4) Judicial: The Entente claimed that the German leaders had conducted the war partly in a criminal way, mainly by opting for submarine warfare. The Kaiser, who was deemed responsible for this, and about two thousand German top officers and officials including Tirpitz, Hindenburg, and Ludendorff were to be put on trial by the Entente.

These were the conditions of the treaty. The German government was not given a chance to change it substantially, and the Entente threatened to advance further onto German territory if it refused. The French actually hoped for a German refusal because that would give their army the opportunity to dissolve Germany and to take more direct control than the treaty allowed. The Germans, government and people, were horrified when they were informed about the peace terms. Not even the worst pessimists had expected that the treaty would be so harsh. A tremendous uproar occurred, but it seemed impossible to resist. Two German governments stepped down because they did not want to take responsibility for signing the treaty, but finally there was no choice but to sign.

The Germans were most infuriated at the claim that they had started the war and therefore should pay for everything. That the Entente had failed to define an absolute sum of reparations and that the criteria for what Germany should pay for were very expansive deeply worried the Germans. They had

no guarantee that the other nations would disarm, too, and thus it seemed as if the Germans would be held in eternal financial and military bondage. Germans, moreover, were incensed about the prospect that their war heroes should be put on trial. The loss of territories with a large German population in the east also incensed public opinion. Many people, particularly on the right, advocated a desperate act of resistance even at the price of complete foreign occupation, hoping that foreign occupation would -- just as under Napoleon I -- produce a united German uprising. The majority in the Reichstag, however, resisted this fanciful alternative. But even if many Germans felt that they had no alternative to signing, there was almost universal consensus that the treaty was extremely unjust and needed to be changed at the first opportunity.

Evaluation:

While the Germans were bitterly disappointed about what they saw as Wilson's "betrayal," the Treaty of Versailles was a compromise between Wilsonian aims and French plans. In the short run, the treaty significantly weakened Germany and gave the victors economic benefits and much power mainly in the west of the country. In the long run, however, nothing spoke against a German recovery at least in economics. The trade conditions favoring the victors would elapse after five years, the occupation would have to be ended after fifteen years, and German disarmament, at least according to the letter of the treaty, was ultimately conditional upon general, world-wide disarmament.

The treaty weakened Germany more than Wilson had wanted, but the American president had been forced to negotiate in a position of weakness and to make far-reaching concessions to his allies in order to secure a peace treaty at all. He tried to conceal his failure to the American public by condoning the peace treaty as a just punishment for a bad criminal. To this purpose he dropped the distinction between Germany's prerevolutionary and republican governments. Wilson first of all wanted to make sure that Germany would not succumb to Bolshevism; in the long run, he wished for an integration of republican Germany into a liberal community of nations. Germany could become a major economic power again, but not a military power.

The fourteen points and Wilson's assurances in October 1918 had suggested a milder peace than Versailles, but the biggest problem was that the Germans still refused to acknowledge that they had lost a world war, a war that had unbound unprecedented energies and emotions and affected societies as a whole, a war, for whose outbreak the German government had to bear a large share of responsibility. The traumatic character of the defeat gave rise to illusions. Germans believed that they had been tricked into disarming themselves by the alleged promise of a "just" peace by the American President. As if there had been no military defeat before! It remained extremely difficult to understand for Germans how they could have lost the war without losing a decisive battle and without letting the enemy conquer German territory. That their war machine had simply run out of men and materiel and that this was decisive in a modern war was hard to understand.

This trauma, this difficulty to understand how things had turned from seemingly imminent victory to disaster, made many Germans susceptible to poisonous, distorting legends. The worst of all was the stab-in-the-back legend, propagated by Hindenburg and Ludendorff in November 1919. The dismissed generals claimed that the defeat had come about as a result of democratic and socialist strivings at home. Politicians eager for reform or revolution had, according to the generals, stabbed the undefeated German army in the back by launching a revolution at home. Already before November 1918, they claimed, the democrats had undermined the war effort by diverting popular attention from ultimate support for the war to concern about domestic gains. In other words: the Socialists and Democrats, those who represented the new Weimar system, were responsible for the German defeat.

This was a perfidious lie, as the revolution was triggered by the defeat, not vice versa. All of Germany's allies in South Eastern Europe had broken down in October 1918, the western front was about to crumble due to the vast superiority of the Entente forces. Even if the Germans had held out for a while in Belgium they would have been attacked in the southeast, where after the Austro-Hungarian defeat Allied troops in Greece and Italy faced no enemy any more. In any case, the ultimate breakdown of the German army was only a matter of time, as Ludendorff himself had admitted before the revolution.

In the light of the German conditions imposed on defeated Russia at Brest-Litovsk, moreover, the Treaty of Versailles did not look extremely harsh. (To check this out, see [Eurodocs, World War I Archive: Brest-Litovsk.](#)) But, as mentioned above, Versailles was a problematic result of a compromise. Germany was not weakened enough to make it impossible for it to ever rise again as a military threat. Its structural potential for hegemony (economy, population, education) was not destroyed.

On the other side, the treaty was sure to make a significant section of the German public unforgiving and eager for a revanche. In that sense it was not a "peace treaty" but, as the German writer Bertolt Brecht once said, a truce in a European thirty-years civil war. The discourse over Versailles helped poison political life of the Weimar Republic, as the extremely difficult adjustment period following the war was blamed not primarily on the war itself (as it should have been) but on Versailles and Weimar Germany's compliance with the peace treaty. Given the high and expansive German expectations of the war years, however, it is hard to think of a peace that would have pleased the Germans.

The dilemma for the United States was that the milder the peace the greater the American role as a future interventionist power in Europe: Germany, fighting a world coalition while having only weak allies, had been overcome only through American help. A Germany left largely intact could again become a military threat, so that once again the United States would have to intervene to decide a war in Europe for the Entente. On the other side, an all too weak Germany could easily become the prey of a France wanting to establish its own predominance over Europe. France could attack Germany before it recovered and impose its own peace on Germany. American assistance would then be needed to save Germany from France. The problem was that the United States was not prepared to assume the new responsibilities it faced as a world power. As the main creditor of the Entente, it had a only a short-term interest in European stability and in French and British wealth.

Altogether, we have to consider that statesmen at Versailles had little latitude. The global war had created circumstances that even good will could not easily have changed. Recent historiography has slightly rehabilitated Wilson. He made sure that at least some compromise between his ideological goals and the more aggressive aims of the French came about. The Paris peace conference had a multitude of problems to solve: Germany was only one part of them. In the following months the Entente concluded separate treaties with Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey (see [Eurodocs, World War I Archive: Conventions and Treaties](#)). Versailles undoubtedly helped to compromise the new German democracy, but the reasons for its failure were more complex than the Versailles trauma. The compromise character of the peace treaty left Germany some hope for revision and ultimate repudiation. There was no need to accept a total defeat as there would be in 1945. Revision remained a distant but viable goal. Germans were determined to work for it.

Go on to [D.2.](#)

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December 25, 2010

Ending the War to End All Wars

By MARGARET MacMILLAN

NOT many people noticed at the time, but World War I ended this year. Well, in a sense it did: on Oct. 3, Germany finally paid off the interest on bonds that had been taken out by the shaky Weimar government in an effort to pay the war reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.

While the amount, less than \$100 million, was trivial by today's standards, the payment brought to a close one of the most poisonous chapters of the 20th century. It also, unfortunately, brought back to life an insidious historical myth: that the reparations and other treaty measures were so odious that they made Adolf Hitler's rise and World War II inevitable.

In truth, the reparations, as the name suggests, were not intended as a punishment. They were meant to repair the damage done, mainly to Belgium and France, by the German invasion and subsequent four years of fighting. They would also help the Allies pay off huge loans they had taken to finance the war, mainly from the United States. At the Paris peace talks of 1919, President Woodrow Wilson was very clear that there should be no punitive fines on the losers, only legitimate costs. The other major statesmen in Paris, Prime Ministers David Lloyd George of Britain and Georges Clemenceau of France, reluctantly agreed, and Germany equally reluctantly signed the treaty.

In Weimar Germany, a society deeply divided by class and politics, hatred of the "dictated peace" was widespread, and there was no shame in trying to escape its provisions. The final sum for reparations was not mentioned in the treaty — itself a humiliation in German eyes — but was eventually set in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks (about \$442 billion in today's terms). The fact is that Germany could have managed to pay, but for political reasons chose not to.

The German government repeatedly challenged the amount, asked for moratoriums or simply stated that it could not pay. In 1924 and again in 1929, the total sum owed was negotiated down. In 1933, when the Nazis took power, Hitler simply canceled reparations unilaterally. In the end, it has been calculated, Germany paid less in real terms than France did after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 to '71 (and France paid off those obligations in just a few years).

Yet this mattered little to the Germans, for whom it was all too easy to attribute every problem

to reparations, and by extension to the Weimar government. Hitler did not attain power because of reparations — the Great Depression and the folly of the German ruling classes did that — but their existence gave him a political cudgel against Weimar. The wrangling over reparations also helped turn the German people against co-operation with the international system.

Equally important, the issue helped drive a wedge between France and Britain at a time when the liberal democracies needed to stand together. Many in the English-speaking world came to agree with the Germans that the Treaty of Versailles, and the reparations in particular, were unjust, and that Lloyd George had capitulated to the vengeful French. That sense of guilt played a role in the efforts by successive British governments to appease Hitler in the 1930s.

In this atmosphere, many if not most Germans came to believe that World War I was a sort of natural catastrophe, with no human authors. The arms race, nationalism, imperialism, fear, hatred: all were seen in retrospect as impersonal forces that had simply swept Europeans along in 1914. The German Foreign Ministry in the 1920s even had a propaganda unit that took every opportunity to encourage attacks on the treaty and, by selectively releasing documents, to suggest that Germany bore no more responsibility for the war than any other nation. All were guilty or none were.

Research since 1945, by German historians among others, has produced a more complicated picture, that of a reckless Austria-Hungary determined to crush Serbia and of Germany providing a blank check for its allies in Vienna. German military planners, if they did not welcome war, by 1914 were increasingly inclined to expect it. Their nightmare was a rapidly industrializing Russia. Rather like the Japanese in 1941 who decided to attack the United States, the Germans thought it would be better to have the inevitable conflict sooner rather than later, while they could still take the offensive.

In a remarkably short time after 1918, many Germans also came to think that they had not really lost the war. Its armies during the war had inflicted stunning defeats on Germany's foes, especially in the east, and little of German soil had been occupied by Allied troops either during the war or in defeat. The military elite mounted a successful campaign in the 1920s to attribute the final German collapse to a "stab in the back" by enemies at home, particularly socialists, liberals and Jews.

This perception was absurd: Germany's armies lost badly on the battlefields in the summer of 1918; its people were on the brink of starvation because of the British naval blockade; its Austrian, Turkish and Bulgarian allies had crumbled; and its military had begged the government to make peace before it was too late. The armistice signed on Nov. 11 was clearly a surrender; Germany gave up its Navy and its submarines and its heavy field equipment, from

tanks to artillery. But as things went from bad to worse such facts were easily distorted or ignored, especially in the late 1920s as Weimar faltered and Hitler rose.

This is not to say that the reparations were a good idea. They were economically unsound and a political mistake with serious consequences. John Maynard Keynes, a member of the British delegation in Paris, rightly argued that the Allies should have forgotten about reparations altogether. (It would have helped if America had written off the war loans it had made to Britain and France, but it was not prepared to do that.)

Still, one has to consider the political atmosphere in 1919. No French or Belgian politician could have openly agreed with Keynes; and even if Lloyd George had wanted to, he had to placate the hard-line Tories in his coalition government. The north of France and virtually the whole of Belgium had been occupied for four years by German soldiers who had driven off livestock, plundered factories and mines, and taken citizens to Germany for forced labor. The areas along the front lines, on the French-Belgian border, were wastelands. And we now have compelling evidence that German forces deliberately carried out a scorched-earth policy; they flooded mines, blew up bridges and stripped bare factories as they retreated.

As one French newspaper asked in 1919, why should the French taxpayer pay to fix the damage the invaders had done? The French remembered too, if nobody else did, that it was the Germans who had declared war on France in 1914, not the other way round.

Ending wars is not easy, and before we condemn the whole idea of reparations as misguided and dangerous, we should think about more recent penalties for aggression. Iraq, for example, is still paying reparations to Kuwait for Saddam Hussein's invasion of 1990.

More significantly, Germany was obliged to pay reparations after 1945, and in that case there was no negotiation at all: Germany was utterly defeated and the Allies simply helped themselves. The Soviet Union in particular extracted whatever it could and in the most brutal fashion. There was little outcry in Germany because of the total extent of the defeat and, equally important, it was impossible for Germans to argue that they were being unfairly blamed for the war.

It's worth noting that less than a decade after the fall of the Nazis, the lingering legacy of the World War I reparations was settled quickly and with a minimum of fuss. A conference in London in 1953 produced the agreement whose terms were fulfilled in October. West Germany agreed to pay the interest on its interwar bonds and make compensation to claimants like those who were forced into labor — but only when it was reunited with East Germany. The agreement is often held up as a model to economically troubled countries for how to settle outstanding debts.

Perhaps Greece and Ireland and their debtors should be taking a look at it. And perhaps we should not be so quick to condemn the decisions of the past, but recognize that sometimes there are problems for which there are no easy solutions. In my view Germany could and should have made reparations for its aggression in World War I — but was the risk of renewed war worth forcing it to do so?

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Lessons from History? The Paris Peace Conference of 1919

By: [Margaret MacMillan](#)

Historians are always reluctant to draw lessons from history, and with good reason. History has been so often abused to support outrageous policies, to promote extravagant claims to territory or to explain away bad decisions. We all know how nationalist movements have created, and indeed been the creation of, highly selective histories. We have seen in the recent past how reference to, for example, appeasement can be used to justify actions in contexts which are not at all like that of the 1930s. Nevertheless I am going to break the rules of the Historians' Guild and see whether the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 offers any useful suggestions for today. The word 'lessons' is perhaps too strong, but history can offer us instructive analogies. It can help us to formulate useful questions about our own times. And it can provide warnings: we are on thin ice here, there are dangerous beasts over there.

Since the end of the Cold War, our world has become an increasingly complicated and troubling one. We have seen the spread of an irrational, powerful and anti-Western fundamentalism in the Muslim world. Failed states, Somalia for example, provide a convenient home for terrorist movements. Ethnic nationalisms, which many of us thought were dying out, are challenging secular states such as India. Rogue states such as North Korea remain outside the international system. A war which shows no signs of ending is ravaging the Great Lakes area of Africa. The Trans-Atlantic alliance which proved so strong during the Cold War has been damaged by recent events, perhaps fatally. The United States, a somewhat reluctant hegemon, is for the time being under the guidance of unilateralists who dismiss the concerns and national interests of other nations as irrelevant. This is bad news at a time when so many challenges, from terrorism to Aids, require more international co-operation rather than less.

If the great conference in Paris at the end of the First World War has been drawing attention recently, it is largely because of our concern with our own world. During the Cold War, the events of that earlier war and the peace settlements which came at its end were remote. They seemed to have no relevance to the great struggle which locked East against West. What did it matter how Yugoslavia or Iraq came into existence? Or how the statesmen then envisaged a world order. Since the end of the Cold War, such questions have become important again. We have also realized that sometimes it is necessary to understand the historical roots of the issues with which we are dealing. Countries and peoples, like individuals, have memories and they have experiences, which shape the ways they act towards each other, shape how they react to the present and approach the future. Of course we also need to understand economics, social structures, geography, or value systems. But if we ignore history, we deprive ourselves of a useful tool.

The Paris Peace Conference was an event the like of which we will never see again. It brought together some of the most powerful people in the world for six months. As they talked, debated, agreed and disagreed, they got to know each other in a way that few leaders have time for today. It is simply inconceivable today that the President of the United States or the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the Prime Ministers of Italy and France, Australia and Canada or the Queen of Rumania, to mention only a few of those who were there, would spend so much time together talking over great and sometimes trivial issues.

The Peace Conference has usually been remembered as a failure and its participants as obstinately short-sighted and foolish. This is unfair. The peacemakers faced problems which often defied solution. It should always be remembered that the conference took place in the aftermath of the worst world war that had been seen in modern history. The signs of the war were visible everywhere in Paris. Half the women on

the streets in 1919 were wearing black because they had lost someone in that war. There were gaps in the trees along the grand avenues because the trees had been cut down for firewood. Many of the delegates also made the short trip northwards to the battlefields of the Western Front.

The war--known as the Great War in those days--had devastated Europe. Twenty million men had died, twice as many again were wounded. Four years of fighting had churned up huge tracts, in the north of France and Belgium, along the frontiers between Germany and Austria-Hungary and Russia, and in the Balkans. European civilization and the confidence that Europeans had once had in themselves had been shaken to the core. The Europeans of 1919 had a very real feeling that they had destroyed not just physical parts of their civilization, not just all those lives, but their very political, social and economic structures. Russia had started down the path to revolution in 1917, and, as the old regime collapsed, parts of the great Russian empire broke away. In the Caucasus, peoples such as the Armenians, the Azerbaijanis, and the Georgians, tried to set up independent states. Ukraine briefly had its own independent government. Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania fought for their freedom. Further west, the Austria-Hungarian Empire, that enormous empire, which had for so many centuries occupied the heart of Central Europe, fell into pieces in the last month of the Great War. The German Empire had collapsed and the monarchy had been replaced by a republic.

The peacemakers did their work in atmosphere of fear: first that they would never be able to put European civilization back together again but also that there was worse still to come. An image, used often during the Peace Conference, was that of being on the edge of a volcano which was about to blow up. This was not an unreasonable apprehension when you think of what they had already experienced by 1919. The Russian Revolution was still working itself out. The Civil War, between the Bolsheviks on the one hand, and a collection of anarchists, liberals, nationalists of various stripes, and the remnants of the old regime, was going on. It was not at all clear yet that the Bolsheviks would win. It was also very difficult to get any reliable information about what was happening in Russia. Most of the communications had been cut and virtually all foreign diplomats, journalists, and aid workers had left. In 1919 Russia was as unknown a country as Iraq was before the coalition defeated the forces of Saddam Hussein.

The Bolsheviks called on the left-wing forces of the world to rise up against their rulers and it seemed, for a time at least, that their call was successful. The fall of the monarchies in Austria-Hungary and Germany was marked by revolutionary upheavals. In a number of cities soviets--consciously named after the model in Russia--of workers and soldiers took power. Bavaria had a communist government briefly in the winter of 1919, and Hungary had one for several months in the spring and summer. Depending on your political perspective there were grounds for fear or for hope, that revolution was going to spread westward and there was certainly evidence that it might as France, Italy, Belgium, Britain, even North America experienced militant demonstrations and strikes.

That fear of revolution was sometimes useful in Paris. Queen Marie of Romania, for example, asked for huge territorial gains, including half of Hungary, for her country. When leaders such as Woodrow Wilson of the United States or Georges Clemenceau of France demurred at granting this, she warned that a disappointed Rumania might well have a violent revolution. This was not something that the peacemakers wanted. Revolution in Romania would bring the threat of Bolshevism much closer to the heart of Europe. The peacemakers, it has been suggested by the historian Arno Mayer among others, were heavily influenced by their apprehensions about revolution when it came to making the peace settlements. While I would argue that this was not their only consideration, it is certainly the case that the French, in particular, felt that it was necessary to have strong states as a cordon sanitaire to prevent revolution from spreading.

The threat was also helpful to a Canadian representative. In the National Archives, there are some delightful letters from Oliver Mowat Biggar, who was legal advisor to the Canadian delegation. Biggar worked extremely hard but he also had time to visit the theatres with other Canadians such as Sir Robert Borden. They went to the classic plays by Racine and Molière but they also went to the opera comique and the revues. Biggar described his evenings out to his wife in Ottawa: the attractive women of the demi-mondaine, the actress who had almost nothing on above the waist, the way in which French women's ankles compared to those of Canadians. Mrs Biggar, not surprisingly, decided that she ought to

join her husband in Paris. He warned her off by pointing out that France was likely to experience violent upheavals.

The peacemakers had equally important consideration, that of the expectations of their publics. This was a time, of course, when public opinion was already a factor in international relations. The war had been so catastrophic and the losses had been so great, that there was a very strong feeling, first of all that someone should pay for it. Reasonable or not, it is human nature to want to find someone to blame, particularly after a great catastrophe, and to want to make someone or something pay. After every European war the losers had lost territory or property such as art work. They had also frequently paid fines (often called indemnities) or, in some cases, reparations for the damage their forces had done. The difficulty with the Great War was that the damage was so great and the strength of public feeling so strong, that the potential bill to be presented to the losing side was astronomical. David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, and Clemenceau knew that they had little chance of extracting vast payments from the defeated nations, but they dared not say so publically for fear of losing political support. They also had to deal with Wilson, who had made it clear in public statements that he would not support punitive fines.

In the Allied countries, before the peace conference met, there was as well considerable enthusiasm for punishing the leaders of the Central Powers, in particular those of Germany which had been the dominant partner. There was talk of trying Kaiser Wilhelm II, who, after one last bombastic speech about dying at the head of his troops, had gone off ignominiously by train to a comfortable refuge in the Netherlands. Lloyd George toyed with the idea of sending him, as the British had done with Napoleon, to an island, perhaps in the Falklands. In the end the Dutch government refused to hand him over.

Public opinion, contradictorily and confusingly, also wanted a better world. Many on the allied side, and indeed among the defeated countries, felt that the sacrifices, the waste in human and other terms of the First World War, would only make sense if the world moved on to find ways of preventing future wars and to build fairer societies. Wilson, although he expressed ideas which many Europeans had been talking about for a generation, came to be seen as the spokesman for such hopes. In his great wartime speeches, particularly that in which he laid out his Fourteen Points, he sketched out a new sort of international relations, where countries dealt openly with each other, where armaments were reduced to the bare minimum for safety, where trade barriers fell and the ships of the world travelled the seas without interference, and where a new type of organization, a league of nations, brought its members collective security.

Then there were all the expectations of those people who had not yet had or who, for some time, had not had their own country. The Paris Peace Conference operated in a context when national self-determination was something that was a very powerful force. This was not something that had mattered during the Congress of Vienna from 1814-1815 which met to create the peace settlements at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. At that time the idea that nations should run their own affairs had not yet really taken hold of Europe or indeed of the world outside Europe.

By 1919, it certainly had taken hold. Woodrow Wilson is sometimes blamed for this -for creating all these expectations that ethnic groups should have their own nation states. This again is unfair. He certainly gave encouragement to the idea in his public statements, including the Fourteen Points, but he did not create what was by now a very powerful force. Europe had already seen how powerful nationalism and the desire of nations to have their own states could be with both Italian and German unification. It had already seen how powerful that force could be in the Balkans. Ethnic nationalism and the idea of self-determination for ethnic states was not suddenly created by a few careless words from the American president.

Given such an array of expectations, from revenge to a brighter tomorrow, is it any surprise that the peace settlements are so often seen as failures? The Paris Peace Conference was only partly about making peace settlements and about making a better world; it was also the focus of the hopes and expectations of nations trying to reconstitute themselves, in the case of Poland, who wanted their independence from an empire, in the case of the Baltic states, or who were new nations such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, or Kurdistan. Paris was in the six months between January and June 1919 the

centre of world power, perhaps even a sort of world government. The peacemakers rapidly discovered that they were dealing with an agenda which kept on growing. An obscure assistant chef at the Ritz Hotel laboriously drew up a petition about his own very small part of the French empire in Asia which he failed to get to the attention of the peacemakers. Ho Chi Minh decided on another way to lead Vietnam to independence. Day by day, fresh petitioners came in, from nations that nobody had heard of, made their way to Paris. Suffragette groups asked for votes for women, Labour organizations promoted better working conditions. African-Americans appeared to ask for rights for their people. So did black Africans from French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa.

The peacemakers dealt with all these issues and more. Their days were crammed with work. Most of them tried hard, and with some optimism, to build peace settlements that would work. If there are lessons to be learned from the peace conference, it is that you can only make peace when the circumstances permit it. In 1919, in my view, the circumstances were not favourable.

In 1815, at the end of that series of wars which started with the French revolutionary ones and ended with those of Napoleon, when the great powers assembled at Vienna to make peace, they had a much easier task. They were dealing with a world that was tired of war, where the revolutionary impulses set off in France in 1789 had basically worked themselves out. What was quite different about 1919 was that the revolutionary fires - those of Bolshevism or other forms of socialism and anarchism as well as those of ethnic nationalism were still on the increase. In the case of Bolshevism they were not really going to burn themselves out until the 1980s. As for ethnic nationalism, it is not clear that we have seen the end yet. Nor was 1919 like 1945 when the revisionist, aggressive nations such as Germany, Italy and Japan were destroyed and inert and the powers, in that case largely the United States and the Soviet Union could impose their will.

We tend to assume--as did the Allies at the time--that the peacemakers had the capacity to do the same in 1919. The statesmen who assembled in Paris knew their enemies were either defeated, in the case of Germany, or had simply vanished, in the case of Austria-Hungary. They had the significant remaining armed forces. They expected that they could reach out and do what they wanted in Europe, in the Middle East, and in parts of Asia and Africa. Yet they found time and time again that their capacity to influence events, particularly the further away they were from Paris, was very limited indeed.

In reality their power was much less than it appeared and certainly much less than the victors possessed in 1945. True the Allies possessed huge armed forces at the end of the war in November 1919. Those forces melted away surprisingly quickly in the succeeding months. The men themselves wanted to go home and their families wanted them back. Taxpayers were no longer prepared to pay the costs. By June 1919, Allied armies were down to about 1/3 of what they had been at the end of the war. Moreover the capacity or morale of those that remained was very much in question. The French army had never really recovered from the great mutinies of 1917. Parts of the French navy were to mutiny in the spring of 1919. The British Army was perhaps in better shape but it too was shaken by riots and demonstrations. Morale was still high in the American armed forces but the last thing the Europeans wanted was more American influence over Europe or further afield.

Projecting power was also a problem. When empires broke up and revolution had spread across Europe, economic and transportation structures had crumbled. The trains could not run if the coal were not available or the rolling stock had disappeared. Many ports were scarcely operating. When it came to Asia Minor or the Caucasus the logistical problems were even greater. Again and again in Paris the statesmen had confronted the need to do something and their own lack of capacity. One day, for example, the Big Four of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, Wilson, and Vittorio Orlando, the Italian Prime Minister, discussed the small war that had broken out between Poland and Czechoslovakia over a rich coal area. All agreed that the two countries must be told to stop. It became clear however that there were no troops available to send. Lloyd George's final solution was to send a firm telegram. Discussions like this happened repeatedly.

There is a danger, it seems to me, for great powers in looking outwards from their great capitals at the world and imagining all the things you might do. The pieces out there in the rest of the world, however, are not as malleable as you might like and ordering them about may not be as easy as you think. There is

perhaps a lesson for today in this. Of course, the world of 2003 is different in many ways from that of 1919 and the United States is much more powerful in relation to its enemies (as well as its friends) than any single power was then, but American policy makers can still fall into the same trap. Some of the schemes that are being floated around Washington today--for the complete reorganization of the Middle East--make that assumption that the pieces on the ground are going to fall into their slots very neatly and stay where they are told to stay.

That brings me to Germany. Here again the situation in 1919 was different from that in 1945. True Austria-Hungary had gone; Bulgaria was completely defeated; and the Ottoman Empire was tottering and had already lost most of its Arab territories. But Germany was not completely defeated or certainly not defeated in a way which was going to make the making of peace easy.

The allies had decided, and it was a very contentious decision, to agree to Germany's request for an Armistice in November 1918. German armies had been defeated on the battlefield. In August 1918, the German lines had broken and the German troops had fallen back towards their own borders. German officers reported from all quarters that they could no longer fight on. (This is something that Germans later on forgot or never knew.) The German High Command, headed by Generals Ludendorff and Hindenburg, panicked and demanded that their civilian government get an armistice as quickly as possible. The request to the allies came in the old-fashioned way when two German officers waving a white bed sheet tied to a stick came across to the Allied lines. But it was also came in a very modern way through an exchange of public messages. The German government asked the American president Woodrow Wilson to arrange an armistice for them with the European powers. Wilson replied saying that he would undertake to intercede if the Germans accepted that the Fourteen Points would be the basis of a subsequent peace.

The making of the armistice caused contention, partly because neither Britain nor France felt they had been consulted on the process. More importantly, the Germans assumed that they were making peace on the basis of Wilson's new type of diplomacy and his new world order and that they would be treated gently. They assumed that Germany would have to pay nothing or little in the way of war damages or reparations, and that they would lose very little territory. Indeed if national self-determination were to be taken as a basis for decisions, Germany might even gain the German-speaking parts of the defunct Austria-Hungary for example Austria itself and the parts of Czechoslovakia that Germans called the Southlands, the Sudetenland. Furthermore, since Wilson had hinted broadly that Germans should get rid of their old regime and become a republic, and since this had in fact happened at the end of the war, many Germans assumed that there was now a new Germany which should not have to pay for the sins of the old one.

There is another and very significant difference between the ends of the First and Second World Wars which affected the ways in which peace came. In 1918, very little of Germany was occupied by Allied troops. There was discussion at the time and there has been since about whether the Allies should have pursued the war to the end. General Pershing, the American commander-in-chief, whose troops were still relatively fresh and enthusiastic, wanted to go on. He wanted to carry the war into Germany and Allied troops marching in victory through Berlin. From the point of view, though, of Marshal Foch, the French commander-in-chief and Supreme Allied Commander in Chief, the armistice terms which the Germans were prepared to accept, which included their surrendering their heavy armaments and the German navy, were tantamount to a complete capitulation. Foch also pointed out, and he was probably right, that Allied opinion would not stand for more waste of lives when victory seemed assured. His political masters agreed: it would have been politically and militarily very difficult for Britain and France to go on fighting against Germany, once an Armistice had been publicly requested. In retrospect, knowing what we now know, it might have been better to make the sacrifice and occupy Germany in 1918 because many Germans were later able to persuade themselves that Germany had not been defeated and that the peace terms imposed by the Allies were deeply unfair. As it was most Germans never saw Allied troops and the German army which marched back in Berlin was greeted by what was now the President of a Republic as the undefeated.

Germany came out of the war weakened and smaller. It has been argued, though, by a number of

historians that Germany in some ways was in a stronger position strategically after 1919 than it had been before 1914. It no longer had an Austria-Hungary on its eastern borders. In its place, were generally weak states, which tended to quarrel with each other. And thanks to the reconstitution of Poland, after a gap of almost over a century, Germany no longer had a common border with Russia, something which had always made German statesmen look uneasily eastwards. Germany was also relatively unscathed by the war. Certainly its population suffered much from the Allied blockade but its infrastructure was relatively untouched, certainly by comparison with that of France's. Most of the fighting had been, of course, on the Belgian and French soil, western front on, or on Russian on the eastern. German factories and mines were largely intact unlike those in France or Belgium. That perhaps does not matter because what also counts in international relations as in domestic affairs is what people believe. The Germans, who had a tendency as see themselves as surrounded by hostile nations even before the First World War, felt themselves to be weak and vulnerable after 1918.

No one who loses a war ever likes conditions of the peace settlements but the widespread and deeply-felt rejection of the Treaty of Versailles in Germany has much to do with the way in which the war ended and the often unrealistic expectations that the Germans developed in the months before they finally saw the peace terms. and so, there was no way that Germany was going to like any peace terms.

Unfortunately the Allies made it worse by not negotiating with Germany. The Peace Conference was initially meant to be like earlier ones, where winners and losers sat down and hammered out a peace. The Allies met in Paris in January 1919 for what they expected would be a preliminary conference for two to three weeks, where they would hammer out common peace terms and then call representatives from Germany and the other defeated nations and have a full-blown peace conference.

When the Allies started their discussions, they rapidly found that the issues were so complicated and involved so many parts of the world, that it was difficult to get agreement. Matters were also complicated Woodrow Wilson's insistence - and one can see why he did it - that the covenant of the league of nations be included in the German Treaty. Two to three weeks turned into two to three months. It was not until the beginning of May 1919, that the Allies managed to draw up a common set of peace terms for Germany, which they could all agree on. The drawing up of those terms had painful and difficult.

A particularly divisive issue was how France should be protected in future from Germany. Should Germany be disarmed completely? - which would leave it defenceless against its neighbours and perhaps against Bolshevism. Or partially? - in which case, how big an army should it have and with what sort of weapons? There were those in France who wanted Germany to be broken up completely and returned to the collection of states it had been before 1870. Others were content to take the Rhineland, part of Germany west of the Rhine River, and turn it into an either independent state or a state attached to France. Lloyd George refused, pointing out that Europe had already been disturbed enough in the 19th century by unfulfilled German ambitions. On the other hand, the French argued, with some justification, that they still needed to be protected from Germany. The basic French problem was that there was still a very big Germany and there were more Germans than French and therefore more future German soldiers than French ones. The demographic gap was clearly going to widen.

Trying to come up with a figure on what Germany should pay for war damages was also extremely difficult, partly because of public expectations. Huge figures had been floated around in the weeks preceding the Peace Conference and the Allied publics in Britain and France in particular had come to expect that Germany would make up for all the money spent during the war (and perhaps even for the future pensions to widows and orphans of soldiers) and for damage to Allied property. Even Canada drew up a list which included freighters that had been sunk in order not to be left out of the final distribution. Then there was the damage done by the fighting on Belgian and French soil. It was hard even to get any estimate of what that amounted to. American army engineers who were starting to do surveys of the battlefields assumed it would take at least two years to get any realistic estimate.

When the Allies finally managed to reach agreement on the German terms, no one wanted to sit down and reopen the whole thing in discussions with the Germans. By May 1919, there was another consideration--the fear that they no longer had the capacity to impose their will on Germany especially if protracted negotiations opened up. The Allied leaders had gloomy conversations with their

military experts about what would happen if Germany refused to sign its treaty. Foch prepared a plan to strike simultaneously into Bavaria and across the Rhine, where the Allies held the bridgeheads, toward Berlin. But he warned that the German resistance might be fighting might be bitter and Allied losses high.

During those long months, views of the war, ultimately very influential ones, were starting to take root in Germany. The High Command and its supporters argued that Germany's armies could have fought on if only certain unpatriotic elements on the home front--left-wingers, for example, or Jews--had not stabbed them in the back. Although many of those who supported the new republic did not subscribe to the stab-in-the-back myth, they also came to share the view that Germany had not lost the war on the battlefields at all. Rather, the German government, in an attempt to save all combatants from further loss and destruction, had wisely, even nobly, asked for an armistice. And Woodrow Wilson had promised, had he not, that Germany would be treated justly by the Allies.

The German government approached the peace negotiations with some optimism. It expected that the customary negotiations would take place in Paris. During the winter and early spring of 1918-19, the Foreign Ministry prepared detailed studies of every aspect of what it expected to discuss in Paris. When the German delegation was finally summoned to Paris in May 1919, it brought with it crates full of materials. The German delegates were shocked by their reception. On their arrival in Paris, they were put in a third-rate hotel surrounded by barbed wire and guards, so it was said, for their own protection. At a brisk ceremony in the Trianon Palace Hotel near Versailles, Clemenceau handed them the terms and told them that they had two weeks to enter any comments in writing. There were to be no negotiations. The shock among the delegates and back in Germany was profound. The Germans felt betrayed. When they looked at the terms themselves they were horrified.

Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, the German Foreign Minister, who headed the delegation, took two speeches with him to the Trianon Palace Hotel. One was conciliatory, the other much more defiant. He did not decide which one he was going to use until he received the peace terms. He chose defiance. Since he looked very much the Prussian Junker, and since nerves forced him to speak seated, the speech made a lamentable impression. If the Allies had felt qualms about treating Germany harshly, they no longer did so.

Von Brockdorff-Rantzau subsequently made a decision, which in retrospect had unfortunate consequences, to attack two clauses in the section on reparations. Article 231 of the Germany treaty has come to be known as the War Guilt Clause. In fact, if you read it, it says nothing about guilt, only about responsibility for the war. It was put in to establish Germany's legal liability. The following article, 232, limits that liability by stating that Germany's reparations obligations had to be based on Germany's capacity to pay. The actual wording came from John Foster Dulles, who was a young lawyer with the American delegation. Von Brockdorff-Rantzau's decision came after considerable debate both among the German delegates and back in Germany. Interestingly enough, none of the other defeated nations, whose treaties included similar clauses, ever made an issue of it. In time, of course, the 'War Guilt' clause became deeply embedded in German thinking about the Versailles Treaty, as it came to be known, and was one of the many grounds on which Hitler and his fellow nationalists attacked the peace settlements. As the years went by and the opening of the European archives suggested that the war may well have started as the result of a series of mistakes on both sides, Germans and indeed many in the English-speaking world, felt that the clause, and by extension, the whole treaty, was unfair to Germany.

In recent years a number of historians, myself included, have come to the conclusion that the German treaty was not as bad as it has been portrayed. Whatever the High Command later said, Germany had lost the war. It should have expected to lose territory. If Germany had won, it certainly would have taken territory from its defeated enemies. It should have expected that the Allies, and particularly France, would attempt to limit Germany's capacity to wage future wars. It should have expected to pay something just as France had paid after it lost the Franco-Prussian War. In fact, the Germany Foreign Ministry had worked out figures and drawn up schedules for the reparations it expected to be imposed. But with a treaty that was widely seen as unjust, and this was right across the political spectrum, there was little will in Germany to pay any reparations. The arguments between Germany and its former enemies, which poisoned international relations for so much of the decade after the war, obscured the

fact that Germany never paid that much in the end, probably less than a sixth of what it owed. Nevertheless in Germany, reparations became shorthand for every economic problem, for unemployment and for the dreadful inflation of the early 1920s. The real culprit was fiscal mismanagement by the German government but that is not how it was perceived in Germany. What is true in history is sometimes less important than what people believe to be true.

Germans in the interwar years also resented the military clauses, in part because the Allies had said that there would be a more general disarmament which never in the end materialized. But was Germany's war-making capacity that seriously affected? Germany was to have an army of 100,000 but no limits were placed on the number of non-commissioned officers. The German army, after 1919, had the highest proportion of these in Europe, which meant that it had the backbone for a much larger force. The military clauses were supervised by a small Allied military commission whose members frequently complained, with little effect, that they were receiving minimal co-operation from the Germans. Germany was not meant to have an air force but it had a great many flying clubs in the 1920s. When Hitler took power in 1933, it took him two years to construct an air force.

The perception that the Treaty of Versailles was unfair and immoral played an important part in the rise to power of Hitler who took every opportunity to attack the 'Diktat' or dictated peace which bound Germany in chains. It also had an impact on the Allies, as it contributed to the appeasement of the 1930s. If the treaty were as wicked as the Germans claimed, then clearly Hitler was justified in wanting to undo it. John Maynard Keynes, in Paris as the Treasury adviser to the British delegation, set the tone early in the great polemic which he wrote in the summer of 1919. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which became an instant best-seller and has been in print ever since, attacks the peacemakers as foolish and short-sighted. They sat in their rooms at Paris indulging in sterile debates about punishment and reparations while they should have been rebuilding Europe and getting trade going again. The book was of course immediately translated into German and it also had a tremendous impact in the English speaking countries. In France, the notion that reparations were deeply unfair, and that the whole Treaty was a mistake, was never as widespread. When the French tried, with increasing desperation, to enforce the terms of the treaty in the interwar years, the British found them unreasonable. Britain, as it had so often done before, was withdrawing from engagement with the Continent and concentrating on tending its Empire. The Americans, although the extent of their isolationism has been exaggerated, withdrew partially from involvement in world affairs in the 1920s in part because they had tired of what they saw as the old vindictive European ways.

There is another sort of criticism of the Peace Conference which may offer useful parallels for the present and that is that it was not properly planned ahead and was simply inefficient. "Worthless schemes and improvised ideas" was how Paul Cambon, the wise old French ambassador in London, described the way in which the statesmen worked. There is something in his complaint. None of the Big Three had much experience in international relations. Lloyd George had a notoriously weak grasp of geography. Maps brought happy surprises such as his discovery that New Zealand was on quite a different side of Australia than he had always imagined. Unreasonably perhaps none of them had much use for their own foreign offices. Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau all chose as foreign ministers men whom they could safely ignore. All preferred to take advice from their close associates or from academic experts or journalists rather than their own diplomats. The conference took too long to get underway. What was meant to be a preliminary meeting of the Allies to work out a common position turned gradually into the only peace conference there was to be.

Given the extraordinary range of problems which came before it and the way in which the agenda kept expanding with as fresh issues, the rebirth of Poland for example or the relief of many parts of the former Austria-Hungary, it is doubtful that any organization or meticulous plan could have kept up. The peacemakers were dealing with such a new world, with new forces in the shape of Bolshevism or ethnic nationalisms, that improvisation was forced upon them. It also made sense to draw on expertise beyond what existed in their foreign services. The peace conference marked the use of experts from the private sector and from the academic world. This was received by the diplomats with a certain amount of scepticism but in fact the professionals and the amateurs worked very well together on the conference's many committees and commissions.

Wilson spoke for many both in Europe and the wider world when he said that a new and more open diplomacy was needed based on moral principles including democratic values, with respect for the rights of peoples to choose their own governments and an international organization to mediate among nations and provide collective security for its members. He was called dangerously naïve at the time and Wilsonianism has been controversial ever since. In the world of 1919, though, when the failure of older forms of diplomacy--secret treaties and agreements, for example, or a balance of power as the way to keep peace--was so terribly apparent, a new way of dealing with international relations made considerable sense.

There was no need, though, for the statesmen to take on so much themselves. In each of their meetings the Big Three (or Four if Orlando is included) dealt with several different matters, some major issues but others details, such as minor adjustments to borders, which they should have left to the many committees and commissions which were working away. It was also foolish and self-defeating of the leading statesmen to ignore tried and useful procedures. The Council of Four, which Wilson insisted upon when he returned to Paris from the United States, was meant to be so informal that it did not at first have a secretary. At the end of three days, the statesmen found they could not remember what they decided so called in Maurice Hankey, the British secretary to the peace conference, who kept his usual meticulous records.

The diplomats felt sidelined and resentful but, for all its innovative nature, the peace conference shows how important they were. Major decisions were usually made by the Council of Four or by the earlier Supreme Council. In many cases, however, the statesmen simply ratified the recommendations, including most of those on Europe's borders, which came up from the committees and commissions. These bodies took their work very seriously. Their members gathered huge amounts of information, interviewed experts and petitioners, and had exhaustive discussions. If the borders they drew left many people feeling dissatisfied, that was because the population in the centre of Europe was so mixed that there was no way of drawing borders based on ethnic considerations. The peace settlements left approximately 1/3 of all the people living in the centre of Europe as minorities in the countries in which they lived. That, of course, was going to be a source of trouble throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

As democratically elected leaders, the statesmen also carried the burden of domestic affairs. Sir Robert Borden, who was in Paris for several months, received dozens of letters and telegrams from his associates in Canada, telling him of crises and urging him to hasten home. Wilson and Lloyd George both had to leave the conference for a month to deal with problems at home. All the statesmen felt the pressure. Lloyd George, who was the youngest, survived the best. Wilson had trouble sleeping and developed a serious tic in his face. There is a possibility that he suffered a minor stroke while he was in Paris. Clemenceau, a man of extraordinary vitality, was wounded in an assassination attempt part way through the conference; observers felt that he never was quite the same again.

The great objective forces matter in history: factors such as economics, geography, military power. So does the intellectual and political context. People think largely in the categories which they have inherited. In 1919 people were thinking in ways which would have been alien to anyone in 1815 but which are familiar to us today: the whole notion of democratic participation in foreign policy, of ethnic nationalism, and of self-determination. Nevertheless the individuals who occupied positions of power are important. In moments particularly of crisis--August 1914, much of 1919, the weeks and months following September 11--when decisions have to be made, the personalities of those who are making those decisions can be of enormous importance.

The Paris Peace Conference reminds us not to ignore the players in history. It made a difference that Wilson was not a healthy man: in Paris he made concessions, to the Italians for example, out of sheer weariness. When he returned to the United States to try to get the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, with the League embedded in it, his natural stubbornness was exacerbated to the point where he refused all compromise with the moderate Republicans. As a result the Treaty was not ratified and the United States never joined the League of Nations. It mattered, to take another example, that Eleutherios Venizelos, the great Greek Prime Minister, managed to charm Lloyd George and persuade him that the ancient Greek empire in Asia Minor could be reconstituted. Lloyd George gave Greece the go-ahead to

land troops at Smyrna and encouraged the Greeks to advance inland. The result was the mobilization of Turkish nationalism under Kemal Ataturk, the defeat of the Greek forces and the end of the centuries-old Greek communities throughout Turkey.

It is sometimes decisions taken lightly or hastily which cause the most trouble in the long run. The fate of the Saar coal mines, which caused so much trouble at the peace conference, or the Duchy of Teschen, which nearly led to a war between Czechoslovakia and Poland, do not seem important today. The minorities treaties, which were laboriously drawn up to try to protect the ethnic minorities in the centre of Europe, were largely ineffective. On the other hand, the creation of Iraq, which was done in an imperialistic deal between Britain and France, has had repercussions right up to the present.

After some haggling, Britain got three former provinces of the Ottoman Empire. These had been ruled separately from Istanbul and did not constitute a nation. The British wanted them partly to keep the French from moving in, partly to protect the new air routes to India and partly because they suspected that there were significant deposits of oil. Britain made Iraq and found an Arab ruler in the person of Prince Faisal on the assumption that it would be easy and cheap to run. There were few of what we think of as the building blocks of a successful nation. Iraq contained different ethnic groups and different religions. There was no Iraqi nationality, although one did develop over the years. Almost from the moment Iraq was created, the British had trouble with it and the world has had problems ever since.

The final lesson which the Paris Peace Conference offers is that getting international agreements is one thing, enforcing them quite another. The Treaty of Versailles was a cumbersome document; it embodied a series of uneasy compromises among the powers and it was unnecessarily irritating to the Germans. In the long run, though, the most important thing was that there was not sufficient will to enforce it among the winning nations. There were enforcement mechanisms in the Treaty, but someone had to decide to use them. The French and, at first, the Belgians were willing, but they needed support from the British and perhaps the Americans and that support was not there in the 1920s and 1930s. From 1935 onwards Hitler violated the provisions of the Treaty--starting with the announcement that Germany had an air force and then moving troops into the demilitarized Rhineland--and got away with it. If, and it is one of those big 'ifs' in history, he had been stopped early on, the Second World War in Europe might not have taken place.

Were the present American administration and its supporters right to see a parallel situation with Saddam Hussein? Were the attempts by the United Nations, supported by countries such as France and Germany, to carry out weapons inspections merely a 21st century version of appeasement? The difficulty with taking lessons from history is always in finding the right one. Unfortunately we do not often know until many years later. Perhaps decades from now the O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture will be on the lessons of 1919 and 2003.

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Interview with Margaret MacMillan

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(opening animation)

WATTENBERG: Hello, I'm Ben Wattenberg. At the close of World War I-allegedly the 'war to end all wars'-the victors met in Paris to forge what they hoped would be a lasting peace. From the ruins of four bankrupt empires they redrew the boundaries of the modern world. They created new boundaries and entirely new nations throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East, including a British protectorate called Palestine and a patchwork country called Iraq. Many of today's most violent conflicts can be traced back to decisions made during those fateful six months in Paris. What went wrong? What went right? To find out, Think Tank is joined by Margaret MacMillan, history professor at the University of Toronto and author of 'Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World.' The topic before the House: From Versailles to Iraq. This week on Think Tank.

WATTENBERG: Okay, Margaret MacMillan, welcome to Think Tank.

MACMILLAN: Thank you.

WATTENBERG: World War I ended eighty-five years ago, and yet it still influences. I think it was one of the reviews said it: reading your book, which is a remarkable book, is like reading the daily paper. So I wonder if you could set the stage for us. I mean you've got a whole sentence or two to talk about the war and then let's go on into this remarkable conference.

MACMILLAN: Well it was the last war that Europe had seen and it killed a great many young men - men of military age - and it left a tremendous mess behind it. I mean political, social, and economic...

WATTENBERG: Well, what's the numerical total of people killed. You have something?

MACMILLAN: Twenty million.

WATTENBERG: Twenty million.

MACMILLAN: Mainly men, because this was before civilians started getting killed in large numbers.

WATTENBERG: Who won, who lost in World War I? Just let's get that out of the way so we know what we're doing

MACMILLAN: Well the winning side was almost the same as the second World War, so it was the United States, France, Britain, and Russia. But Italy was on the winning side in the first World War and so was Japan...

WATTENBERG: Japan was on our side?

MACMILLAN: Yep. Japan was on the allied side.

WATTENBERG: And the axis was...

MACMILLAN: Germany, Austria/Hungary, which was a big empire in those days; Bulgaria and Ottoman Turkey.

WATTENBERG: Who calls this peace conference - the book is called - I have it down here, Paris 1919, but it's about what is called the Versailles Treaty. The actual negotiations were held in Paris?

MACMILLAN: Yes, they were held in Paris in various rooms in the French Foreign Ministry for example, at the.... and around Paris and the treaty with Germany was signed at Versailles and then other treaties were signed in other suburbs of Paris.

WATTENBERG: The final grand treaty done in Versailles. Is that why it's called the Versailles Treaty?

MACMILLAN: Yes. Well, the most difficult treaty to do of all was the one with Germany, because it was the major of the defeated nations, and it was a template for the other treaties, and so they signed that one at Versailles.

WATTENBERG: I see. All right. Who were the big players?

MACMILLAN: Well, it was sort of an odd conference because what it was meant to be was a preliminary one where the allies would get together and the big players among the allies were Britain, with David Lloyd George as Prime Minister...

WATTENBERG: Now David Lloyd George was your great-grandfather?

MACMILLAN: Yes, he was my great-grandfather.

WATTENBERG: Right. But that's not why you wrote the book.

MACMILLAN: No. In fact it's almost why I didn't write the book, because I thought everyone would think I was just doing it to be nice about my great-grandfather, which I fought against doing.

WATTENBERG: Did you ever meet him?

MACMILLAN: No. He died a year after I was born.

WATTENBERG: Oh, I see.

MACMILLAN: But I knew my grandmother very well - and my great aunt - who'd both been there in Paris with him and at various stages.

WATTENBERG: I see.

MACMILLAN: So they told me a lot about it.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: But, so you had David Lloyd George of Britain, Woodrow Wilson - President Woodrow Wilson in the United States - Georges Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France and Vittorio Orlando, the Prime Minister of Italy. Russia wasn't there because they'd dropped out of the war. They'd had their revolution and they were now in a civil war. And they were meant to meet together and draw up a common allied platform and then they were gonna have an old-fashioned sort of peace conference where everyone, winners and losers, sat down and hashed it out. But they took so long to get a common platform that by the time they got it it was May - they started doing it in January, 1919 - so by May, 1919 they'd finally come up with a common platform.

WATTENBERG: That the victors - among the victors...

MACMILLAN: Yes.

WATTENBERG: Yes.

MACMILLAN: So they ended up not really having an old-fashioned type of peace conference at all. They basically had a victor's peace conference. They didn't there - then they did not dare to begin to negotiate it again with Germany and the other defeated nations, so they called the Germans and the other defeated nations, one by one, and they said to them basically, here are the terms, take them or leave them, which Germany in particular resented bitterly.

WATTENBERG: I gather the key personality, was Woodrow Wilson. Is that the idea? I mean that's who the world was concentrating on.

MACMILLAN: Woodrow Wilson was the key personality in a way, although the United States wasn't yet the dominant power. If there was a dominant power it was still Great Britain or the British Empire. But Woodrow Wilson was the one that the public looked to, because he expressed I think more than anyone else a public longing for a better world. I mean the war had been so awful and caused such destruction that I think people thought something better must come out of this and we can't afford to do it to ourselves again.

WATTENBERG: What are the statistics I saw that you have in your book? Is it a

quarter of all young Frenchmen were killed during the war?

MACMILLAN: A quarter of all men in France of military age. The French lost the most proportionate to their population of any country in the war.

WATTENBERG: A quarter. God, that is amazing, isn't it?

MACMILLAN: It's - I can't imagine it actually. It's hard to get your mind around it.

WATTENBERG: And of course you get disillusioned a whole generation of Brits didn't it, who were just stuck in those trenches and just killing each other.

MACMILLAN: Well, and those who survived felt a combination of guilt, because they had survived and their friends hadn't survived. I think a lot of them resolved that there would never be a war like this again, which of course led into the appeasement of the 1930s, but you also got people like Hitler who looked back and said it was one of the happiest times of his life. The camaraderie, you know, they're all there in the trenches together, so people different took different messages...

WATTENBERG: He was a corporal in the German army, is that right?

MACMILLAN: He was a corporal in the German army and a very brave one apparently.

WATTENBERG: Now what were Wilson's principals that he came to, I mean they - I gather they sort of excited the world.

MACMILLAN: Yes. Well Wilson had the big picture more than anyone else. I mean Britain had its national aims and France had its national aims and so on. But Wilson came into the peace conference saying we don't want anything from the United States. What we want is to make a better world and that's what people got excited about. And he talked about a world in which you didn't have the old secret deals which he argued had led to the first World War that you had an open diplomacy, you had a league of nations where nations would get together and - and keep the peace and - and protect each other. You'd have collective security; you'd have a world without trade barriers; you would have a world where people had democratic government. I mean it was a wonderful picture.

WATTENBERG: And the key phrase, or one of them, was self-determination. What was decided? What are they - so they had this - the victors met amongst themselves, cut their deals without really hearing the case of - of the vanquished and sat them down one by one and said, 'Here's what your country is.'

MACMILLAN: Yep. Yep.

WATTENBERG: And what was the result?

MACMILLAN: Well, the result has been argued about ever since. I mean was it so harsh that, again in the case of Germany particularly, it drove the Germans to extremes; it drove them into the arms of Hitler and it led to...

WATTENBERG: Well what did they actually take away from the Germans?

MACMILLAN: Well, Germany lost all its colonies, which in fact was a blessing in disguise because they'd never paid. Germany had grabbed some very indifferent colonies around the world...

WATTENBERG: And they took another year - another world war until the Brits and the French get, and the Dutch were - lost their colonies.

MACMILLAN: Yes. Yes. I mean little do the British and French know it, but they - the empires were on the way out anyway, but the Germany lost some land in the east; it lost land to what became the reborn Poland but some of that land...

WATTENBERG: In other words some of what was Germany became Poland.

MACMILLAN: Yes. But to be fair, some of what had been Germany had once been Poland, so when Poland was reborn it took what had become part of Germany. But in fact if you go back to the eighteenth century it had belonged to Poland. It lost some territory in the west, which it'd taken from France. It lost Alsace and Lorraine, those two provinces which it had seized from France in 1871.

WATTENBERG: But again they were originally French, had been taken over by the Germans and now the victors gave it back to France.

MACMILLAN: Gave it back to France. They lost...

WATTENBERG: ...highly industrial coal mining, steel producing areas.

MACMILLAN: Yes. Yes. I mean it was a considerable loss for Germany but Germany still, even with its territorial losses in Europe; it still was the biggest country in Europe west of Russia. So it wasn't - not reduced to a tiny little helpless scrap of country. It still had its infrastructure so it was still a very powerful country. Under the treaty Germany also was meant to disarm. It was only meant to have an army of a hundred thousand men. It wasn't meant to have an air force. It wasn't meant to have tanks. It wasn't meant to have this and that.

WATTENBERG: This was all spelled out.

MACMILLAN: It was all spelled out in great detail. I mean the treaty's massive. I mean I think it's something like four hundred and forty clauses. But...

WATTENBERG: That'll do it every time.

MACMILLAN: That'll do it every time. Some of it's ridiculous because in the one hand at the beginning of the treaty you have the covenant of the League of Nations, which is Woodrow Wilson's vision for new world organization.

MACMILLAN: But you have all these territorial provisions. You have disarmament provisions and then you have what was probably the most difficult one, or the one that became the most contentious and that's the reparations issue.

WATTENBERG: Yes. How did that play out?

MACMILLAN: Well, there was...

WATTENBERG: What was the rational?

MACMILLAN: Yes. Well the rational - and even Woodrow Wilson agreed with this as well - was that someone should pay for all the damages done to Belgium which was invaded at the start of the war by Germany and occupied...almost the whole

of Belgium was occupied during the war and someone should pay for all the damage done, for example to the north of France where most of the fighting had been.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: And who should pay but Germany? And even again, Woodrow Wilson agreed that Germany had started the war and so Germany was obliged under the treaty to pay for the damage it had done. These were called reparations.

WATTENBERG: Right. And there are those who say that there were enormous and there are those I gather from your book who say, 'well they weren't really that big in terms of dollar amounts.'

MACMILLAN: Yep. The trouble is there was sort of a way of fudging it and that's what the allies did. The allies knew - Lloyd George of Britain and Clemenceau of France and so on - knew that in fact they couldn't ever get that much out of Germany but they couldn't tell their own publics that. And so what they did was ultimately come up with a very large figure that they structured in such a way that Germany would not have to pay the largest part of what it owed until it had paid the first two parts. And so Germany in a way knew that it wasn't going to have to pay the whole lot.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: But it was put in such a way that the German public thought they were paying a great deal; allied public opinion was satisfied they were getting a great deal out of Germany. I think everybody secretly knew, at least people in leadership positions secretly knew that Germany was never going to have to pay that much.

WATTENBERG: Right. Tell me about um, I gathered as I read your book, this was the first time that you had a real media presence for an extended period of time over a diplomatic event. I mean it was sort of like a superbowl or something. It was there - I think the number you gave was seven hundred accredited journalists. And there were - I guess it was before actual public opinion polling, which came in with Gallup in the thirties - but there was clear feedback from the public. Is that correct and if so what did that do to the process?

MACMILLAN: I think - I mean there had - public opinion had been becoming a force but this was really the first big international gathering where it really became quite clear just how important it was. The press was there and more than that the leaders who were there kept on getting reports from their own people and Woodrow Wilson would get reports from Washington saying you know, such and such an issue is really causing concern to the American people; or Lloyd George would get telegrams from - from England saying, 'You have got to be tougher on Germany.' And they were all democratic politicians and so they were looking anxiously over their shoulders to make sure that their publics approved of what they were doing.

WATTENBERG: And the reporters there of course every - I can imagine seven hundred reporters covering one event; everybody's always outbidding somebody to get the most sensational headline.

MACMILLAN: Yes. Yes. Yes, I mean there were endless rumors going around and stories and what was going on and initially Woodrow Wilson's idea was that they should have a fairly open negotiation and they realized very soon that this would be complete disaster, I mean you can't ...

WATTENBERG: Because every...we have to posture...

MACMILLAN: Yes. Yes. And you can't have delicate negotiations in public and so they closed the main sessions to the press and the press then complained bitterly, but...

WATTENBERG: But then they would still be getting leaks...

MACMILLAN: Oh yeah. Yeah.

WATTENBERG: ...it was like America or Canada or Britain. I mean it's just a...

MACMILLAN: Yes. Yes. Yes. In fact I get the impression that this is when politicians really learned how useful leaks can be.

WATTENBERG: Yes. That's right. The meeting was closed but then somebody said, 'Hey, well you know, we won; we lost and this is so and so and this is so and so'. And then the press would pick it up from one another obviously. I mean they didn't have computers but they had their means and ways of doing it.

MACMILLAN: Yes and all the hotels in Paris were filled with both delegates and press and the press often knew a lot of the delegates, so they'd have meals together and they'd you know, there was a constant sort of interchange between the delegates and the various press people.

WATTENBERG: The people in Paris at that time were some of the most amazing collection of political personalities. I mean you had... Ho Chi Minh was working in the kitchen at one of the Parisian hotels. Is that right?

MACMILLAN: Yes, he was working at the Ritz as an assistant chef.

WATTENBERG: Oh. Is that right?

MACMILLAN: Yes.

WATTENBERG: And then he became the leader of the North Vietnamese and ultimately the Vietnamese and caused a little...

MACMILLAN: A little trouble...

WATTENBERG: A little problem - a little problem of it's own in Vietnam. So this really set the stage for I guess what we call now 'the media world'. I mean what did your compatriot Marshall McLuen call it? The..

MACMILLAN: The global village?

WATTENBERG: Yes, the global village.

MACMILLAN: No I think it - because the world was already becoming more tied together through telegraphs and railways and I think now you really did get a sense that events in one part of the world were affecting events in another part. It's also the first conference that was ever filmed, as far as I know.

WATTENBERG: I see.

MACMILLAN: So it's a funny sort of conference because it's partway between an

old world, it's - and in some ways they're figures of the nineteenth century there but you've also got figures of the twentieth century. And you have, you know you have the older men but you also have people like John Foster Dulles.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: And John Maynard Keynes who are part of the future.

WATTENBERG: Let's just go around the world a little bit and tell me what was decided, and we talked about Germany...

MACMILLAN: Yes.

WATTENBERG: We talked about Vietnam. What about Yugoslavia, that's - or what is now called Serbia minus a few pieces I guess.

MACMILLAN: Yes. Yugoslavia was not created by the peace conference. It created itself, really. The Croatians and Slovians were suddenly left adrift when Austria/Hungary disappeared and they didn't really want to be independent and there was Serbia which had sort of people who were very like them and so they joined up with Serbia to form this new state of Yugoslavia. But if the peace conference and the powers in the peace conference hadn't recognized Yugoslavia and hadn't sort of given it their blessing, I don't think it would have existed in the same form so although Yugoslavia wasn't formed by the peace conference it was given a sort of stamp of approval by the conference.

WATTENBERG: Right. What about Palestine? Now Israel or part now let's not get into definition. But what about what was then called Palestine?

MACMILLAN: Well, the Paris Peace Conference and the period immediately around it is when a lot of the structure of what's going to happen later - or the groundwork for what's going to happen later on - is laid because the British during the war had given approval to a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

WATTENBERG: That was the Balfour Declaration.

MACMILLAN: Under the Balfour Declaration.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: At the same time the British and the French had quietly done a deal to make sure that they each got the bits of the Middle East that they wanted. I mean the Middle East was - most of it at that point - was still under the control of the Ottoman Empire, which was on the losing side and was clearly doomed to - to disappear.

WATTENBERG: Versailles um, kept the concept of uh, monarchs that the monarchy still lived after the Versailles Peace Treaty. Is that right? Basically.

MACMILLAN: They do. I mean nobody wants to get rid of kings, but a number of countries had made themselves republics when Germany had become a republic.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: They got rid of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second who was not much missed, I don't think. Czechoslovakia became a republic. Yugoslavia when it was

formed became a monarchy. I think in those days people still felt that they needed some form of - many countries felt they still needed some form of monarchy. It's not entirely dead now. I mean there's still talk about restoring a monarchy in Romania.

WATTENBERG: You mentioned somewhere in the book that it would have been healthier for all if the allies had marched all the way to Berlin. Now, can you explain what the geographical positions were what caused surrender and how come we didn't do that? And why would it have been healthier to do it?

MACMILLAN: Okay. I'm not sure if would have been healthier for the people who'd have died fighting, but it...

WATTENBERG: [Laughing] We can sort of...

MACMILLAN: Yes, but it might have avoided later trouble. What happened is - is the Germany armies basically crumbled and broke in August, 1918 and the German forces began to pull back or retreat very - back quickly - very back to Germany's boundaries and the German high command asked for an armistice. The armistice was signed on November the eleventh, 1918 leaving most of German soil free of occupation. For only a very, very small bit of Germany was occupied. The bit west of the Rhine River. And the German army marched back in tact into Berlin and was greeted by the new president of what - what was now a republic with the words 'we greet you undefeated'. Now why it might have been better for Germany to be occupied is the German people then wouldn't ever have had any illusions about whether or not they were defeated. As it was, very soon after the war ended the German high command in particular began to say, 'Actually, we didn't really need an armistice; we could have fought on', which is rubbish in my view. But this is what they began to say. And the only reason we had to give up was because the traitors at home who stabbed us in the back. And so you've got something called 'the stab in the back theory'.

WATTENBERG: Right.

MACMILLAN: Which was pernicious, but became very widely believed in Germany. And who stabbed us in the back? Oh, well, it was the left wing, the intellectuals, and the Jews.

WATTENBERG: And the Jews.

MACMILLAN: Yes. And this is when you really begin to get this sort of pernicious influence of the stab-in-the-back theory going into Germany. So it might have been better if Germany had been occupied. The trouble was - there were two reasons. Marshall Foch, who was the allied commander-in-chief said, 'I cannot justify killing anymore men. You know, if we can get a peace, let's get it. And Germany is prepared to surrender all its military equipment. Let's get it.' The other thing is that the British in particular did not want to have to occupy Germany because they would have more and more American troops coming to Europe and if the war ended with a German occupation it wouldn't end until the spring, probably of 1919 and the United States would be much, much more influential than it already was and the British didn't want that.

WATTENBERG: So and - it being basically before the era of mass aerial bombardment, I mean you had some dog fights and stuff like that but, so the civilians, other than little fact that their sons were being killed, but they never really saw the devastation of total war.

MACMILLAN: No. They didn't see it - they didn't - many of them see what they'd done to France or to Belgium. They also felt - I mean they sort of been done to them - they felt the privations from the British embargo, but they never really felt that they had been properly defeated and so when the treaty was signed - the Treaty of Versailles was signed - with that sense that many Germans had that

they hadn't been properly defeated, of course they weren't going to welcome the treaty. They felt it was extremely unfair that they should sign a treaty, which treated them as if they'd lost.

WATTENBERG: When you're traveling in Europe and you look at the kids from Germany and France and the kids from France and in Germany and they're all sort of one happy troupe - the idea that these sorts of kids would start slaughtering each other - or that British soldiers would come onto the continent and start shooting people, it just doesn't.

MACMILLAN: No, it's hard to imagine it now.

WATTENBERG: It's kind of hard to imagine today when you travel around Europe, you look at these young French kids and British kids and German kids - imagining these kids picking up mortars and rifles and butchering each other.

MACMILLAN: I mean it's - I think it's wonderful. I mean because their grandfathers were doing it.

WATTENBERG: Exactly.

MACMILLAN: Without any trouble at all.

WATTENBERG: And their great-grandfathers.

MACMILLAN: Yes.

WATTENBERG: It's a blood-soaked continent.

MACMILLAN: Yes. And they had the view - I mean the French thought the Germans were subhuman and the Germans thought the French were subhuman and that seems to me - and that sort of - the stereotyping seems to be - it's still there but it seems to - it's very much gone.

WATTENBERG: So, maybe there's a little hope for the species left.

MACMILLAN: Oh, I hope so. I really do.

WATTENBERG: I saw where there was some reference, I mean the way people remember things that Osama bin Laden referred back to something coming out of the Versailles Treaty. Are you familiar with that?

MACMILLAN: Yes, well, I think I caught it the other day but that it seems to be so much of what the political rhetoric in the Middle East is about is about what happened to us, the Arabs at the end of the first World War. And how we were promised our own independent states and they were taken away from us by the imperialists and how the Balfour Declaration was issued promising a homeland to the Jews and Palestine. I mean this I think is very much in the historical memory of Arabs. It's something they refer to and it's something that still is very much part of their thinking.

WATTENBERG: The prize that Wilson felt he won I gather in these Versailles negotiations was the League of Nations.

MACMILLAN: Yes.

WATTENBERG: What happened?

MACMILLAN: Well Wilson thought -and Lee was the centerpiece of all his thinking about a new world order -if we could only get nations to work together, to prevent war, to settle disputes, to work together against aggressive nations the world will become a better place. And so for him if he could get the league up and running other problems would fall into place. I mean time and again in Paris they were talking about something, Wilson says, 'Look, I know it's not right but when the league is running, it can sort it out.' I mean he had tremendous faith that this was the new international body that was going to save the world. It was set up on Wilson's lines but the tragedy or part of the tragedy was that the United States never joined it.

WATTENBERG: And were the Brits and the French in it just as sort of a game or did they too share this idea that it was some visionary new way of thinking?

MACMILLAN: It's a good question. There were a lot of Europeans in Britain and France and elsewhere who really believe that a new way had to be found. I mean, they'd seen what the war had done. I mean, they'd suffered from it so they were sympathetic to the idea of a league. They had reservations, particularly France, because France had been invaded twice by Germany in many people's living memory. Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister said, 'I like the league, but I don't believe in it.'

WATTENBERG: What's the lesson for today?

MACMILLAN: I think the lesson is that even when you're very powerful, you should not think that you can fix everything, sort everything out. That you may look at the world from the perspective of your very powerful capital and the British did it in their time and say, 'Well that'll be easy. Those people are much weaker than we are. They will do what we tell them.' But they may not. And -

WATTENBERG: As we're seeing in Iraq.

MACMILLAN: Well I think you are seeing a bit in Iraq.

WATTENBERG: and I'm a supporter - was and am a supporter of - of that war but it's nothing's quite so simple.

MACMILLAN: Nothing is quite so simple and when you're dealing with - I mean some things you can measure. You can measure guns, you can measure economic capacity, but when you're dealing with nationalist fervors, when you're dealing with ideologies and you're dealing with religious fervors, then you can't always predict how people are going to behave because those sorts of feelings will make them behave in ways that aren't really rational often to you, but are very, very powerful.

WATTENBERG: Okay. Thank you very much Margaret MacMillan. We can leave it on that. We shall see what happens in the future. Thank you again. And thank you. Please remember to send us your comments via email. We think it helps our program get better. For Think Tank, I'm Ben Wattenberg.

(credits)

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Was the Treaty of Versailles fair?

Yes

by **Mark Hopkins**

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It is often true that perceptions of what is or is not 'fair' differ. Although many writers today, benefiting from hindsight, trot out the approved opinion that the Treaty of Versailles was unfair and was somehow 'bound' to cause another war, other views deserve to be considered. Although the Treaty did not turn out to be a lasting solution to the problem of European stability, it can be argued that it was reasonably fair.

Germany had only been unified as a single nation since 1870. From its birth, it proved to be a 'difficult' neighbor for France and Britain. Blessed with plentiful natural resources, an inventive and numerous populace and the aggressive, militaristic, inheritance of the Prussian state it quickly destabilized the economic and political status quo. The accession of Kaiser Wilhelm II, (a 'loose cannon' of a leader if ever there was one) set Germany on an unpredictable course but one always likely to end in conflict with one or another of the Great Powers which he wished Germany to emulate.

Germany did not propel Europe into war single handedly in the summer of 1914. All of the countries involved share a degree of responsibility. In the highly charged and nationalistic atmosphere of the time they were all 'up for it' to some extent. However, Germany had been pursuing an aggressive foreign policy for many years and had done much to stoke up an arms race between the great European powers. This, in turn, had fuelled antipathy and mutual suspicion. When conflict approached, it had been Germany which prevented any hope of limiting its scope, by determining to attack France through neutral Belgium.

As the war developed, it had been the Germans who first used poisonous gas on the battlefield and bombed civilians from the air using Zeppelins. A new barbarity was loosed upon the continent of Europe, which was no stranger to the horrors of war. In the titanic conflict which was required to overcome the might of Germany, hardly a family in France or Britain escaped without the loss of at least one loved one. It was entirely 'fair' that at the end of such a conflict the leaders of the victorious powers should seek to prevent any prospect of a repetition by reducing Germany's potential as an aggressor.

Much is made of the supposed severity of the Treaty of Versailles. This is nonsense. When the Germans had forced the new Communist Russian government, desperate for peace, to the negotiating table at Brest in Belarus in early 1918, they showed what severe really meant! Russia was stripped of 34% of its population, 32% of its land and 54% of its industries, losing 300,000 square miles of territory, 50 million people and vast resources of iron and coal. By comparison, the Germans got off very lightly at Versailles a year later (when, incidentally, the Allies made Germany cancel the terms imposed on Russia).

Even if one ignores the comparison between the German treatment of Russia and her own treatment by the Allies, the Treaty of Versailles was still fair in the circumstances. Germany was not broken up into the historic princedoms and dukedoms existing before 1870. It remained united but was forbidden to join with Austria, now shorn of its imperial appendages. Germany retained a 100,000 man army, adequate for internal defence. It was allowed to have a modest surface fleet, adequate to its needs. It was required to promise to pay, in installments, significant financial compensation to the Allies. This amount was tiny compared to the total cost of the war. It was not beyond Germany's means to pay it, despite what some have asserted.

In France and in Britain, which had struggled against Germany since August 1914, the political reality in 1919 was that people hated the Germans and expected a degree of vengeance. The USA had only been involved in serious fighting since early 1918, despite declaring war in April 1917, and anti-German emotions were less high. All in all, the war had resulted in horror, misery, casualties and expenditure way beyond anything ever experienced before. In the circumstances, the Germans were lucky not to have faced far sterner penalties. Political realism tempered the more extreme calls for vengeance and the resulting Treaty was something of a compromise as a result. When considered in context, it seems quite fair.

After initial political unrest and financial difficulties in the period 1919-1923, post-war Germany prospered under the leadership of Gustav Stresemann in the period 1924-1929. This gives the lie to the claim that the Treaty of Versailles crippled Germany or made another war inevitable. Most Germans, except a few die-hards and extremists, accepted the post war settlement. Not until the economic crash of 1929, when Germany's recovery faltered, did this start to unravel. Adolf Hitler said the Treaty of Versailles was unfair and was at the root of Germany's problems. We do not have to agree with him.

Learn more about this author, Mark Hopkins.

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No

by **Jerry Curtis**

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The Treaty of Versailles was a treaty in name only. It was actually a surrender document that the defeated Germans had no choice but to sign. It was a series of penalties and punishments imposed on Germany, and it sowed the seeds of an even deadlier war 20 years later. Rather than seeking ways to prevent future wars, the victorious allies (led by France) decided instead to cripple the German losers by imposing a series of blows to the national pride of Germany.

The major provisions of this treaty were:

. Loss of land. Among other areas in Europe, Germany was required to surrender the Alsace-Lorraine (to France), Eupen and Malmédy (to Belgium), Northern Schleswig (to Denmark), West Prussia, Posen and Upper Silesia (to Poland), plus overseas colonies to the League of Nations. In the age where colonial possessions were a part of a nation's self-image, the latter penalty was a particularly egregious blow to German pride.

. Restrictions on the German military. The German army was cut to 100,000 men (no tanks or air force allowed). Germany was permitted only six major navy ships (no submarines). The treaty set up a demilitarized zone near the Rhine River, and the allies were allowed an occupying force on the west bank of the river for the next 15 years. To a people with a strong military tradition, Germans could only view this as an attempt to make them a weak, second-rate power.

. Financial losses. Much of the territory confiscated from Germany was industrial, and included coal and industrial resources of several territories (from the Saar and Upper Silesia regions.) The Versailles Treaty appeared to have as one major purpose to bankrupt Germany and prevent any chance of economic recovery. That purpose seemed to be compounded by the excessive war reparations Germany was required to pay to the allies (over \$15 billion, an amount Germany could not pay). These reparations would ruin Germany financially and set the stage for the rise of the ultra-nationalist Nazis.

. Acceptance of responsibility for starting the war. This was the basis for war reparations. Most of the money was to go to Belgium and France to pay for war damage. This provision must have been particularly galling, as the responsibility for starting World War I was equally shared by Austria-Hungary, France, Russia and Great Britain and the web of treaties and old grudges that were caused and settled by World War I.

. Absolutely no say in the provisions and contents of the treaty. The Allies did not consult with German leaders, who never even saw the treaty until just weeks before the signature ceremony in the Palace of Versailles on June 28, 1919. This cavalier handling of the defeated Germans would be the basis of the German people's perception that they were both betrayed by the allies and the German leaders. The Nazis would blame that sell-out on Communists and Jews.

. Sign the treaty or else be invaded by the Allies. Germany chose to sign, as it was in no position to fight further. This "treaty" was correctly regarded by the angry German public as a "dictate." Usually in a treaty arrangement, both sides benefit somewhat. The Treaty of Versailles was a surrender document.

So the Treaty of Versailles was unfair, punitive, and a product of shortsighted vindictiveness on the part of politicians. Its consequences and legacy were yet another round of bloodletting as a resentful Germany modeled its post-World War I and pre-World War II behavior in an open flouting of the unfair and punitive treaty. One ironic outcome was that Germany was forbidden to unite with Austria. An Austrian-born World War I war veteran named Adolf Hitler saw to it that that provision of the treaty was scrapped right before the revitalized German army invaded Poland.

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