World War I

I INTRODUCTION

World War I, military conflict, from August 1914 to November 1918, that involved many of the countries of Europe as well as the United States and other nations throughout the world. World War I was one of the most violent and destructive wars in European history. Of the 65 million men who were mobilized, more than 10 million were killed and more than 20 million wounded. The term *World War I* did not come into general use until a second worldwide conflict broke out in 1939 (*see* World War II). Before that year, the war was known as the Great War or the World War.

World War I was the first total war. Once the war began, the countries involved mobilized their entire populations and economic resources to achieve victory on the battlefield. The term *home front,* which was widely employed for the first time during World War I, perfectly symbolized this new concept of a war in which the civilian population behind the lines was directly and critically involved in the war effort.

The war began as a clash between two coalitions of European countries. The first coalition, known as the Allied Powers, included the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, and the Russian Empire (*see* Russia). The Central Powers, which opposed them, consisted of the empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Japan joined the Allied Powers in 1914. The Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers in 1914, as did Bulgaria in 1915. The same year, Italy entered the war on the Allied side. Although the United States initially remained neutral, it joined the Allies in 1917. The conflict eventually involved 32 countries, 28 of which supported the Allies. Some of these nations, however, did not participate in the actual fighting.

The immediate cause of the war was the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, by a Serbian nationalist. The fundamental causes of the conflict, however, were rooted deeply in the European history of the previous century, particularly in the political and economic policies that prevailed in Europe after 1871, the year that Germany emerged as a major European power.

By the end of 1914 the war entered a stalemate. Both sides became mired in two main, stationary fronts—the western front, primarily in northeastern France, and the eastern front, mainly in western Russia. At the fronts, the troops fought each other from numerous parallel lines of interconnected trenches. Each side laid siege to the other’s system of trenches and endeavored to break through their lines.

When the war finally came to an end on November 11, 1918, and the Central Powers were defeated, the political order of Europe had been transformed beyond recognition. The German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires had collapsed. New areas were carved out of their former lands, and the boundaries of many other countries were redrawn. The war also helped precipitate the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (*see* Russian Revolutions of 1917), which ushered in the ideology of Communism there.

The war also had important long-term consequences. The enormous cost of the war undermined the financial stability of all of the countries involved, and they had to bear an onerous burden of debt for many years to come. These financial losses, combined with the battlefield deaths and physical destruction, severely weakened the European powers.

I THEATERS OF WAR

Most of the fighting during World War I was carried out by land armies in Europe. Naval forces were used primarily to prevent food and supplies from reaching their destinations. Airplanes were also used in a major military campaign for the first time during World War I, although they played a small role in the war’s outcome.

A Land Warfare

Most of the decisive land campaigns of World War I occurred on the continent of Europe. The two chief centers of operations were the western front and the eastern front. On the western front, German armies confronted those of the British Empire, France, Belgium, and, later, the United States. Most of the fighting on this front took place in northeastern France. The trenches of the western front ran from the North Sea to the border of Switzerland. On the eastern front, where German and Austro-Hungarian armies faced the Russians, the fighting began in the frontier regions

between Germany and Poland (then divided among the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and German Empires) and between Austria-Hungary and Russia. Gradually the battle lines moved eastward and northeastward, deep into Russian territory.

A subsidiary theater of war in Europe was the alpine frontier between Italy and Austria-Hungary, where the two countries fought each other after Italy joined the Allies in the spring of 1915. Another subsidiary theater was the Balkan Peninsula, where Serbia, Romania, and the Greek-held area of Salonika (*see* Thessaloníki) were successively the scenes of local campaigns.

Since the major participants in the war had colonial empires in Africa, Asia, and what is now called the Middle East, the war quickly spread to those parts of the world. Although Germany was a late entry in the race for overseas colonies, it had obtained the rudiments of a colonial empire in Africa, including Togo, Cameroon, German South-West Africa, and German East Africa. It also had an assortment of islands in the Pacific Ocean, including the Marshall, Mariana, and Caroline islands; German New Guinea; the Bismarck Archipelago; the Solomon Islands; and Samoa. Germany also possessed a land grant with special economic and residence rights at Kiaochow (Jiaozhou) on China's Shantung (Shandong) Peninsula.

At the outbreak of war in Europe, British, French, Belgian, and South African military forces invaded German possessions in Africa. Japan seized Germany's island possessions north of the equator while Australia and New Zealand took control of the German islands to the south. The remnants of the Ottoman Empire, located in the area later known as the Middle East, came under military attack from British forces based in Egypt.

World War I saw advances in the area of battlefield weapons. At the start of the war, the principal infantry weapon was the bolt-action magazine rifle, which was capable of firing 6 to 10 aimed shots per minute. The machine gun, which had been developed in the 1880s, was just gaining acceptance by the major European armies as the war began. It could fire rifle ammunition automatically at a rate of 200 to 250 shots per minute. It was an excellent defensive weapon, capable of devastating waves of cavalry and infantry. Other important weapons developed during the war were the flamethrower, the hand grenade, poison gas, and the tank. All these weapons were designed to restore mobility to the troops huddled in the trenches avoiding machine gun and heavy artillery fire.

B Naval Warfare

Naval operations were carried out primarily in the North Atlantic Ocean and in the North Sea. At the start of the war, Britain had decisive superiority in heavy battleships, which were the cornerstone of sea power at that time. But Germany eventually challenged British dominance of the seas with its submarine, or U-Boat, campaign.

The war at sea was mainly important economically. The Allies were concerned with keeping open the vital sea lanes by which ships transported supplies, war materials, and troops to Europe from the United States and other overseas sources. In 1914 Britain implemented a sea blockade of Germany to prevent the delivery of imports such as food and war materials. The same year, Germany began using submarines to disrupt Allied seaborne traffic and prevent supplies from reaching Britain. In 1915 Germany instituted a submarine blockade around Britain. From February 1915 to September 1915 and again in 1917, Germany used unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking ships without any warning. Germany’s use of unrestricted submarine warfare angered the Allies and resulted in the United States entering the war.

C Aerial Warfare

Airplanes were first used in large numbers for military purposes during World War I. At the start of the war, airplanes and other aircraft were generally used for reconnaissance and for observing and adjusting artillery fire. Both the Allies and the Central Powers made extensive use of small tethered balloons for observing stationary battlefronts, of dirigible balloons for scouting at sea, and of airplanes for scouting coastal waters. Later, airplanes specially equipped for combat came into wide use on the western front. Both sides also employed airplanes carrying machine guns and light bombs to attack enemy ground forces. Shore-based naval aircraft capable of landing on water proved useful in antisubmarine warfare.

The Germans launched the first air raids in 1914. During 1915 and 1916 a German dirigible known as the Zeppelin raided eastern England and London more than 50 times. With the raids, Germany hoped to force British planes to withdraw from the western front, to handicap British industry, and to destroy the morale of the civilian population. The raids caused much loss of life and damage to property but accomplished little of military value.

From mid-1915 aerial combat between planes or groups of planes was common. The Germans initially had superiority in the air on the western front, but the British gained the advantage in mid-1916. The Allied advantage in the air gradually increased thereafter and became overwhelming when the United States entered the war in 1917.

II I ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES

Industrial and economic resources played an important role in World War I. Military success was critically dependent on a country's ability to produce a continuous supply of goods for their armies. German industrial resources were so great that Germany was able to survive the British naval blockade and meet the demands of four years of war, while giving some help to Austria-Hungary. British industry, although capable and versatile, had begun to lag in output and in modernization. Britain came to depend heavily on U.S. production. Throughout the war, Germany occupied French territory that contained important industrial and mineral resources, so France also depended on U.S. supplies. Russian industry was incapable of dealing with the needs of the Russian armies. In addition, since the Ottoman Empire controlled the Dardanelles Strait, Russia was cut off from Allied supplies via the Mediterranean Sea and could not easily be supplied from its Arctic or Pacific ports.

During the war, Britain and France were able to harness the economic resources not only of their own vast colonial empires, such as India and Indochina, but also of the United States. This ability gave them a great advantage. The Central Powers were cut off from their prewar markets and sources of food and raw materials. Although Germany gained access to the vast economic resources of the western part of the former Russian Empire in the spring of 1918, it was too late in the war to affect the outcome.

The Allies also enjoyed a critical advantage in being able to obtain loans from American investment banks. The Allies used the loans to purchase oil, wheat, steel, and other critical products. When the United States entered the war, the U.S. Treasury Department took over the financing of loans to the Allied Powers to cover their supply purchases in the United States. The combined economic resources of the United States and the British Empire played a significant role in the Allied victory.

I V BACKGROUND

A German Unification

When World War I broke out in 1914, it ended almost 100 years of relative peace in Europe. In 1815 a coalition defeated France in the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815), a series of wars caused by Napoleon I's attempt to dominate Europe. The coalition included Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. These countries held a peace conference, known as the Congress of Vienna, which was designed to prevent at all costs another Europe-wide war.

The principal architect of the peace settlement devised at the conference, Austrian foreign minister Prince Klemens von Metternich, believed that the key to making peace durable was the balance of power. According to this diplomatic principle, the major nations of Europe should distribute power relatively evenly among themselves to deter any one of them from seeking dominance over the continent. If any country were to attempt to disturb the balance of power, the others would oppose it as an alliance.

Metternich also thought that in order for Europe to be stable, a monarch should continue to rule each major European country. The French Revolution (1789-1799) had given rise to democratic principles, such as representative government. If these democratic principles were revived, Metternich believed, they would undermine the authority of the hereditary rulers of Europe and lead to other revolutionary uprisings throughout the continent.

Finally, Metternich was intent on suppressing the forces of nationalism that had also been unleashed by the French Revolution. Nationalism was the idea that people of the same ethnic origin and language deserved the right to liberty and self-government. Nationalism threatened the existence of multinational empires such as Austria, which was composed of many peoples, including Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles. Metternich believed nationalism was a prescription for conflict and war.

In the course of the 19th century the Vienna system survived a number of wars that were directly related to the spread of nationalism throughout the continent. Two new nation-states were forged

as the result of such wars: Italy in 1861 after the defeat of Austria (Italian Unification) and Germany in 1871 after the German states defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) (German Unification (1871)). But neither of these wars had escalated into the Europe-wide conflict that Metternich had so feared. Each of these conflicts was restricted to a limited geographical area and ended before it could spread.

When a unified, militarily triumphant, economically powerful Germany emerged after 1871, it challenged the balance of power on which the peace of Europe had long depended. But the architect of German unity, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, was not interested in further expanding German power at the risk of a Europe-wide war. Rather, he strove to preserve Germany's newly acquired position as the dominant power in Europe.

To achieve this goal he set out to isolate France, which nurtured a smoldering grievance against Germany. After the Franco-Prussian War, France was forced to cede its eastern province of Alsace and part of the adjoining province of Lorraine to Germany under the Treaty of Frankfurt. During Bismarck’s 19-year tenure as chancellor from 1871 to 1890, Germany was the undisputed master of Europe while the new French Republic that had been established after the Franco-Prussian War remained militarily weak and diplomatically isolated. France never gave up hope of recovering “the lost provinces,” whose population was split between French- and German-speakers. This goal became the country's most important war aim after the beginning of World War I.

Bismarck was at pains to reassure the other European powers that Germany posed no threat to their interests. He shrewdly crafted a network of alliances and agreements with all of the other European powers except France. In 1873 Bismarck negotiated the Three Emperors’ League with Austria-Hungary and Russia. Bismarck contracted the Triple Alliance of 1882 with Austria-Hungary and Italy to strengthen German power against France and to help balance power in the Balkans between Austria-Hungary and Russia. In 1887 he signed a Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. This treaty pledged Russia to neutrality in the event of a war between France and Germany and promised German neutrality in case of war between Austria-Hungary and Russia. He also facilitated an Anglo-German friendship by not competing with Britain for colonial territory in Africa and Asia. Germany also did not construct a large navy that would threaten British dominance on the high seas.

B German Ambitions

When Bismarck retired in 1890, however, his carefully crafted policy of isolating France began to unravel. The impetuous new German emperor, William II, abandoned Bismarck’s cautious foreign policy. When William refused to renew Germany's treaty with Russia, the French approached Russian tsar Alexander III. By 1894 France and Russia had concluded a treaty of alliance, in which each country pledged to come to the assistance of the other in case of war with Germany. The Franco-Russian alliance obliged Germany to face the prospect of having to fight a war on two fronts, which would prevent Germany from concentrating all its military might against a single foe.

William also began to assert Germany's ambitions abroad. He loudly complained that Germany had fallen behind in the global competition for colonial territories and insisted that Germany make up for lost time. As the 20th century began, Germany aggressively acquired overseas territories. German industrial firms and financial institutions also began to compete fiercely with their long-entrenched British counterparts in distant lands.

William also decided that Germany must become a great naval power. The British were at first scornful, then irritated, and finally alarmed as Germany embarked on major battleship-building programs. The country, which under Bismarck had been content with its role as the most powerful nation on the European continent, now aspired to become a global power.

Concern about William’s new global ambitions and naval policy prompted Britain to resolve its disputes with France over colonial territories in the common interest of restraining Germany. In 1904 Britain and France established a friendly diplomatic relationship called the *Entente Cordiale* (French for “cordial understanding”). Thereafter these two powers developed closer political ties and began to discuss possible forms of military and naval cooperation in the event of war in Europe. In 1907 Britain settled its outstanding conflicts with France's ally Russia, and the same year, these three powers began to cooperate in a loose diplomatic association that was known as the Triple Entente.

In the decade before World War I, Britain, France, and Russia began to compete with Germany and Austria-Hungary in a costly arms race. Anglo-German naval rivalry was accompanied by a competitive military buildup between France and Russia on the one hand and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other. All of the powers except Britain had adopted the policy of *conscription* (drafting men to serve in the armed forces). These conscription policies left the European continent bristling with large, well-trained, fully armed, land forces. Britain alone was

content with a small volunteer army because of its overwhelming naval superiority, which it deemed sufficient to shield the British Isles from invasion.

From 1904 to 1914 Germany's military, industrial, and commercial power grew steadily, while the country’s political leaders increasingly pursued an aggressive foreign policy. During the decade, Germany made two outright threats of war against France and one against Russia, and the German naval program was openly directed against Britain. By 1911 only Austria-Hungary continued to give diplomatic support to German policy. But the multinational empire, ruled by the Habsburg royal family, was hardly a reliable military ally. It faced mounting discontent from the many nationalities that made up its empire. Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and the Slavic inhabitants of the southern portion of the empire in the Balkan Peninsula wanted autonomy within the empire. They were inspired by the principles of nationalism that had brought about the political unification of Italy in 1861 and Germany in 1871.

It was also openly known in Europe that if war should come, Germany could not depend on Italy, the third member of the Triple Alliance. Italy was bound only to fight a defensive war, and in any event it was more of a rival than an ally of Austria-Hungary.

V MILITARY STRATEGIES

All the European countries developed plans in the event of war. They knew the number of men they could call up, the length of time it would take to get their armies ready, and their strategies for battle. Each country had a different plan although general similarities existed.

A Conscription

Among the major European powers only Britain had no peacetime conscription. It relied on command of the sea by its powerful navy for defense against sudden attack. The British army was a small, highly trained force recruited by voluntary enlistment. About half of it was normally stationed in India and other overseas colonies, and the other half was stationed in the British Isles. There also was a citizen-soldier territorial army, which was composed entirely of volunteers.

On the other hand, the armies of France, Italy, Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary conscripted every able-bodied young man at a given age, usually 19 or 20. When he had completed his term—two to three years of active service in the army—the young man went back to his home and civilian job. However, he remained a member of the reserve forces; for a prescribed period of years, he was liable to immediate call-up in case of war or national emergency. During this period he was normally called back several times for short periods of refresher training. Since reserve liability sometimes lasted until ages over 40, large numbers of fully trained reserves were available under this system.

The peacetime strength of military units was about 50 percent of their war strength. When mobilization occurred, the strength of each unit would be doubled by the reservists assigned to it, and a full-strength sister unit would usually be formed, composed entirely of reservists. Thus the mobilized fighting strength of a European army could become four times its peacetime strength within a few days.

B Mobilization

Each country needed a certain amount of time to mobilize, or activate its armies for battle. It would be disastrous for a European country to be attacked by the fully mobilized forces of a neighboring country while it was still mobilizing. In designing their war plans, the European countries factored in the time it would take for other countries to mobilize, whether the country was friendly or hostile. For example, France was aware that it would take Russia longer to mobilize and had to plan accordingly.

Each country’s ability to mobilize was affected by an important instrument of technology, the railroad. The railroad was capable of transporting troops along with their weapons and supplies to the front in the opening phase of the war. Many observers regarded the railroad as the key to victory or defeat. Since the two sides were of roughly equal numerical strength, the speed of mobilization and the efficiency of troop deployment were expected to affect the war’s outcome.

Germany and France could complete the first stage of mobilization in 48 hours, with all units at regimental concentration points and ready to move. Russia, Italy, and Austria-Hungary required four or five days because their organizations were more cumbersome. France and Germany would again run nearly even in the second stage, that of concentrating forces in a given frontier area. At the other extreme, Russia, with its vast distances and inferior network of railways, would need 15 days to concentrate one-third of its first-line units on its western frontier.

Each country had a separate war plan for every potential enemy. The war plans were prepared by the general staff, a body of specially trained professional officers. The general staff was responsible for organizing and training the army. It also collected and evaluated military intelligence, the information that had been obtained about foreign armed forces. Each general staff was headed by a chief of staff, who was the principal military adviser to the government.

In every case, the head of the national government ordered mobilization: in France and Italy, a prime minister responsible to an elected parliament, and in Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, a hereditary sovereign. In France and Italy, the minister of war, who was responsible to the parliament, reviewed the war plans of the general staff to at least some degree. In the other three countries, the general staff kept the details of their war plans secret.

To order the mobilization of a European army was an act almost as grave as a declaration of war, because it was very difficult to halt the mobilization and deployment of troops once it had started. In a period of crisis, the head of each government was under increasing pressure to mobilize from the chief of staff, who was aware of the danger of waiting too long. Even the all-powerful Russian tsar Nicholas II, who was plagued by last-minute doubts about the wisdom of attacking Germany, was unable to interrupt the train of events on the eve of the war. When he sent a message canceling his approval of general mobilization, his chief of staff persuaded him that it was too late.

C The Schlieffen Plan

For its war plan, the German general staff relied on the Schlieffen Plan. Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the German general staff from 1891 to 1905, formulated the original plan. In 1906 General Helmuth von Moltke succeeded von Schlieffen as chief of staff. Under Moltke, details of the plan had been changed but its main feature remained. This feature called for Germany to concentrate about 90 percent of its forces against France at the beginning of a European war. Thus, only a defensive screen would remain to contain the Russians, who, because it took them longer to mobilize, could be dealt with once Germany achieved a quick victory in the west.

The Schlieffen Plan called for the strong right wing of the German forces to swing through Belgium, move southward to engulf Paris, the French capital, and force the French to surrender within six weeks. This plan involved violating Belgian neutrality, which all the European powers had pledged to honor in an 1839 treaty. If Germany violated Belgian neutrality, Britain was virtually certain to enter the war because it was unwilling to tolerate Belgium falling under the control of Germany. But the German general staff deemed it militarily necessary to attack France through Belgium. If they undertook a direct offensive across the Franco-German frontier, they would encounter heavily fortified French positions, causing a fatal delay in the German plan for a rapid victory in the west.

The German general staff made another dangerous concession to what they considered a military necessity. The Schlieffen Plan would be triggered not when countries formally declared war but simply when they ordered mobilization. In addition, the plan would go into action regardless of whether mobilization was ordered against both France and Russia or against Russia alone. In either case, once Germany mobilized, its armies would immediately be hurled upon France by way of Belgium, in order to gain the maximum advantages of timing and surprise. In spite of the implications of the Schlieffen Plan, its details remained virtually unknown outside the cloisters of the German general staff. In fact, William II and his ministers had never officially approved the war plan.

D Toward War

Germany did not consciously plan or provoke the outbreak of war in August 1914, in spite of its threatening attitude toward France, Russia, and Britain. However, there were certain factors that made the summer of 1914 Germany’s best chance to begin and win a war. First, a new French military law required three years of service instead of two. In each year after 1914, every French regiment was to increase its soldiers on active duty by 50 percent. Moreover, Russia was using French loans to finance the expansion of its strategic railway network, which would greatly improve the Russian army’s ability to speed its troops to the German frontier.

Nevertheless there is no evidence that Germany planned to begin a war in 1914. The diplomatic crisis that started the war was in fact the only major European crisis since 1900 that Germany had not helped engineer. But once the crisis degenerated into a Europe-wide conflict, many German political, military, and economic leaders welcomed the war as a means of expanding German power within and beyond Europe.

E Assassination

The diplomatic crisis was triggered on June 28, 1914, when the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The archduke had traveled to Sarajevo to direct the maneuvers of the two army corps stationed there. Austria-Hungary had annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, and the archduke's presence in Sarajevo enraged Serbs living in Bosnia who resented Austria-Hungary's rule and regarded the military presence as an affront to their nationalist aspirations. The assassin, a 19-year-old Serb named Gavrilo Princip, belonged to a terrorist group devoted to Serbian nationalism, wanting to unite all Southern Slavs in a single state dominated by Serbia.

The Austro-Hungarian foreign office under Foreign Minister Graf Leopold von Berchtold regarded the assassination as a golden opportunity to crush Serbia. Although the role of the Serbian government in the assassination has never been fully determined, Austria-Hungary viewed Serbia as a threat to the empire's security. However, Russia was the traditional protector of the South Slavs (including Serbs), and Austria-Hungary by itself was no match for Russia. It therefore appealed to Germany for help. William II promised unlimited support to Austria-Hungary and went off for a cruise on his yacht to attend the annual regatta in the Kiel Canal, obviously not expecting war to break out.

F Mobilization Orders

After the assassination, Austria-Hungary sent an ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, making demands calculated to humiliate the Serbs so they would reject the ultimatum. The demands included creating a joint Austro-Serbian commission to investigate the murder and ordering the Serbian government to condemn any propaganda against Austria-Hungary. Urged by both Britain and Russia, Serbia accepted most of the demands with a few minor reservations. Austria-Hungary declared the Serbian reply to be unsatisfactory. On July 26, the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, proposed a conference to address the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. However, Austria-Hungary refused to allow foreign powers to decide a matter of national honor, and Germany supported its ally. On July 28 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, after ordering a partial mobilization of its armed forces.

A chain reaction followed. The military machinery took charge in the empires of Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Germany. Although all three rulers hesitated at the brink of the abyss, they all yielded at last to the stern demands of so-called military necessity. The tsar ordered partial mobilization on July 29. Then, faced with a German ultimatum and the known Russian time lag, Russia went on to full mobilization on July 31. Austria-Hungary took the same action on July 31, before news of the Russian order had reached Vienna. On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia, and William II set in motion the Schlieffen Plan.

Acting in accord with the Schlieffen Plan, ten German divisions were sent east to maintain a defensive posture against the Russian army. Meanwhile most of the remaining divisions were concentrated into the right wing of the German army in the west. This wing was to march through Belgium and envelop the French army, and in a vast wheeling movement, sweep into Paris from the north. The Germans expected to profit from the element of surprise and from what they believed to be the superior firepower of their own forces.

France, faced with immediate danger from Germany, had no choice except to resist or surrender. It indignantly rejected Germany's demand for ironclad assurances that France would remain neutral in the forthcoming conflict between Germany and France's ally Russia. Germany declared war on France on August 3. King Albert I of Belgium defied a German ultimatum demanding free passage through his country for the German army. However, he was faithful to the obligations of Belgium's pledged neutrality. Only when German troops actually invaded Belgium, early on August 4, did Albert send an appeal for help to the guarantor powers, including Britain.

His action imposed a moral burden upon Britain to honor its pledge. Although the British Cabinet and House of Commons had hesitated to become involved in a war on the continent, they now warned Germany that Britain would defend Belgian neutrality, by force of arms if necessary, if Germany did not withdraw. At midnight on August 4, the British ultimatum expired, and Britain was at war with Germany. By that time the "rape of Belgium" was not the only, or even the main, reason Britain was determined to intervene. The British government opted for war because it feared that Germany would decimate France and dominate the rest of Europe.

V PHASE ONE: BID FOR QUICK VICTORY

I

A Western Front, 1914

In 1914 the northern and eastern frontier of France was about 600 km (400 mi) long. It ran from northwest to southeast, with roughly 300 km (200 mi) facing Belgium and 300 km (200 mi) facing Germany. A formidable system of permanent fortifications defended the eastern, or German, half of the frontier. The French war plan in 1914, known as Plan XVII, called for a headlong French offensive into Alsace and Lorraine, in which it was imagined that French *élan* (fighting spirit) would carry the offensive.

However, the frontier facing Belgium was virtually unfortified. French planners did not believe that the Germans could bring enough troops into action to make a strong attack through Belgium and simultaneously attack the French fortress system. The fortresses of 1914 in both France and Belgium consisted of a circle of detached masonry forts built around a city or town. The intervals between the forts could be protected by crossfire from soldiers in the forts and could also be covered by fieldworks occupied by infantry. The forts themselves had been built mainly underground except for the turrets, or cupolas, in which guns of 3-inch to 8-inch bore were positioned on revolving mounts.

Belgium had two strong fortresses of this type in Liège and Namur. These fortresses covered the roads and railways that a German army attacking France through Belgium would need to use. As a result, the first German move had to be a quick knockout of Liège, in eastern Belgium. Liège guarded a narrow gap between the thickly wooded Ardennes region and was the junction from which four main highways led westward.

When the Germans began their assault on Belgium and France, they used some 1.5 million men, or about 20 to 25 percent more men than the highest French estimate. Of these men, almost 1,160,000 were assigned to the five field armies of the enormously strong German right wing, which was destined to drive into France by way of Belgium. The remaining 345,000 troops in the German Sixth and Seventh armies were to advance toward the French fortress system in the east.

A Commanders 1

The commander of the German forces was Colonel General Helmuth von Moltke, who as the chief of the general staff automatically became commander in chief in wartime. Moltke had been an ardent proponent of war during the assassination crisis. However, his leadership on the battlefield in the opening stage of the conflict left much to be desired.

The French commander was General Joseph Jacques Césaire Joffre, who had served a considerable amount of time in France's colonies. Joffre was France's foremost champion of the offensive, believing that the speed and morale of an advancing infantry was the key to victory. However, he ignored the effects of firepower from modern weapons and sent his troops in their traditional uniforms of blue coats and red trousers to face German machine guns and rapid-firing artillery. The results were devastating.

A Invasion of Belgium 2

On August 4, 1914, the Germans invaded Belgium. They encountered spirited Belgian resistance at and near Liège and suffered heavy losses in repeated attempts to storm the forts. However, the Germans had secretly built a number of heavy cannons that fired 931-kg (2,052-lb) shells and were the most powerful siege artillery to appear in Europe at the time. Forged in the Krupp munitions factories, the terrifying new weapon was dubbed “Big Bertha” after Gustav Krupp's wife. After the Germans dragged the huge guns into position, they knocked out the forts by August 16. The gray-uniformed tide of German troops swept on past Liège and fanned out into the wide plains to the west.

King Albert I of Belgium had wanted all six divisions of the Belgian field army concentrated to defend Liège to the last. If this had happened, the Germans would have had to overcome this resistance before they could have brought their big guns within range of the forts, and a serious delay might have resulted. However, Albert did not have time to enforce his commands on a reluctant staff, and as a result, the resistance of Liège served to delay the Germans only slightly. The Belgian field army withdrew into the fortified camp of Antwerp, where two German corps besieged it while the main German advance flowed past toward the open French frontier.

A 3 Battle of the Frontiers

The first bloody encounters between Germany and France occurred in the last two weeks of August 1914, in a series of engagements known as the Battle of the Frontiers. On August 14 the French launched an offensive on its eastern border into Lorraine. The French First and Second armies had some initial success but a counterattack by the German Sixth and Seventh armies threw them back across the frontier on August 20. Losing 140,000 men in six days, the French army fell back toward Paris in disarray, with the Germans in hot pursuit.

Meanwhile, to the northwest the German Fourth and Fifth armies were moving slowly forward into the Ardennes forest. To the west of them the right wing, made up of the German First, Second, and Third armies, was still wheeling around to deliver the decisive blow. The French launched a series of desperate counterattacks against the advancing German forces as they crossed the Belgian frontier into France. These counterattacks cost the French enormous losses, and still the Germans forged on.

On the French line, the French Fifth Army held the extreme west, extending to the Sambre River. To the west of the French Fifth was the newly arrived British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Both the French and British forces began to feel the pressure of the advancing German right wing. The outer element of the advancing force was the German First Army, and next in line was the German Second Army. The German Third Army linked these two wheeling armies with the rest of the German troops. From August 20 through 23, there was bloody and rather confused fighting along the frontiers, notably at Charleroi and Mons and in the Ardennes. The Allied armies then retreated toward the Marne River northeast of Paris.

The Battle of the Frontiers ended the French hope of driving deep into Alsace and Lorraine in order to advance into the center of Germany. Moltke's headquarters considered the battle a decisive German victory. Joffre, on the other hand, knew that his armies had been badly mauled but were still full of fight. He energetically set to work to collect troops from his right and center in order to gather a new army, the Sixth, for a counterattack against the German right wing. Joffre planned to fight in the shelter of the fortifications of Paris. The French government had fled Paris, which was preparing to defend itself against the Germans.

Meanwhile, the German Second Army was checked for 36 hours by a violent French counterattack in the Battle of Guise, while the German First Army pressed forward eagerly. This opened a gap between the German First and Second armies, eventually exposing part of the First Army to attack by the French Sixth Army in the Paris area.

A 4 First Battle of the Marne

With the gap opening between the two German armies, Joffre seized his opportunity. On September 6, he ordered all of the French armies and the BEF to launch a general counterattack. This action led to what became known as the First Battle of the Marne. The French Sixth Army moved out from Paris eastward against the German First Army's flank and rear, while the other armies advanced directly against the enemy’s front. Troops were rushed to the fronts from Paris by all available means, including taxicabs.

Most of the German First Army had crossed the Marne River. It then began hastily moving back north of the Marne River to face the French threat. The French Fifth Army threw back Germany’s Second Army. The gap between the two German armies widened. The BEF was opposite this gap, and if it had moved forward into it with speed and determination, the German First Army would probably have been destroyed. However, the BEF leadership was overcautious, and the opportunity was lost. Fierce fighting took place along most of the front during the next few days.

Moltke was alarmed by the First Army's situation, and because of faulty communications he was unable to find out exactly what was happening. So he sent a staff officer to visit the three right-wing armies (First, Second, and Third), with absolute power to give orders in his name. Although the Germans were making gains against the French on the Ourcq River, a tributary of the Marne, the British were threatening the German First Army's left flank. The Second Army was unable to advance. Moltke's representative ordered a withdrawal, which began on September 9. Moltke followed up the order by directing a general retreat for the whole German line behind the Aisne River.

The First Battle of the Marne, which the French called the Miracle of the Marne, was one of the pivotal battles in history. The battle destroyed the German war plan for a quick and decisive victory over France.

The Allies defeated Germany at the First Battle of Marne for two tactical reasons. The first was the fact that the German First Army drove north and east of Paris instead of following Schlieffen's original plan for a wide sweep to envelop the capital city from the south and west. The second was the opening of a 50-km (30-mi) gap between the German First and Second armies—a gap that the BEF and the French Fifth Army were able to exploit.

The more fundamental causes of Germany’s debacle were problems with logistics and communications, which paradoxically were the result of its stunning success on the battlefield at the beginning of the war. The exhausted German First Army under General Alexander von Kluck had swept 350 km (220 mi) from the German-Belgian frontier to the Marne River with such extraordinary speed that it outran its supply lines and communications network. Even if it had thrown the French army back at the Marne, it is unlikely that it would have been able to resume its offensive.

Some of Moltke’s decisions also weakened Germany’s position. When Russia invaded the German province of East Prussia in August, Moltke rushed several divisions to the eastern front; those divisions would have been of value to him on the Marne. In addition, he had allowed Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who commanded the German left flank, to continue offensive operations against the French armies in Alsace and Lorraine, instead of shifting Rupprecht's troops to the decisive First Battle of the Marne. On September 14, after Joffre's armies had crossed the Aisne River and were attacking the new German positions, Moltke was relieved of his command and replaced by General Erich von Falkenhayn.

A5 Race to the Sea

The fighting on the Aisne continued inconclusively until September 18, 1914. During September and October, a succession of clashes, known as the Race to the Sea, took place as each side began shifting troops from east to west in an attempt to overwhelm the other’s western flank. Each attempt was outflanked when opposing reinforcements arrived in the nick of time. The process stopped when the western flanks of the two armies reached the North Sea. The BEF took up positions near Ypres (*see* Ieper), Belgium. The Belgian army, having escaped from Antwerp, which surrendered to the Germans on October 10, occupied a short front on the Yser River. Both sides made further violent, costly, and unsuccessful attempts to break through enemy lines. The final two-week series of German assaults, known as the First Battle of Ypres, was ended in mid-November by rain and snow. The opposing armies literally sank into the ground, facing each other in a line of trenches. Thus began the deadly stalemate on the western front, which endured for three bloody years.

B Events Outside the West

B1 Battles of Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes

The German war plan for a rapid victory over France was based on the gamble that Germany could temporarily protect its eastern frontier against the much larger Russian forces until it could transfer its armies in the west. That assumption was almost shattered from August 17 to August 22 when two Russian armies advanced into the German province of East Prussia.

The German general staff had taken a calculated risk in leaving the defense of East Prussia to an army of about 200,000 men. Although the two Russian armies that penetrated East Prussia in the second half of August numbered about 350,000 men, the total Russian soldiers under arms at the beginning of the war was 1.5 million. At the end of mobilization that number was swollen to 4.5 million, with another 2 million in reserve. It was evident that if the battle in the west was prolonged, the German forces in the east would be dangerously outnumbered.

The Russian war plan called for a two-pronged attack into East Prussia as soon as Russia could mobilize. The Russian commander in chief was Grand Duke Nicholas, a cousin of the tsar. One object of the Russian attack on East Prussia was to fulfill Russian promises to relieve the French by engaging the Germans in the east. Another object was to clear East Prussia of German forces, so as to straighten and shorten the Russian front by bringing it forward to the Vistula (Wisła) River. Such

an offensive would ensure that the decisive battles in the war would be fought on German rather than Russian territory. Once ensconced on the Vistula, the Russian army would be well positioned to drive deep into the heart of Germany and force an early end to the war in the east.

The grand duke assigned two armies to this task. They were commanded by General Pavel Rennenkampf and General Alexander Samsonov. Rennenkampf was to attack straight to the west while Samsonov moved north from Poland around the water barrier of the Masurian Lakes. Each of these armies was marginally superior in strength to that of the German army in East Prussia, although it had the advantage of a central position.

Rennenkampf crossed the frontier on August 17, and on August 20 he gained a partial success at Gumbinnen. Rennenkampf’s troops inflicted heavy casualties on the German Eighth Army. This setback, plus the news on the same day that Samsonov was over the border and advancing, unnerved the German commander General Max von Prittwitz. Against the vigorous protests of his staff, he decided to withdraw to the Vistula River, thus abandoning all of East Prussia to the enemy. Moltke, informed by telephone of this decision, immediately ordered Prittwitz relieved of his command. Moltke sent two military leaders who would play a central role in directing Germany's military forces for the rest of the war: General Paul von Hindenburg and his chief of staff, Erich Ludendorff.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff endorsed a daring plan by a senior staff officer, Lieutenant Colonel Max Hoffmann. Because Rennenkampf, who thought that victory was already his, had halted to regroup, Hoffmann suggested diverting German troops to the south by train to destroy the Russian Second Army and then redeploying them to the north against the Russian First Army before Rennenkampf could react. From August 26 to August 30 the German Eighth Army, which had been sped southward by railway, overwhelmed and virtually destroyed the Russian Second Army at the Battle of Tannenberg. The Germans took over 100,000 prisoners, and most of the rest of the troops were killed. Samsonov, the Russian commander, committed suicide during what was to become one of the most decisive battles of the war. After defeating the Russian Second Army, the German army moved back to the north to smash Rennenkampf’s First Army. The Russians met the main force of the German Eighth Army on September 9 and quickly began to withdraw from East Prussia. The Russian First Army was back across the Russian border by September 15, but they had suffered heavy losses in what became known as the First Battle of the Masurian Lakes.

Although the Russian forces greatly outnumbered their German counterparts, they were inadequately trained, poorly led, and lacking in adequate weapons and supplies. The Russian armies' brief offensive into East Prussia helped the Allies in the west because Germany had to divert troops to the east. But the Battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes dashed the Russian plan of driving deep into German territory. The ultimate consequence was the establishment of a stationary front on the Russian side of the frontier that would hold for the next three years. The brief campaign on the eastern front also established the reputations of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who acquired increasing authority in the German war effort.

B Operations in Galicia

2

Meanwhile, in Galicia, a region of Austria-Hungary, Russian armies led by General Nikolai Ivanov, clashed with the advancing Austro-Hungarian forces of General Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, who was chief of the general staff of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Armies. Conrad wanted to use military action to restore the fortunes of Austria-Hungary. He hoped to demonstrate in a dramatic way the vigor and vitality of the Austro-Hungarian army, whose effectiveness as a fighting force had long been considered doubtful. However, his goal was beyond the capabilities of his multinational armies: Over half of the army comprised soldiers who spoke a different language from their German-speaking commanders, and their loyalty to the Habsburg state was questionable.

In pursuit of his objective, Conrad assigned almost half of his forces to invade and destroy Serbia and deployed the rest against the Russians in Galicia. Austro-Hungarian forces, however, suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Serbs, while Conrad found himself with insufficient troops to deal with Ivanov. By September 11, the Russians had driven the Austro-Hungarians back to the Carpathian Mountains. The Austro-Hungarians suffered heavy losses, particularly among the officer cadre, and thereafter the Austro-Hungarian army was less effective.

The Russians now prepared to invade the German province of Silesia. Hindenburg and Ludendorff reacted to this threat by using the excellent German railroad system to shift troops from East Prussia to southern Poland to counter the Russians. The troops formed a new army, the Ninth, which launched a drive toward Warsaw, then a Russian city. The Russians halted the German

effort, but their counterattack failed. A renewed German attack in mid-November began the Battle of Łódz, which ended with a Russian withdrawal and a temporary lull on the eastern front.

The Austro-Hungarians launched a new invasion of Serbia in the first week of November. They again encountered stiff resistance from the Serbs, who counterattacked on December 3. By December 15 the Serbs had driven the Austro-Hungarians out of Serbia.

The Hindenburg-Ludendorff team had used the prestige of their victory at Tannenberg to bring strong pressure on William II and General Falkenhayn for more troops in the east. This pressure evolved into a struggle for power between Falkenhayn on one hand and Hindenburg and Ludendorff on the other. This power struggle was to dominate and frustrate the German military effort throughout 1915 and much of 1916.

B War at Sea

3

In the war at sea, the British and German battle fleets confronted each other across the North Sea, as they would continue to do throughout the war. The British fleet operated from its bases in the islands and harbors at the northern end of Britain, and the German fleet was based on Germany's North Sea coast. On August 28, 1914, in the first major naval battle, the British sank or damaged several German cruisers and destroyers in the Heligoland (Helgoland) Bight (*see* Helgoland Bight, Battle of).

Britain implemented a sea blockade of Germany at the beginning of the war. Originally intended to deny the Central Powers access to munitions and other war-related material, the sea blockade was eventually extended to include most foodstuffs in an effort to starve the Germans into submission. Germany also began to use submarines called *Unterseeboot* (undersea boats, or U-boats) to try to prevent supplies from reaching the British Isles. At this time, Germany was conducting its submarine warfare by international rules, which included stopping and boarding merchant ships to check the cargo, then removing the crew before sinking the ship.

On November 1, 1914, a German cruiser squadron under Admiral Graf Maximilian von Spee destroyed a British squadron off Coronel, Chile (*see* Battle of Coronel). On December 8, however, British battle cruisers destroyed a German squadron in the Battle of Falkland Islands. In 1914 Allied command of the sea remained relatively undisputed.

A naval operation in the Mediterranean Sea, however, turned out decidedly in Germany's favor. Two German warships, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, succeeded in evading British pursuers at the outset of the war and took refuge in the waters at Constantinople (now İstanbul). When the warships arrived, Ottoman leaders, anxious to recover lands they had lost in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, were encouraged by German promises to restore their lost territory. In October 1914 the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. The two German ships, flying the Ottoman flag, bombarded ports along the Russian Black Sea coast on October 30. Russia, Britain, and France declared war on the Ottoman Empire. In November British troops from India encountered minimal resistance when they landed in Ottoman-controlled Mesopotamia (later Iraq and Syria). In December 1914 the Russians defeated the Ottomans in an action at Sarikamis, near the Caucasus Mountains.

B The Entry of the Ottoman Empire

4

When the Ottoman Empire joined the war on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914, it dealt the Allies a harsh blow. Through its control of the Dardanelles, a strait that connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara, the Ottoman Empire was able to cut off Russia from the Mediterranean Sea and make it much more difficult for Russia’s British and French allies to send supplies and munitions. It also forced Britain to divert troops that might otherwise have been used on the western front to Egypt and Mesopotamia for use against the Ottoman Empire.

Officials in London and Paris were also concerned that when the Ottoman Empire, an Islamic state, intervened on the side of Germany, it would inspire the Muslim populations of the British and French empires to rise up against their colonial masters. The sultan of the Ottoman Empire also held the Islamic title of caliph, the supreme leader of the Muslim community (*see* Caliphate). After the Ottomans entered the war, the sultan proclaimed a *jihad* (holy war) against those countries at war with the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war, however, did not dramatically tip the balance in favor of the Central Powers. While Britain diverted troops to the Ottoman front, it still honored its commitment to the French in the west. The sultan's call for an Islamic jihad against the Allies fell on

deaf ears among the Muslims in French North Africa and British India. Many North Africans and Indians fought valiantly in the French and British armies on the western front. At the same time, some leaders of the Arabic-speaking Muslims in the southern portion of the Ottoman Empire began to view the war as an opportunity to gain independence from the empire.

B5 War in Asia and the Pacific

Japan declared war on Germany on August 23, 1914. It joined the Allied coalition in the hope of obtaining the scattered German possessions in East Asia and the Pacific. Japanese forces promptly attacked the German-controlled islands in the Pacific north of the equator—the Marshalls, the Marianas, and the Carolines—as well as the German economic concession of Kiaochow on China's Shantung Peninsula. Since Germany was fighting for its very existence in a two-front war in Europe, it could not spare resources and manpower to defend its far-flung holdings in Asia. Japan was therefore ideally situated to expand the frontiers of its colonial empire.

VII PHASE TWO: DEADLOCK

By the end of 1914, the two sides settled into trenches and faced each other across no man’s land, the area between the trenches on the western and eastern fronts. A war of attrition was underway, with each side trying to wear down the other. This harsh reality had a devastating effect on the morale of the soldiers on both sides. At the beginning, most people expected that the war would be over by Christmas 1914. This expectation prompted an outburst of patriotic enthusiasm on the part of the soldiers headed to the front as well as on the part of the civilians left behind. Young men eagerly signed up to achieve the type of glory that was associated with fighting for one's country.

However, when the early offensives failed and the casualties mounted, a widespread sense of despair developed in the trenches. The public did not know the extent of the despair because governments concealed it from them by imposing rigid censorship. Governments prevented news reporting of the slaughter at the front and intercepted mail from soldiers that contained messages of gloom and doom.

The Prussian military theorist Karl von Clausewitz once defined war as an extension of politics. But the political purposes of World War I had been lost amid the enormous death and destruction. The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and the rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in the Balkans were but distant memories with no relevance to the traumatic experience of soldiers on the battlefield. As the two sides confronted each other in trenches and periodically engaged in suicidal attempts to break the deadlock, the soldiers lost their original enthusiasm for the war effort. By 1917 the growing sense of despair and lack of purpose resulted in widespread discontent in the French and Russian armies.

A Causes of the Deadlock

For three years of continuous warfare, neither side succeeded in gaining a decisive success on either of the main European fronts, in spite of the millions of lives sacrificed. By the end of 1914, the western front had solidified into two deeply entrenched systems of fortifications running west to east from the English Channel to the border of Switzerland. The fortifications consisted of numerous parallel lines of interconnected trenches protected by lines of barbed wire. The leaders on both sides thought that the way to achieve a breakthrough was to penetrate enemy lines and gain access to open country. In the open country, they believed that they could regain the ability to maneuver. They also thought that the only way to penetrate enemy lines was to start a massive artillery bombardment of a chosen sector and to follow it up with a massive infantry assault.

However, both sides had equal forces, so they could repel enemy attempts to overwhelm entrenched defensive positions. The tragic equilibrium, as it has been called, caused continued assaults. With each assault, both sides attempted to improve upon the preceding one, chiefly by adding more artillery shells to the bombardment and more men to the attack. As more soldiers were killed in futile efforts to overrun enemy positions, leaders continued the same pattern because they felt that they had to prove that it would succeed, thus justifying the slaughter of their troops.

The reason that the leaders continued using this suicidal strategy for the remainder of the war was that no alternative appeared to exist. Maintaining fixed positions in the trenches was no solution, since it produced only boredom and eventually despair. In addition, as each army appointed new

leaders, they resumed the deadly offensives to try to earn a place in history by masterminding a breakthrough that would end the war.

Another factor in the deadlock on the western front was that Germany had occupied almost all of Belgium and parts of northern France since the beginning of the war. The French people and their government did not want to entertain any war aim other than recovering the occupied territory and its inhabitants. France's preoccupation with this goal hampered British-French strategy.

The French commander in chief on the northeastern front in France considered that area the only front worthy of French resources, and he also felt that the British should loyally accept the same viewpoint. The British, however, had developed other war aims to break the stalemate that did not always coincide with those of their French allies. For example, officials in London wanted to concentrate on the British war effort against the Ottoman Empire. To the French, the war in the Middle East was much less important than the struggle to liberate the occupied portions of northeastern France. As a result, the two allies continually disputed military priorities.

On the eastern front, there was also stalemate, although geographically the armies had plenty of room to maneuver. The Russians followed a strategy that had brought them success against previous invasions from the west in other wars. Russian armies would withdraw eastward deep into Russia's interior, fighting bloody defensive battles as opportunity offered. Then, as the invading armies wasted away, Russia's vast reservoirs of manpower would refill the Russian ranks.

In World War I, however, the strategy did not work. Russian industry could not furnish enough weapons or ammunition to supply the reserve of manpower. On the other hand, the periodic British and French offensives in the west prevented Germany from transferring sufficient forces to the eastern front. Without these troops, the Germans could not shatter the Russian armies and achieve victory. Thus, the exchange of fighting continued, and neither side gained a decisive edge on the eastern front until the Russian Revolutions of 1917.

B Eastern Front, 1915

German general Falkenhayn's original purpose for 1915 was to renew the offensive in the west before Britain put new wartime volunteers, who had finished their training, into active service. In the east, however, Hindenburg and Ludendorff urged a full-scale offensive to eliminate the Russians as a serious threat. To ensure success, every available German division not needed for a secure defensive on the western front was required. Germany decided to focus its attention on the east.

Germany and Austria-Hungary launched a massive offensive on May 2, 1915, in the area of the cities of Gorlice (*see* Görlitz) and Tarnów, south of Warsaw**.** The Russians were taken by surprise, and the German and Austro-Hungarian armies forced the Russians to retreat. During the following four months, the Russians were driven back more than 300 km (200 mi). Their casualties were estimated to be about 2 million. The Russians lost even more weapons and war material, which were less easily replaced than their manpower losses. When the Germans stopped advancing in September, Russia had lost control of Poland. In response to this military disaster, the tsar relieved Grand Duke Nicholas of the supreme command and ordered him to assume command against the Ottomans on the front at the Caucasus Mountains.

C Western Front, 1915

Germany faced a great disadvantage because it had to fight a war on two fronts. At the beginning of the war, the German command moved German units from the western offensive to the east, weakening the already exhausted German army in the west. Germany was continually stretched by having to divide its military strength against two adversaries. As long as Germany faced enemies on both sides, it was never able to concentrate sufficient forces either against the British and French in the west or against the Russians in the east to achieve military objectives.

The Germans were confined to using defensive measures in the west during 1915, except for occasional local attacks to keep the Allies off balance. The Allies, however, made several determined attempts to penetrate the German front. All of these followed much the same futile pattern. First came the bombardment and infantry assault, with moderate initial progress that soon bogged down in the shell-torn ground along the front. Then, German reserves would counterattack, causing the Allies to lose most of the ground gained. Finally, there was once again deadlock, with little to show for the lives lost except minor scattered changes in the original front. One reason for these successive and invariably costly failures was the effectiveness of the machine gun as a defensive weapon. One gunner could mow down a hundred attacking soldiers in a minute. Furthermore, the preliminary artillery bombardment by the Allies warned the Germans where the attack was about to occur and enabled them to assemble their reserves in readiness.

At the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in France, in March 1915, the British did achieve surprise simply by limiting the opening artillery to a short intense bombardment. As a result, the leading British infantry units broke through the German front, one of the few times when this was accomplished during more than three years of deadlock. By the end of the battle the British had taken a small *salient* (an area that projects outward into enemy territory) 1,800 m (2,000 yards) wide and 1,100 m (1,200 yards) deep and captured 1,200 German soldiers. But the costs of this small advance through the German trenches were 7,000 British and 4,200 Indian casualties, again because of the overwhelming firepower of German units in fixed positions.

In 1915 only one attempt at military innovation provided any change in the pattern of stalemate. In April, during the Second Battle of Ypres, the Germans used cylinders of poison chlorine gas against their enemy, introducing the concept of chemical warfare. The gas attack fell on Algerian units of the French army, which dissolved in panic and opened a wide gap in the Allied front. The German general staff, however, had put little faith in its new weapon and therefore was unprepared to exploit the success. Canadian units of the British Second Army acted quickly and closed the gap, eliminating the enemy's advantage before the Germans seized the opportunity.

Thereafter, both sides used gas throughout the war. The Allies first used it extensively under British command at the Battle of Loos in France in September 1915. Gas masks soon became a standard part of every soldier's gear. At first the gas attacks caused widespread panic among troops in the trenches, but the masks did provide some protection. Planning a gas attack was exceedingly difficult because the wind often blew the gas the wrong way. The physical effects of gas attacks included temporary and even permanent blindness, and severe damage to the lungs that required a long and painful recovery. Mustard gas, first used in 1917, caused blistering of the skin and prompt asphyxiation for those who inhaled it.

During 1915 the French constantly pressed for additional British troops on the western front. Under this pressure, British strength on the battle line rose from 10 divisions at the beginning of the year to about 36 at its end. Britain drew additional troops from overseas sources, such as Canada and India. The Territorial Army in the British Isles also supplied more troops as its divisions completed the required additional training. In addition, in August 1914, the secretary of state for war, Field Marshal Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener, called for men to enlist in the army. These troops became known as the New Army, or Kitchener’s armies, and the first became available for service in 1915.

Despite the increased assistance, the French called 1915 “the futile year” because military results were small compared to the expenditure of lives and material. During that year, governments learned that they needed to organize the production of war materials. In order to supply the huge amounts of weapons and ammunition needed by both sides, governments implemented strict control of every means of production and rationing of civilian requirements. They rationed food, which led to so-called wheatless and meatless days. In addition, they severely restricted the use of gasoline for non-essential purposes.

D Other Developments, 1915

During 1915, new campaigns began, new fronts opened, and new countries joined the war. In February Germany began using unrestricted submarine warfare—they sank British and sometimes neutral ships without removing the crew first. In March and April, Britain opened a new front when it attempted to invade the Gallipoli Peninsula of the Ottoman Empire. In May 1915 Italy entered the war on the Allied side, which forced Austria-Hungary to divert troops to a new front in the mountains along their common border. However, the advantage that the Allies gained from Italy was balanced when Bulgaria joined the war on the side of the Central Powers in October. When Bulgaria declared war against Serbia, it opened another front in the Balkans.

D Submarine Warfare

1

By 1915 Germany was feeling the effects of the Allied blockade. Since Germany lacked the conventional naval power necessary to challenge the British fleet, they turned to the submarine as their chosen sea-weapon. Germany relied on submarines to sink Allied ships carrying food and necessary supplies to Britain and France. Their goal was to interrupt Allied trade by targeting merchant ships. In February 1915 Germany proclaimed that the waters around the islands of Britain would be considered a war zone. Every Allied merchant ship in the zone was subject to being torpedoed without warning, and neutral ships operated at their own risk. Germany then began sinking ships without regard to the safety of crew or passengers. They also ignored the protests of neutral countries, which claimed that unrestricted submarine warfare violated international law.

The submarine proved a capable destroyer of merchant ships. To protect against submarine warfare, Britain labored to provide mines and detection devices to aircraft and antisubmarine ships. The toll of destruction mounted steadily throughout 1915, while German shipyards strained to add to the submarine fleet.

From February 1915 through September 1915, German submarines sunk more than 350 ships of Allied and neutral countries. Included among the victims was the British passenger liner *Lusitania*, sunk in the Irish Sea on May 7, 1915. The loss of 1,198 men, women, and children, including 128 American citizens, produced vigorous protests from the U.S. government. Late in September 1915 the German government finally agreed to end the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. However, these orders were not always obeyed, and tension between Germany and the United States increased.

D Gallipoli Campaign

2

At the beginning of 1915 three members of the British Cabinet had already glimpsed, if not yet fully accepted, the grim possibilities of the trench deadlock. These men were the war secretary, Lord Kitchener; the secretary of the war cabinet, Sir Maurice Hankey; and the first lord of the admiralty, Winston Churchill. They knew that a successful move against the Ottoman Empire at the Dardanelles Strait, which links the Mediterranean and Black seas, could give the Allies a direct route to Russia. Allied and American industrial sources then could supply the Russian armies through the Black Sea. The three men hoped that gaining access to Russia would convince the Balkan countries that were still neutral in the spring of 1915, such as Bulgaria and Romania, to join the Allies. Austria-Hungary, the weak partner of the Central Powers, then would be vulnerable to attack from the south, and Germany would be confronted with yet another front if it tried to support its failing ally.

The Dardanelles Strait was defended by a series of forts equipped with heavy guns. The forts, although old, had been improved under the direction of a German military and naval mission. The Ottoman army was composed of tough, dependable fighting men. Part of the army, however, was engaged against the Russians on the Caucasian frontier and another part against the British in Mesopotamia. In addition, the British forces would have the advantage of surprise because they were striking from the sea against the land. Although the operation should have succeeded, problems with the British decision-making process denied the enterprise both careful planning and the element of surprise.

First, general officers serving in France violently opposed the plan because they wanted British troops to be sent only to the western front. Kitchener was at first unwilling to override them, denying British troops to the operation. As a result, the operation started out as a purely naval enterprise under Churchill. After a series of preliminary bombardments, which served little purpose except to alert the enemy, a strong British-French battle fleet, consisting of 16 battleships, entered the Dardanelles on March 18. It had virtually silenced the forts when some of the ships blundered into a minefield and three ships sank. Admiral Sir John De Robeck, the fleet commander, drew back.

Historians debate what would have happened if the admiral had attacked instead of withdrawing. Some argue that the Ottoman Empire would have been out of the war. The forts had nearly exhausted their ammunition, and there was panic in Constantinople. Kitchener, however, had belatedly changed his mind about sending troops, and so Robeck decided to wait until they arrived.

When the British force under General Sir Ian Hamilton finally landed on April 25, the Ottoman troops had had more than a month to prepare under the leadership of German general Liman von Sanders and the commander of the 19th division, Mustafa Kemal (later Mustafa Kemal Atatürk). British, French, Australian, and New Zealand troops went ashore at various landings along the western side of the Gallipoli Peninsula, including Anzac Cove and Cape Helles. The Allied force, however, was small, hampered by steep cliffs and deep ravines, and pinned down after fierce fighting. Batches of Allied reinforcements arrived, but they were never on time or in large enough numbers to take the advantage. In August another landing at Suvla Bay, farther up the peninsula, failed. Hamilton was replaced with Sir Charles Monro, who recommended evacuating Gallipoli. The Allies withdrew from the peninsula during December 1915 and early January 1916, and the Gallipoli Campaign ended. The British Empire had 205,000 casualties, including troops from New Zealand, Australia, and India. The French suffered 47,000 casualties, including troops from French colonial holdings. The official government casualty figure for the Ottoman Empire was more than 250,000 casualties.

D Italy and Bulgaria

3

In May 1915 Italy entered the war on the Allied side. Italy had been a member of the German alliance system from 1882 to 1914 but had opted for neutrality when the war began. Britain and France induced Italy to enter the war on their side by secretly offering territory in the Alps and along the Adriatic coast they hoped to capture from Austria-Hungary. They also offered Italy territory in the Ottoman Empire if it was partitioned.

Italy’s only available operational theater was its alpine front with Austria-Hungary. The mountainous terrain limited fighting between Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces to the Isonzo River front near the Austrian town of Gorizia. The armies fought a total of 11 battles of the Isonzo, four of them during 1915. There were heavy losses on both sides, and no significant gains for the Italians, who were consistently on the offensive. However, since Austria-Hungary had to defend this front, they had less men and manpower to use against Russia.

Meanwhile, in October 1915 Bulgaria joined German and Austro-Hungarian troops in a renewed attack on Serbia. Bulgaria became part of the Central Powers because Germany offered it territory held by Greece and Serbia if they won the war. Bulgaria was also impressed with the recent Central Powers’ successes in Gallipoli and Italy. With Bulgaria’s help, Serbia was at last overrun. British and French troops landed at the Greek port of Salonika the same month to try to help Serbia, but they were too late. The Central Powers gained control of territory extending from the Baltic Sea to the Persian Gulf, and Russia was cut off from the other Allied countries.

E Western Front, 1916

At the beginning of 1916, more soldiers of the British New Army became available as they finished their training. The British decided to focus on a new and mighty effort to drive through the western front. French forces were to join in the offensive, which was originally set for mid-August to give time for thorough preparation. Sir Douglas Haig replaced Sir John French as commander of British troops in France. Sir John French had been discredited by the failures of 1915.

However, Germany acted first under the direction of General Falkenhayn. Falkenhayn felt that the time had come to mount an offensive against France before more British soldiers could tip the scales of battle. Falkenhayn considered that although the Russian armies had not been beaten, Russia's power to take the offensive had been broken, and it had effectively lost its strength. For 1916 he proposed a German attack on the French fortress of Verdun, one of the historic guardian fortresses of France. Falkenhayn believed the French general staff, for moral and patriotic reasons, would “have to throw in every man they have” to retain Verdun.

He was correct in that prediction. The defense of Verdun, whose strategic significance was minimal, became a powerful symbol of the national will of the French people. The French prime minister, Aristide Briand, warned Joffre that if he surrendered Verdun, he would be dismissed immediately as French commander. Falkenhayn did not plan a headlong assault but instead planned that his troops would exert a steady pressure supported by massive artillery fire. Falkenhayn proposed to draw wave after wave of France's limited manpower into his operation over a period of weeks and months. He predicted that “the forces of France will be bled to death” in his Verdun offensive without a corresponding loss of German lives.

E Battle of Verdun

1

The first German attack on Verdun began on February 21, 1916. The Germans advanced several miles and captured Fort Douaumont on February 25. On that day, General Henri Philippe Pétain arrived with Joffre's order to take command of the disheartened garrison of Verdun. Under Pétain’s leadership, the French defenders recovered confidence. The Germans found that for further gains, they would have to pay the price of rising casualties.

In April Pétain was promoted, and he handed over command of the Verdun defense to General Robert Nivelle in the beginning of May. Falkenhayn planned a new attack for early June. However, on June 4 Falkenhayn’s belief that Russia was immobilized collapsed under the impact of a sudden overwhelming Russian offensive in Galicia, a region of Austria-Hungary. More than 40 Russian divisions under General Aleksey Brusilov broke through at a weak point from which Austro-Hungarian troops had earlier been withdrawn to fight on the Italian front.

The Brusilov offensive answered the urgent pleas of French president Raymond Poincaré, who had asked the tsar for help in relieving the situation at Verdun. Brusilov gained complete surprise after a short but intense artillery bombardment. He succeeded in pushing back the Austro-Hungarian

army almost 100 km (60 mi)—the most successful Russian offensive of the war. The Germans suspended their attacks at Verdun and dispatched divisions to the eastern front. Brusilov's offensive suffered by the end of September 1916 because the Russian railways were insufficient to transport enough troops and supplies in time.

On June 22 the Germans renewed the offensive at Verdun, but they made no progress. In August William II dismissed General Falkenhayn as chief of the general staff and replaced him with Hindenburg. Ludendorff became Hindenburg's first quartermaster general. Two powerful French counterattacks in October and December recovered almost all the ground lost to the Germans and reestablished the lines of deadlock virtually where they had been in February. The total casualties of the Verdun fighting on both sides are estimated at more than 700,000 men, of which approximately 377,000 were French soldiers and an estimated 337,000 were German soldiers.

E 2 First Battle of the Somme

The main scene of action on the western front shifted from Verdun north to the valley of the Somme River. The British had moved the date for their offensive forward to help take the pressure off the French army at Verdun. The offensive began on the morning of July 1, 1916, following seven days of massive artillery bombardment.

This was the baptism of fire for Britain's New Army, the young volunteers who were to become known to their country as the lost generation. On the first day of battle, the British suffered 60,000 casualties (including 20,000 deaths) for a gain of no more than a few yards of ground scattered along the front. The First Battle of the Somme was a repetition on a broader scale of the local offensives of 1915. It continued intermittently until mid-November. When it lapsed into resumed deadlock, the British casualties were estimated at almost 420,000 men. The much smaller French force operating on the British right flank had almost 195,000 casualties. Estimates suggest that the German casualty figures were about the same as the Allies.

On September 15, 1916, during the First Battle of the Somme, the British gave the tank its first trial in combat. Although the German soldiers fled in panic at the sight of the strange-looking new machines, most of the tanks bogged down or came to a stop because of mechanical defects and inexperienced crews. For the next year, tanks represented a great disappointment because of their unwieldy operation. The Germans originally dismissed them as signs of weakness on the part of infantry but eventually developed their own model, which was put into operation in the spring of 1918. By that time, however, the British had worked the defects out of their machines, and the tank was to become the weapon that helped to end the trench deadlock in the last year of the war.

The enormous losses sustained at Verdun and at the Somme prompted the French command to move Joffre offstage by making him a marshal of France, the country's highest-ranking army officer. The French command then turned to General Robert Nivelle, who had replaced Pétain as commander of the French forces at Verdun. At Verdun, Nivelle immediately launched a series of vigorous counterattacks, which eventually forced the Germans to adopt defensive tactics. Nivelle's success at Verdun convinced him of the wisdom of massive offensives as a strategy for victory. Under Nivelle's command, Fort Douaumont and the rest of the German gains at Verdun were triumphantly recovered.

The Germans did not break through the fortress of Verdun but the cost to the defending French army was terrible. Ninety thousand men a week were sent to Verdun along the road that became known as *La Voie Sacrée* (the Sacred Way) because it was the only road that remained open. One of the thousands of French prisoners of war taken at Verdun was Captain Charles de Gaulle, later president of France.

F Other Events, 1916

In 1916 the war raged in areas beyond the major theaters of combat in France and Russia. A bloody series of battles were fought between Ottoman and Russian forces in Armenia, while the British also clashed with Ottoman forces in Mesopotamia. In August 1916 Romania intervened in the war on the Allied side and invaded the Austro-Hungarian region of Transylvania. Romania entered the war in hopes of gaining several provinces of Austria-Hungary that had large Romanian populations. After a vigorous counterattack by Austria-Hungary and Germany, the Central Powers controlled most of the valuable wheat- and oil-producing parts of Romania.

F 1 Ottoman Action Against the Armenians

Once World War I developed into a “total war” that involved the mobilization of each country’s entire population and economic resources, the distinction between soldiers at the front and civilians behind the lines was erased. As terrible as the carnage on the battlefield was, noncombatants also suffered as the brutality practiced against the enemy on the battlefield was also practiced against perceived enemies at home. The most egregious example of this phenomenon was the policy of genocide that the Ottoman Empire conducted against its Armenian citizens (*see* Armenian Massacre).

Conflict between the Christian Armenian minority and the Muslim Turkish majority had occurred before World War I. Many Armenians looked forward to independence from the Ottoman Empire so that they could control their own government and practice their own religion without restrictions. When the war began, some Armenians supported Russia against the Ottoman Empire and clashed with Ottoman military units. The Ottoman government regarded the Armenians as a dangerous subversive force within the country that endangered the war effort. The Ottomans also felt threatened by the possibility of an Allied invasion after the Allied landing at Gallipoli and the Russian military pressure in the Caucasus Mountains. In May 1915 the Ottoman government ordered the deportation of the entire Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire.

Over the next two years, the government of the Ottoman Empire deported two-thirds or more of its Armenian citizens in eastern Anatolia (present-day Asian Turkey) to the deserts of Mesopotamia. Many Armenians died of exposure, disease, and starvation; others were killed by Ottoman soldiers and civilians. By the time World War I ended, an estimated 1 million or more Armenians had died. After receiving harrowing reports from its diplomatic representatives, the United States government issued a formal protest at this policy of genocide. But as a neutral party in the war the United States had no influence over the Ottoman government.

F 2 Conflict at Sea

The most spectacular naval event of 1916 was the first venture of the German High Seas Fleet into open water to challenge the British Grand Fleet. The Battle of Jutland, on May 31, was the only time in World War I that the main battleship forces of the two navies engaged in direct combat. After inflicting heavier losses on the British than his units sustained, German admiral Reinhard Scheer returned to his base under cover of darkness, convinced that he would risk total defeat if he tried to gain a clear victory. The British admiral Sir John Jellicoe was afterward accused of missing a golden opportunity to destroy the retreating German fleet. From a strategic viewpoint, Jutland was a British victory, because the German fleet had not ended Allied domination of the world's sea-lanes.

However, German submarine attacks challenged Allied maritime supremacy and began to play a large role in the war. In June a German mine in the icy waters northwest of Scotland sank the cruiser *Hampshire*, killing British war secretary Lord Kitchener, who was on his way to Russia at the personal request of the tsar.

VII I PHASE THREE: THE TIDE TURNS

In the last two years of the war, the stalemate that had existed since the end of 1914 was broken by a number of actions taken by both sides. At the beginning of 1917, Germany made a desperate bid to starve Britain into submission by reverting to the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare that it had used until September 1915. In response, the United States entered the war on the Allied side in the spring of 1917, a move that threatened to tip the balance against the Central Powers. Then the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1917 effectively ended Russia’s role as a fighting force. When Russia formally withdrew from the war in March 1918, Germany gained access to the vast economic resources of the western part of the Russian Empire and was able to concentrate its military forces in the west against the Allies.

A German Submarine Campaign

In 1917 German submarine operations reached their climax, leading to serious consequences that affected the course of the war. On January 31 Germany announced that it would resume unrestricted submarine warfare the next day. United States president Woodrow Wilson immediately broke off diplomatic relations with Germany and warned of the consequences if more American ships were sunk. Despite this warning, Allied shipping losses, including American ships, rose steeply, exceeding 500,000 tons in March and 850,000 gross tons in April.

If such a rate of loss continued for long, Britain would face defeat because it depended on the food, supplies, and war materials that the ships brought. The crisis caused the British Admiralty to reconsider using the convoy system. This system, in which merchant ships sailed together escorted by warships, compelled enemy raiders to expose themselves to counterattack. Despite urges since 1915 to adopt the convoy system, the British Admiralty had resisted for a variety of reasons. It feared the convoy system could cause delays in shipping and congestion in ports. Also some in the Admiralty believed that a group of ships was easier to find than just one and that the system would create bigger targets.

By the spring of 1917 the convoy system was already in use for Scandinavian trade to British east coast ports and for coal shipments across the English Channel to France. In both cases, losses of ships were far lower than average.

In May the British tried the convoy system in the Atlantic Ocean with a large convoy from Gibraltar. The convoy reached its destination without losing a single ship. Tonnage losses in May dropped to about 550,000 tons. American destroyers began to arrive in British waters to help provide additional escorts, and the convoy system became established practice. In the last six months of 1917, shipping losses showed an irregular but steady monthly decline. In addition, the Allies destroyed more and more submarines. The Germans were no longer able to build submarines faster than they lost them, and they were no longer able to sink merchant ships faster than the Allies and the United States could build new ones. Although the submarine campaign continued at a diminishing rate during 1918, it was no longer a deadly threat.

B United States Enters the War

Prior to 1917, the United States had stayed out of the war because many Americans felt that the war was too remote from U.S. affairs to affect the United States (*see* isolationism). In addition, the people of the United States were divided in their loyalties—many Americans were of British ancestry but many were of German origin, while many Irish Americans were opposed to U.S. support for Britain because of it refused to grant home rule to Ireland. However, when Germany insisted upon using unrestricted submarine warfare, it brought its relations with the United States to a breaking point. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson read his war message to the Congress of the United States. Congress voted on April 6 for the United States to go to war against the Central Powers.

When the United States entered the war, President Wilson insisted that it be referred to as an Associated Power rather than an Allied Power. Wilson stressed that the United States had entered the war for its own reasons and entertained war aims that did not necessarily coincide with those of its Europeans Allies. The United States was the only Associated Power during the war.

Beginning in June, the first troops of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), under General John J. Pershing, arrived in France. However, U.S. intervention in World War I did not have an immediate impact on the fighting in Europe. When Congress declared war, the United States had a small volunteer army that had no experience in the kind of warfare that was being waged on the western front. In May 1917 Congress enacted conscription through the Selective Service Act to draft men into the armed forces. Within a few months over 10 million American men had registered for military duty.

But the United States had to mobilize, train, and transport this new collection of conscripts before they could contribute to the Allied war effort in France. That process took over a year, during which Russia withdrew from the war. Only four American divisions reached France in 1917, and none saw any serious action in that year. It was not until the summer of 1918 that the AEF began to play a significant role in the Allied war effort.

In the meantime, however, the United States contributed to its European allies in the form of massive economic assistance. After Congress declared war, the U.S. Treasury began selling so-called liberty bonds to its citizens in order to finance Allied government purchases in the United States. The British, French, and Italian governments used the proceeds from these bond sales to pay for products and raw materials that they desperately needed to conduct the war. The federal government also generated revenue for the war by increasing income and excise taxes.

C Western Front, 1917

On April 16, 1917, General Nivelle of France began an offensive on the Aisne River. The Allies had to change the area of the offensive because the Germans had pulled back along a section of the western front to a new defensive line to shorten and strengthen their front line. The Hindenburg Line, as the German position was called, stretched from Arras south to near Soissons.

When the offensive ended in early May in bloody disaster, it caused the ranks of the French army to mutiny. Whole regiments refused orders to advance or to head for the front. On May 15 the French government dismissed Nivelle and replaced him with Pétain, who set about to restore discipline. France suppressed details about the mutiny at the time, but later estimates suggest that 49 soldiers convicted of mutiny were executed. In personal visits to more than 100 French divisions, Pétain calmly assured the troops that there would be no more offensives like the one Nivelle had launched. Although the incident could have been disastrous for the French, the German intelligence service gained no reliable information about the mutinies until after Pétain had restored order.

In April the British troops had local successes at Arras in France, and in June they captured Messines Ridge near Ypres in Belgium. However, the Third Battle of Ypres, which opened on July 31 and continued intermittently until the capture of Passchendaele (Passendale) Ridge in November, degenerated into a disheartening struggle in the mud of Belgium. The Allies achieved a brief advance at the Battle of Cambrai in France on November 20. General Julian Byng's Third Army, having been allotted more than 300 tanks of an improved design, launched a dawn surprise attack with no advance bombing. The large initial British gains were so unexpected that Allied reserves were not available for the follow-through, and German counterattacks recovered most of the lost ground.

D The Russian Revolutions of 1917

In 1917 an event of far-reaching consequences took place in Russia. Although by this time some Allied supplies were arriving in Russia through the ports of Archangel (Arkhangel’sk) and Vladivostok, there were not enough of them. Russian administrative chaos prevented the supplies from being distributed in an orderly manner. The troops at the front were starving. Many were weaponless, shoeless, and in rags.

From February 23 to 27, 1917, disorder broke out in Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg) in which civilians and soldiers cried for peace and bread. In less than a week, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated and a Provisional Government was created that soon came under the leadership of Aleksandr Kerensky. (Dates for the February Revolution are given according to the Julian, or Old Style, calendar then in use in Russia. On January 31, 1918, the Soviet government adopted the Gregorian, or New Style, calendar, which moved dates by 13 days; therefore, in the New Style calendar the dates for the first revolution would be March 8 to 12.)

By the beginning of 1917 the Russian army was falling apart because of the inadequacy of its weapons and supplies and a succession of losses at the front. Many soldiers had lost confidence not only in the ruling Romanov dynasty but also in the cause of the war itself. But replacing the tsar with the Provisional Government headed by Kerensky did not remedy the situation once Kerensky pledged to keep Russia in the war. When he ordered another offensive in the summer of 1917, Russian soldiers streamed home from the front and joined antiwar demonstrations that were skillfully exploited by the Bolshevik Party, which ousted Kerensky in October (November, New Style), in a second revolution.

Once in power, the Bolshevik leader, Vladimir Ilich Lenin, sent delegates to the Polish city of Brest-Litovsk to negotiate an armistice with the Germans, which was signed on December 2 (December 15, New Style). The armistice’s terms included a 30-day peace, no troop movements that were not already ordered, and immediate peace negotiations. But when the Bolshevik government resisted the harsh conditions that the Germans demanded in the peace treaty, the German army marched eastward into Russia. Finally, the Central Powers and Russia concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, which ended Russia’s participation in the war. The price that the Bolshevik government had to pay for peace was a heavy one: Russia was forced to cede to Germany the Baltic States, Russian Poland, and Ukraine, which briefly became part of a vast satellite empire of Germany. After Russia withdrew from the war, German military planners were able to transfer forces to France to prepare for a massive offensive against the British, French, and new American troops there.

E The British Fight Against the Ottomans

British forces continued fighting against the Ottomans, gradually taking over territory. In Mesopotamia a British army under Sir Frederick Maude recaptured the city of Kut-al-Imara (Al Kūt) early in 1917, pushed on to Baghdād in March, and inflicted a heavy defeat on the Ottomans at the city of Ramadi in September. In the region of Palestine, which the Ottoman Empire ruled, the British made two unsuccessful attacks in the spring of 1917 on the coastal fortress of Gaza. In November, British general Edmund Allenby outflanked and overwhelmed Gaza, and after hard fighting, captured Jerusalem in December 1917. German troops under General Falkenhayn

reinforced the Ottomans, who tried to recover Jerusalem during the last week of December. However, Allenby and his troops defeated them.

During this campaign the Arabs of the Hejaz (Al Ḥijāz) region of Arabia revolted against the Ottomans in an attempt to gain their independence. They were aided by Englishman T. E. Lawrence, who became known as Lawrence of Arabia.

The British military campaign against the Ottoman Empire did not have a major impact on the outcome of the war, which would be determined on the fields of Belgium and France. But it had important consequences for the part of the world that would later be referred to as the Middle East. In order to obtain the support of the inhabitants of the Hejaz region in the war against the Ottomans, Britain had to pledge support for the creation of an independent state in the Arabic-speaking portions of the Ottoman Empire after the war. Although the Arabs did not get independence when World War I ended, the cause of national self-determination became a potent force in the Arab world.

F Other Events, 1917

With the Russian collapse, strong German reinforcements went to Italy to help the Austro-Hungarians. On October 24, 1917, covered by a heavy mist and a relatively short bombardment, Austro-Hungarian and Germans attacked in overwhelming force on both sides of the Austrian town of Caporetto (now Kobarid, Slovenia). They shattered the whole front of the Italian Second Army on the Isonzo River. It was more than two weeks before the Italians were finally able to make a stand on the Piave River, 200 km (100 mi) behind their original front. In the Battle of Caporetto, Italian casualties, including prisoners, were about 300,000 men. French and British troops arrived in early November to help stabilize the front.

In the Balkans, intermittent operations had continued on the Salonika front during 1916. During this time pro-German King Constantine I of Greece refused to allow the British and French to use Athens to supply their military forces fighting in Salonika. In June 1917, with vigorous intervention by the Allies, King Constantine abdicated. The same month, a pro-Allied government took over in Athens under Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos, and Greece declared war on Germany and Bulgaria. Henceforth Greece, which had stubbornly refused to assist the Allies in the Balkans, actively participated in the war against German and Bulgarian forces on the peninsula.

I X PHASE FOUR: PERIOD OF DECISION

In 1918 two critical events brought an end to the long period of stalemate: the withdrawal of Russia and the intervention of the United States. When Germany forced Russia out of the war in March 1918 and transferred some of its military forces from east to west, the American Expeditionary Force had yet to participate actively in the Allied war effort in France. Germany promptly mounted a major western offensive in an effort to break through the Anglo-French defenses before American military power arrived on the western front. The German offensive failed, and the Allies followed it with a counteroffensive, in which U.S. forces actively participated for the first time. This counteroffensive brought an end to the war in the autumn of 1918.

A Western Front, 1918

A 1 Germany's Gamble

At the beginning of 1918, German leaders were considering a plan to gain decisive victory on the western front. The plan was to take advantage of a temporary superiority in numbers of troops, which occurred because Germany was able to shift troops from the eastern front to the western front after Russia withdrew from the war. Germany wanted to mount a surprise offensive before the full force of the U.S. armies could be ready for action. The plan was a gamble—if the Germans failed, it would mean final defeat because Germany was running out of men and war materials.

Some German military leaders, notably General Max Hoffmann, the new commander in chief on the eastern front, felt that Germany should avoid the gamble, consolidate its gains in the east, and stand strictly on the defensive in the west. Under the terms of Russia’s withdrawal from the war, Germany gained predominant influence in a number of non-Russian states that were formed all along the Russian frontiers in the west and south, such as Ukraine, the Baltic States, Georgia, and

Armenia. These areas had food and raw materials that could meet the needs of the German people and of German industry. Hoffmann believed that a reinforced German army in the west could hold the western front strongly enough to induce the Allies to grant tolerable peace terms if Germany offered to evacuate French and Belgian territory. Hoffmann and the other supporters of this strategy felt that if Germany obtained vast territorial gains in the east, it would soon regain a dominant position in Europe.

However, General Ludendorff refused to compromise, and his desire for victory on the battlefield won over Hindenburg. Hindenburg had grown to trust Ludendorff's judgment, and he felt that he owed Ludendorff loyal support against Hoffmann.

The new German plan was largely invented by General Oskar von Hutier and had been tested in battle on the Russian and Italian fronts, where it had been overwhelmingly successful. The plan of attack began with a relatively brief artillery bombardment in which chemicals launched in so-called gas shells were used to avoid breaking up the ground over which the infantry would have to advance. (Conventional shells broke up the ground, making it difficult for the infantry to cross.)

The Germans were not going to initiate the infantry assault by solid lines and masses of men but would begin it with a wave of troops. Their objective for the first day was not to capture the enemy's first line or intermediate line. They were to push straight ahead, bypassing strong points of resistance or working around them, and press on toward the hostile artillery positions. Reserves were to be put in wherever the first troops were making progress, not where they were held up. No attempt was to be made to preserve a continuous line, and no commander was to worry about his flanks.

A 2 Failed German Offensive

On March 21, 1918, Ludendorff launched his great attack. The objective was to capture the French city of Amiens before proceeding to Paris. He had amassed 190 German divisions in France and Belgium, against 60 British and 99 French divisions. However, on the front where the first blow fell, opposite the British Third and Fifth armies in the Somme region, the German manpower superiority was even higher and was backed by an artillery ratio of nearly three to one (*see* Somme, Battles of the).

The Fifth Army held the right flank of the British front, where the British and French forces joined. Ludendorff intended to break through at this junction, to separate the British from the French, and to roll up the whole British army north to the sea. Under the shock of the new tactics, the British Fifth Army virtually dissolved. Hutier's 18th Army, making the best progress, broke clear through into open country. If Ludendorff had concentrated all his reserves to exploit the gap Hutier had opened, the plan might have succeeded. Instead, he launched three separate new attacks.

The Allied high command was in near panic. Pétain told Haig that if the German attacks continued, he would have to abandon contact with the British and fall back to cover Paris. Ludendorff, however, had already missed his moment of opportunity. His troops were reaching the end of their endurance, and fresh British and French reserves were arriving. Slowly the German momentum died. As a decisive effort, the offensive failed. It had merely gained ground. On April 4 and 5, Hutier launched one final thrust toward Amiens, creating a *salient* (outwardly projecting battle line). Australian troops east of Villers-Bretonneux stopped them.

A 3 Allied War Council

An Allied conference on March 26th at Doullens, France, had established French general Ferdinand Foch as commander in chief of all Allied forces on the western front. Soon afterwards, General Pershing finally agreed to allow American troops to join British and French forces in small formations. Pershing had originally insisted on keeping American troops together rather than dividing them amongst the British and French armies. His decision was a great boost to Allied morale.

The Allies also created a supreme war council to coordinate their strategy on all fronts. The council consisted of the prime ministers of Britain (David Lloyd George), of France (Georges Clemenceau), and of Italy (Vittorio Orlando). A high-ranking military adviser assisted each leader. President Wilson of the United States sent a representative, but not as a formal member of the council, because the official U.S. view was that the United States was an Associated rather than an Allied Power. The Supreme War Council permitted a much greater degree of policy coordination than had

existed before, although the Allied Powers continually had sharp differences of opinion over the proper conduct of the war.

A 4 Germany's Final Offensives

Ludendorff continued his attempts on the western front, although his resources were diminishing. During the spring, he had lost almost 350,000 men and had inflicted roughly equal damage. In that same period of time, almost 180,000 U.S. troops arrived in France.

Nevertheless, when Ludendorff launched another offensive in May, it was a shock to the Allies. The Germans moved along the Aisne River between the cities of Reims and Soissons. Heading directly for Paris, they broke through the front of the French Sixth Army and rolled forward all the way to the Marne River, only 130 km (80 mi) from the French capital.

To widen the Marne salient created by the Amiens offensive, Ludendorff began an offensive on July 15 on both sides of Reims, known as the Second Battle of the Marne. It met a new French defensive tactic: The French had set up a line of lightly manned trenches that gave the false impression of real obstacles. The Germans wasted most of their artillery fire on these so-called fake trenches and then advanced in an uncoordinated fashion against the fully manned trenches that had been untouched by the shelling. They came under heavy French and American fire and were thrown back with heavy casualties. Two U.S. divisions, which were numerically stronger units than British, French, or German divisions, helped halt the offensive in the vicinity of Château-Thierry.

A 5 Allied Counteroffensives

On July 18 the Allies launched a powerful counteroffensive, which included U.S. divisions, against the western flank of the Marne salient. Successive assaults eliminated the German protrusion at the Marne by early August. The next Allied counterstroke involved eliminating the salient at Amiens, where the first German attack had driven so deeply into the Allied front. On August 8 the British Fourth Army delivered the main blow of the counteroffensive on both sides of the Somme River. More than 500 Mark IV tanks, which had a much more powerful engine and much greater maneuverability than the earlier models, led the attack. The infantry jumped off behind a brief artillery barrage, which gave it the element of surprise that had been lacking in earlier offensives. Under the impact of the attack, the German army fell back.

That day, German morale and discipline dissolved. Ludendorff wrote that it “was the black day of the German army.” The German army, like the French in 1917, contained men who argued that the war had nothing to do with the real interests of the rank and file. German troops were becoming depressed and insubordinate.

During the rest of August, a series of Allied attacks continued to reduce the Amiens salient. By the first week of September, the Germans were back on the line from which they had launched their great offensive in March. In order to launch a general counteroffensive, the Allies needed to remove the Germans from their salients. Those areas interfered with the Allies' use of railway lines running parallel to the front. The railway lines had to be reopened to traffic so that the Allied forces could move from one part of the line to another as circumstances required.

September 12, 1918, was the beginning of the end for the German armies in the west. The recently created U.S. First Army assaulted a small salient in the area of Saint-Mihiel, southeast of Verdun. The Battle of Saint-Mihiel was the first appearance of a U.S. force large enough to be called an army. General Pershing had insisted that a separate U.S. army be created and put under his own command. Pershing had overridden Foch, who wanted to keep feeding U.S. divisions into French or British armies. At Saint-Mihiel, the U.S. generals and staffs proved their ability to handle an army-sized operation successfully.

A 6 Victorious Allied Offensive

The Allied general offensive started on September 26. Its strategic objectives were the two key railroad junctions of Aulnoye and Mézières. At these points, the trunk lines from Germany joined the main lateral rail line behind the German front. If Aulnoye and Mézières were taken, the Germans could neither supply their forces nor withdraw in good order. Foch’s plan was for a pincer movement with an American offensive in the east through the rugged Meuse-Argonne sector (in what became known as the Battle of the Argonne) and a British advance north toward the city of

Lille. After October 10, two U.S. armies were in action: the first under Lieutenant General Hunter Liggett and the second under Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard.

Although both the American and British advance were much slower than expected, the two armies did regain territory that had long been held by the German army. This development, coupled with the news that Bulgaria had surrendered, prompted General Ludendorff, in a fit of panic, to demand on September 29 that the German government initiate armistice negotiations before Allied forces broke through the German lines.

B Collapse of the Central Powers

B Bulgaria

1

While the British, American, and French armies were driving the German armies back on the western front, the military forces of Germany’s allies were collapsing everywhere. The Bulgarian front was the first to break. In September 1918 British, French, Italian, Serbian, and Greek forces cooperated in an offensive from Albania that resulted in the Bulgarian army retreating along a broad front. On September 29 Bulgaria sued for peace at Salonika after pledging to evacuate all Greek and Serbian territory and to turn over its own territory for Allied military operations.

B Ottoman Empire

2

In September 1918 the British forces that had entered Palestine launched a major offensive that broke the Ottoman lines. Fortified with Arab armies accompanied by T. E. Lawrence, they drove into present-day Syria and Lebanon in early October. Meanwhile, the Ottomans suffered heavy defeat in both Palestine and Mesopotamia and were isolated when Bulgaria withdrew from the war. On October 30 the Ottoman Empire concluded an armistice, pledging to open the Dardanelles Strait, demobilize its armies, and permit Allied military forces to use its territory.

B Austria-Hungary

3

Throughout the fall of 1918 the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed as its armies retreated before the Italian forces. On October 24 the Italians, who had suffered so many setbacks earlier in the war, launched a powerful offensive known as the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. They moved along the Piave River toward the town of Vittorio Veneto and sent the Austro-Hungarian army into full retreat.

Even before the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, though, the Austro-Hungarian government was desperately seeking a suspension of hostilities through neutral contacts. Austria-Hungary was willing to accept any terms under which its different nationalities would remain part of the empire. The Vienna government eagerly associated itself with Germany when it appealed to President Wilson for an armistice on October 4.

But during the exchange of notes with Washington, representatives of the different nationalities of Austria-Hungary declared their independence. On October 28 the Czechs and Slovaks declared the independence of the new state of Czechoslovakia. On October 29 the Yugoslav National Council announced the independence of what would later be called Yugoslavia. On October 30, the German-speaking citizens of the dissolving empire created a German-Austrian republic in Vienna, later known as Austria. On October 31, the Magyars had a revolution that initiated the creation of an independent Hungarian republic. The Austro-Hungarian empire had begun to disintegrate into its separate ethnic parts before the conclusion of the armistice between Austria-Hungary and the Allied Powers on November 3.

B Germany

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German morale, both on the home front and in the ranks of the army, was sinking fast, even though the government tried to suppress the worst of the war news. The German people had suffered terrible deprivation because of the British blockade throughout the war. Food riots had

erupted in several major cities in response to severe shortages. In April 1917 hundreds of thousands of workers in Berlin had walked off their jobs in protest against the high cost of living.

The Russian Revolutions had inspired some members of the German Social Democratic Party to make plans to overthrow the empire and replace it with a socialist regime. In the latter stages of the war, revolutionary sentiments such as these had spread to the German army and navy as well. In the end of October, sailors of the High Seas Fleet mutinied and refused to put to sea. By early November soldiers were joining with revolutionaries among the civilian population to create disorder in several German cities. During the armistice negotiations, both Allied and German officials expressed the fear that if the war continued much longer, Germany might be submerged by the revolutionary wave that had swept the Bolsheviks into power in Russia a year earlier.

The German high command, not government politicians, decided to abandon the hope of victory on the battlefield in favor of a negotiated end to the war. They feared that if the war continued, the Allies would drive into German territory.

After the high command demanded that the government initiate armistice negotiations, the ministry loyal to William II resigned. A government under the Chancellor Prince Max of Baden replaced it on October 4. In one of its first acts, the new government appealed directly to U.S. president Woodrow Wilson for an armistice based on the principles he had enunciated in a speech to Congress on January 8, 1918. In the speech, Wilson had specified American peace conditions known as the Fourteen Points, which constituted a relatively moderate basis for an end to the war. He had outlined his peace program as an alternative to the proposals of the new Bolshevik regime in Russia for a peace “without annexations or indemnities” and to the harsh war aims of America’s European allies.

After Germany approached Wilson, he replied a few days later stating that Germany must accept the Fourteen Points and must evacuate all occupied territory. As a later stipulation, Wilson demanded that Germany completely abandon submarine warfare. The Allied military authorities would later determine the actual terms of the armistice.

On October 24th Ludendorff published a statement calling Wilson's terms unacceptable. Prince Max, angered at Ludendorff’s outspokenness, informed Emperor William that Ludendorff had to go. On October 26 Ludendorff learned that he no longer held the emperor’s confidence, and he resigned. Hindenburg also tried to resign, but the emperor refused his resignation.

In the meantime, the Allied leaders were also unhappy with Wilson’s peace program because they thought it too lenient. However, they were dependent on American economic and military aid, and so accepted the Fourteen Points with certain specified reservations. On November 8th Marshal Foch received a German armistice commission near the town of Compiègne, France, to negotiate an end to the war.

As unrest spread throughout Germany, political leaders and the press publicly demanded that the emperor abdicate his throne. Although he initially protested and resisted, William II abdicated on November 9 and fled into exile in The Netherlands on the next day. In Berlin, meanwhile, Prince Max had handed over the reins of government to socialist leader Friedrich Ebert, and a German republic was proclaimed.

The new German government agreed to the armistice terms that the Allied generals demanded. Germany had to evacuate all occupied territories. The terms also provided for Allied and U.S. troops to occupy all German territory west of the Rhine River (known as the Rhineland), along with bridgeheads east of the Rhine at Cologne, Mainz, and Coblenz. The occupation troops moved into these areas during the first two weeks in December and remained until peace was concluded.

C End of Hostilities

On November 11, 1918, at 5:00 AM the Allied and German delegates signed an armistice on terms established by the Allies; at 11:00 the same morning hostilities on the western front came to an end. The end of the war on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 prompted relief and jubilation in all of the belligerent countries. The murderous struggle that had dragged on for over four years had finally ended. Political leaders then took up the task of trying to transform the military armistice into a durable peace.

X AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR I

In the aftermath of World War I, the political order of Europe came crashing to the ground. The German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires ceased to exist, and the Ottoman Empire soon followed them into oblivion. New nations emerged, borders were radically shifted, and ethnic conflicts erupted. Victors and vanquished alike faced an enormous recovery challenge after four years of financial loss, economic deprivation, and material destruction. Amid this chaotic situation,

the leaders of the victorious coalition assembled in Paris to forge a new international system that would replace the old order. The decisions they made would determine the future of Europe, and much of the rest of the world, for decades to come.

A Treaty of Versailles

Delegates from all of the Allied countries met in Paris, France, in January 1919 to draft the peace treaties. But it soon became evident that real decision-making authority rested in the hands of the leaders of the four states whose economic and military might had defeated the Central Powers: Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Britain, Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando of Italy, Premier Georges Clemenceau of France, and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States. The Japanese delegation was on the same level as the four European powers, but it participated in the conference debates only when matters pertaining to East Asia were discussed.

Britain's principal goal at the peace conference was to remove the threat of German naval power and to end Germany's overseas empire. Once Lloyd George had achieved these two objectives, he pursued a moderate territorial settlement out of concern that a harsh peace would prompt a defeated Germany to try to destroy the new international order. Orlando wanted the territory that the Allies had promised Italy when it entered the war as well as additional territory on the Adriatic Coast inhabited by Italians. Clemenceau had two principal goals: to establish a set of ironclad guarantees against a future German military threat to France and to require Germany to pay to repair the extensive damage that it had caused to northeastern France during the war. The United States had no financial or territorial claims against Germany, but Wilson fought for what he regarded as a peace of justice. He wanted a new international organization known as the League of Nations to be created to help prevent future armed conflicts.

The Treaty of Versailles that the representatives of the new German Republic were compelled to sign on June 28, 1919, was a compromise. On the one hand, Germany was deprived of portions of its prewar territory, such as Alsace and Lorraine, the city of Danzig (Gdańsk), and the Polish corridor. Also Germany was unilaterally disarmed and forced to accept an Allied military occupation of the Rhineland and to give up its colonial empire. Germany was forced to accept responsibility for the outbreak of the war and was required to pay the cost of repairing the wartime damage, known as reparations. On the other hand, Germany emerged from the peace conference as a potentially powerful country because its industrial areas were left intact and it did not lose any vital territory.

The U.S. Senate refused to approve the treaty in part because of internal U.S. politics, and the United States concluded a separate peace treaty with Germany in 1921. Without U.S. support, the economically weakened, war-weary countries of France and Britain were left with the difficult task of enforcing the provisions of the Versailles peace.

B Legacy of the War

When Marshal Foch of France learned of the Versailles Treaty's contents, he reportedly complained, “This is not peace. It is an armistice for twenty years.” As it turned out, he was uncannily accurate in his prediction of when humanity would be plunged into a second world war. World War II was a conflict that would surpass its predecessor in the number of deaths and injuries, the extent of physical destruction, and the geographical area affected. The terrible experiences of World War II have tended to overshadow the memory of the war that broke out in the summer of 1914. But World War I unquestionably represented a major turning point in history, and its consequences are still felt throughout the world.

The major fighting in World War I was confined to a relatively limited area: northeastern France, western Russia, the Balkan Peninsula, the Alpine frontier between Austria-Hungary and Italy, and the deserts of what would later be called the Middle East. But millions of people far from the battlefields felt the effects of the war, people who lived not only at the home front in Europe but also in towns and villages throughout the world. Men from as far away as Australia and India died on the fields of northern France and the beaches of Gallipoli. Africans from Senegal and Morocco fought in the trenches on the western front while Bedouin tribesmen from the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula rode camels against the Ottomans.

The death of over 10 million men in combat left a gaping chasm in the social and economic life of the postwar world. Many of those who survived the war returned home with physical disabilities that prevented them from rejoining the work force. Others suffered the lasting effects of what in those days was called shell shock and what is today labeled post-traumatic stress disorder, a psychological affliction that prevents a successful adaptation to civilian life. Many of the dead left widows and orphans who had to cope with severe economic hardship and emotional loss.

The war had a profound effect on the relations between men and women in the major belligerent states. As the men rushed to the battlefield, women moved into many traditionally male

occupations in industry. They then began to achieve a degree of independence and self-reliance that had been unavailable before the war. Many of the countries involved in the war (including Britain, the United States, and Germany) granted women the right to vote for the first time shortly after the war ended.

The war also profoundly disrupted the revered cultural tradition of the Western world. Optimism about human nature and about the glorious future of civilization was discredited as soldiers from what had been hailed as the most highly civilized societies on earth slaughtered each other without mercy. Artists began to produce works that mocked the self-confident assertions of humanism and portrayed the sordid realities of modern life. Social scientists and psychologists probed the sources of human aggression in an effort to explain the orgy of violence that had ended. Philosophers bemoaned the decadence of civilization and the decline of the west.

The economic consequences of the war were felt throughout the world. All of the countries involved had to borrow heavily to pay for the costs of the war, either from their own citizens or from foreign lenders. Such deficit-financing generated inflation, which impoverished many citizens living on fixed incomes. Some governments, such as the Soviet regime in Russia, repudiated their foreign debts, wiping out the savings of frugal investors in many countries. The war also wrought political changes that had serious economic consequences. For example, the new states in Eastern Europe that were formed out of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire found it nearly impossible to achieve economic viability. When the empire was divided into separate countries, the new countries were cut off from their prewar markets and sources of food and raw materials.

The postwar international order that was forged at the Paris Peace Conference proved to be unstable and short-lived. What Woodrow Wilson called “the war to end all wars” led to, within a generation, a second, even more destructive conflict. The early evaluations of the Versailles settlement were largely critical. People blamed the leaders of the victorious European powers for having betrayed President Wilson's principle of national self-determination by forcing Germany to cede territories with large German populations. They also criticized the imposition of crushing reparations on Germany. Some believed that the reparations would destroy Germany economically and guarantee the country’s resentment.

More recent scholarship has challenged this evaluation of the Versailles settlement as a harsh, vindictive, peace settlement. Germany's territorial losses were much less harsh than those imposed on its allies Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. In addition, some scholars have argued that Germany could have paid the reparations, if the country’s standard of living had been reduced. The reparation settlement failed not simply because Germany was not able to pay but because many German people did not accept that Germany was more responsible for the war than any other country. In addition, the wartime coalition of Britain, France, and the United States, which might have been powerful enough to enforce the treaty, dissolved shortly after the war as each country concentrated on its own domestic issues.

When Nazi leader Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, he was able to destroy much of the Versailles treaty by exploiting two pervasive sentiments of the 1930s. The first was the lingering suspicion, particularly widespread in Britain, that Germany had been treated unfairly at the peace conference and that its demands for territorial changes should be considered. The second was the universal belief that any political compromise with Nazi Germany was preferable to another European war. The diplomacy of appeasement, which enabled Hitler to remilitarize Germany and take over territory during the 1930s, was therefore a direct outgrowth of the memories that millions of survivors retained of the traumatic experience of the World War I. They were intent on not repeating the experience at all costs.