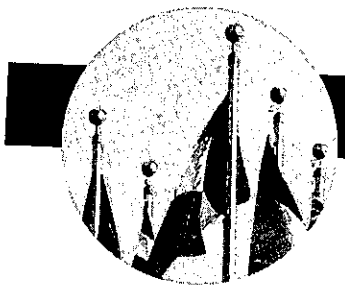


CHAPTER 3

World War I: The Turning Point of European Ascendancy

THE YEARS AFTER WORLD WAR I PRODUCED MANY NOVELS IN ALL LANGUAGES revealing the peculiar horror of soldiers' lives in the front-line trenches. The most famous of these is certainly Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928). The story focuses on a group of German schoolboys from their enlistment in the army under the urgings of their patriotic high school teacher until the very last of them has been killed in France on a day when the official report is that the Western Front has been "quiet."

Like most soldiers, these boys-turned-men talk mainly in matter-of-fact terms about their daily experiences. But on one occasion Remarque, a front-line veteran himself, depicts them in a rare discussion of why the war that is killing them had happened. Wars happen, says one, "mostly by one country badly offending another." A comrade objects: "A country, I don't follow. A mountain in Germany cannot offend a mountain in France. Or a river, or a wood, or a field of wheat." "Don't be stupid," retorts the first. "I don't mean that at all. One people offends the other—." But the second interrupts "Then I haven't any business here at all. I don't feel myself offended . . . ," adding ironically "I can be going home right away."

The old soldier who now leads them suggests, "Just you consider, almost all of us are simple folk. And in France, too, the majority of men are laborers, workmen, or poor clerks. Now just why would a French blacksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us? No, it is merely the rulers. I had never seen a Frenchman before I came here and it will be just the same with the majority of Frenchmen as regards us. They weren't asked about it any more than we were."

"Then what exactly is the war for?" asks a younger soldier. But though the discussion continues for awhile, his question is never really answered. Finally, one growls, "The best thing is not to talk about the rotten business," and the old soldier agrees, "It won't make any difference, that's sure."[1]

Thus these young men, confronted daily with death, can find no answer to the question why. But the question is still a good one to keep in mind while reading the following chapter. Why, exactly, do wars happen? Why did this one happen?

Causes of World War I

The collapse of Europe's world dominance began with an assassination. It took place on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, then under Austro-Hungarian rule but in the 1990s the scene of savage ethnic strife after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. A nineteen-year-old terrorist, Gavrilo Princip, stepped up to the car in which Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, was making an official visit to the city. With a shaking hand he pumped bullets into the archduke and his wife, fatally wounding them both.

Because the Austrian government correctly suspected that Princip's terrorist organization, the Black Hand, had the covert backing of the head of intelligence of the neighboring kingdom of Serbia, Austria-Hungary retaliated by threatening and then declaring war on Serbia. The hostilities soon expanded. One after another, honoring commitments made in treaties with their allies, the major powers of Europe entered the most costly war the world had yet witnessed.

In the end, some 10 million young men were killed and another 20 million crippled. In France, more than 1.3 million died, a quarter of all the men of draft age (between twenty and thirty-eight) in 1914; in addition, half the draft-age population had been wounded by 1918. Death reaped a rich harvest among civilians as well. Millions died from malnutrition in Germany, as the British blockade cut off food supplies, and in Russia, where the still-developing economy could not cope with both total war and normal requirements.

Other consequences of World War I had even longer-lasting significance. To mobilize manpower and materiel, governments extended their control over the lives of citizens, creating a precedent for later government management of society to meet crises. To meet the gigantic costs of World War I, governments resorted to methods of financing that continued to strain the world's economy for generations. The stresses of the war gave communism its first opportunity when V. I. Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized control of the 1917 revolution that had toppled Russia's tsarist government. Thus began the formation of the hostile blocs that divided the world for most of the century, until communism finally collapsed. Above all, the impact of the war and its aftermath helped Adolf Hitler take power in Germany in 1933. The rise of a man dedicated to reversing the outcome of World War I by force probably made a second world war inevitable. From that conflict, Europe would emerge in ruins in 1945, too feeble ever to re-establish control over the rest of the world.

The shots fired by Princip at Sarajevo in 1914 killed not only the heir to the Hapsburg throne but eventually the European-dominated world system. They marked one of the great turning points of history. When the slaughter stopped in 1918, people groped for an explanation of its origins. How could a political assassination, in a town unknown to most Europeans of 1914, have led to such a disaster?

Aggression or Accident?

In the peace treaty they wrote at Versailles, the "winners" of World War I (France, Britain, and the United States) naturally held the "losers," especially Germany, responsible—though it makes little sense to speak of winners and losers after a conflict that mortally weakened every country involved, except the United States. Article 231 of the Versailles treaty placed the blame on decisions made by German leaders between the shooting of the archduke on June 28 and the outbreak of general war in early August.

If we could believe, as the victors claimed at Versailles, that World War I was caused by the deliberate aggression of evil leaders, we would have the key to preventing future wars. Peace could be maintained by preventing people with such intentions from obtaining power, or by constantly resisting them if they already held power. In fact, however, most historians believe that well-meaning, unimaginative leaders in every capital stumbled into World War I. By doing what most people believed was normal for defense, they produced a result none had ever intended.

Ideas cause wars: ideas of how the world is divided and how to resolve conflicts within it. Ideas of nationalism and of alliances underlay World War I. The idea of South Slav nationalism inspired Princip to fire his fatal shot. The local conflict between South Slav nationalism, represented by Serbia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire escalated into a world war because of European leaders' notion that their nations' safety depended on maintaining credible alliances. These two ideas were reflections of some more basic characteristics of the European-dominated world of 1914. We cannot explain why South Slav nationalists like Princip wanted to destroy the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and why Europe was tangled into alliances that pulled everyone into the conflict, without understanding the nature of international relations in 1914, the assumptions that Europeans made about their obligations to their national communities, and even the general mood. A full appreciation of these factors makes it much easier to understand the link between the shots at Sarajevo and a war of 30 million casualties. If that assassination had not triggered a world war, some similar event elsewhere might have done so.

The Multinational Empire

The shots at Sarajevo might never have been fired had multinational Austria-Hungary not survived into the twentieth century. A state that included people of a dozen ethnic groups seemed out of date to a nationalistic age that believed every ethnic group should have a nation of its own. Austria-Hungary was a mosaic of ethnically diverse provinces collected over a thousand years of wars and dynastic marriages (Map 3.1). Some of these ethnic groups felt they were unfairly treated by the dominant Austrians and Hungarians, and by the twentieth century their rebelliousness had been encouraged by developments on the empire's borders. Nations such as Italy had emerged as independent homelands for some of the ethnic groups that felt oppressed under Hapsburg rule.

In the capital, Vienna, it was feared that a rebellion by another ethnic minority would mean the end of the empire. The nightmare was that the independent kingdom of Serbia would do for the empire's South Slavs what Italy had

The capture of the assassin of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, June 28, 1914. *The Granger Collection*

done for its Italians. Since a palace revolt in Serbia had replaced rulers sympathetic to Austria-Hungary with fanatical nationalists, discontented South Slavs within the empire could look across the border for arms and encouragement. Through the assassination of the archduke, Princip and his fellow terrorists, Austrian subjects who sought a nation of their own, aimed to provoke a war that would destroy the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

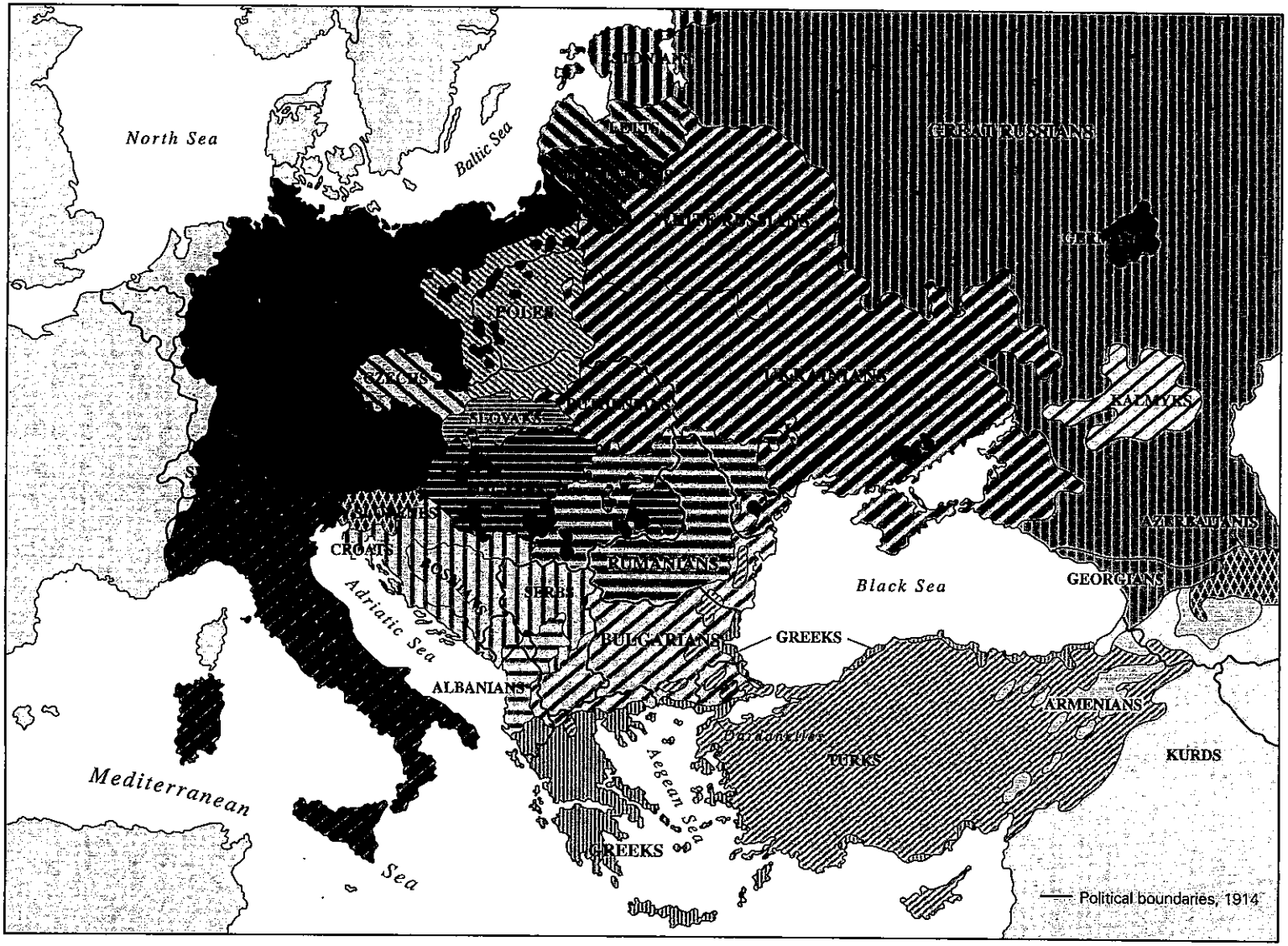
They succeeded. In Vienna, the Austro-Hungarian government took the assassination as a historic opportunity to eliminate the Serbian menace. On July 23, Austria-Hungary dispatched to the Serbs an insulting set of demands that no independent nation could have been expected to accept.

Alliances and Mobilization

The ultimatum to the Serbs set off a chain reaction that within ten days involved almost all the major powers in war. Government leaders believed that in a showdown the loser would be the first country that did not stand with its allies. A power that proved a weak or disloyal ally would soon have no allies left.

In 1914 Europe was divided into two combinations of great powers: the Triple Alliance o

Map 3.1 Ethnic Groups in Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Balkans Before World War I


North Sea
Baltic Sea
GREAT RUSSIANS
POLES
SLOVAKS
CZECHS
RUMANIANS
SERBS
CROATS
BULGARIANS
GREEKS
ALBANIANS
KALMYKS
GEORGIANS
ARMENIANS
TURKS
KURDS
Black Sea
Adriatic Sea
Aegean Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Political boundaries, 1914

Germany, Austria, and Italy and the Triple Entente of France, Russia, and Britain. Ironically, these alliances had originally been formed for defensive purposes. In a clash over European or colonial issues, diplomats had felt their countries would face less risk of attack or defeat if backed by a strong ally.

The events that led to the outbreak of World War I suggest that the leaders had miscalculated. Alliances made it easier, not more difficult, to go to war. The more aggressive partners tended to recklessness because they were counting on allied help. The less aggressive partners were afraid to restrain their ally, lest they appear unreliable and thus find themselves alone in the next crisis. Had the rulers of Austria-Hungary not been sure of German support, they might not have risked war with the greatest Slavic nation, Russia, by attacking Serbia. But the German government essentially gave the Austro-Hungarian government a "blank check" to solve the Serbian problem as it chose. Because of their own blundering foreign policy of the past quarter-century, the Germans felt encircled by unfriendly nations. Ringed by France, Britain, and Russia, the Germans felt they could not let down their one reliable ally.

In the Bosnian crisis of 1908–1909, Russia had challenged Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia but eventually had backed down. In 1914, however, the Russians were determined to stand by their South Slavic kinfolk. When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28 (despite Serbian acceptance of all but one of the demands), the Russians began mobilization. Tsar Nicholas II, who had recently sponsored two international disarmament conferences, would have preferred war against Austria-Hungary alone. Russian military experts, however, explained that their mobilization plan did not permit that kind of flexible response. The tsar had only two choices, they said. He could remain at peace, or he could launch total war on all fronts.

When the tsar chose the latter course on July 30, the events that followed were almost automatic. Though some German leaders began to think of drawing back, it was too late. With the Russian army mobilizing on their borders, they felt forced to launch full-scale war. Germany expected to fight both France and Russia; its only hope of success would be to finish off France quickly before the slow-moving Russians posed too great a threat. Thus German mobilization meant a direct threat to France. The French, outnumbered almost two to one by Germany, believed that their national survival depended on the Russian alliance. Having done little to restrain Russian belligerence, the French responded to the German threat by mobilizing.

Although Britain and France had long been enemies, British rivalry with Germany had recently drawn Britain into a loose alliance, involving some joint military planning, with France. Thus British leaders felt a commitment to help the French. The new friendship of Britain and France, and the cooling of once-friendly British-German relations, resulted above all from the German decision at the turn of the century to build a high-seas fleet. The ensuing arms race convinced the British that the new German battleships were a direct threat to the Royal Navy. Even so, the British public probably accepted the need for war in 1914 only when the Germans invaded neutral Belgium. German military planners, guided by strategic rather than diplomatic priorities, thought the quickest way to defeat France was to attack through Belgium. The British government could now lead its people to war for the moral cause of defending a violated neutral country. Thus, by August 4, all the major European powers but Italy had toppled over the brink into war.

The immediate blame for this catastrophe falls on the monarchs and ministers who made crucial decisions with the aim of either bluffing their opponents into backing down or entering

a war with maximum allied help. All considered the preservation of their national interests more important than the vaguer general European interest in maintaining peace. The vital interests of Serbs, Austrians, and Russians justified waging a local war even if it might spread. The Germans and French believed they served their own interests by backing even aggressive allies, because the loss of an ally seemed more dangerous than the risk of war.

In one sense, then, World War I was the result of a series of apparently reasonable calculations, as national leaders decided that each new step toward war was preferable to a backward step that implied national humiliation or isolation. Thus the confrontation was played out to the point of collision.

Nationalism and Interdependence

To avoid the trap into which they fell, Europe's leaders would have had to go against people's perceptions of the nature of the world and against values derived from those perceptions. In a general sense, World War I was caused by the fact that people were nationalists, feeling themselves to be not Europeans but Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, or South Slavs. Although growing global interdependence was making this vision of an ethnically divided continent obsolete, most Europeans knew no higher goal than national self-preservation.

The decade before the war had seen a few steps toward internationalism. An International Office of Public Health and a World Missionary Congress had been created; these institutions recognized that neither disease nor the word of God was restrained by borders. Over half of Europe's trade union members belonged to internationally affiliated unions, united by the idea that workers of all countries had more in common with each other than with their employers. A growing peace movement placed its hopes in the permanent International Court of Arbitration recently established in The Hague. But such expressions of internationalism counted for little against the prevailing nationalism, which exalted individual countries. Many people interpreted international politics the way Charles Darwin had interpreted the world of nature: in the struggle for survival, the weak perished and the strong dominated.

To many people the major European powers seemed already locked in economic struggle for raw materials and markets. Germans resented the fact that their belated achievement of national unity had denied them a colonial "place in the sun" like the empires of Britain and France. By creating a navy to assert its aspirations to world power, Germany came into confrontation with Britain, even though each country was the other's best export customer. Substantial sectors of both economies would have collapsed without the markets provided by the "enemy."

The perception of the world as an arena of conflict rather than interdependence weighed heavily on the calculations of statesmen in 1914. Most people everywhere had learned in school to accept this view. Even Russia was fumbling toward making elementary education compulsory by the time of the war. In parts of Germany all young children had been educated since the early nineteenth century. Britain and France had made their educational systems universal in the 1880s. After school came military service. All the major powers except Britain had universal conscription—the draft.

The patriotism young men learned from their schoolmaster and the drill sergeant was reinforced by what they read in the newspapers. Now that most of the population could read and write, mass journalism entered its golden age. The number of European newspapers doubled in twenty years. And patriotism sold papers. The international conference held at Algeciras in 1906 to deal with a colonial confrontation between Germany and France

was the first to be covered by a pack of reporters. Although nations continued to keep their treaties secret, diplomats would henceforth have to negotiate their way out of international showdowns with patriotic public opinion looking over their shoulders.

An Age of Militarism

Hemmed in by public opinion, statesmen struggling to resolve international issues also had to reckon with increasing military influence on decision making. Europe in 1914 was in the grip of *militarism,* the dominance of a military outlook and of the men who embodied it. Of the major heads of state, only the president of the French Republic never appeared in uniform. The German Kaiser, the Austrian emperor, and the Russian tsar always wore uniforms. This custom suggests the supreme prestige of soldiers, especially the generals who commanded the vast armies the draft made possible.

Europe's generals and their allies in industry, finance, and journalism formed a kind of military-industrial complex. The creation of the German fleet, for example, was facilitated by a publicity campaign financed and managed by admirals and shipbuilders. Lucrative contracts were their reward. Such military spending did not mean that a country's leaders were planning aggression. Armaments were amassed in the name of defense, to provide a "deterrent" against attack. These buildups did not prevent war in 1914, however. Indeed they had the opposite effect. Measuring their armaments against those of a potential enemy, some commanders became convinced that they had the upper hand and could risk war. Others feared that they were about to lose their advantage and argued that if a war was to be fought, it should be fought soon. Estimations of this kind were particularly dangerous because military men were specialists trained to think almost entirely in military terms. Such were the advisers who persuaded Nicholas II that partial mobilization was impractical in 1914. And General Alfred von Schlieffen's strategic masterstroke of launching the German attack on France through Belgium brought Great Britain into the war, thus leading to the German defeat.

Against this background of intense national rivalry and expanding militarism, the decisions statesmen made in 1914 are understandable. None of them had any idea of how long and devastating a war between countries armed with twentieth-century technology would be. Neither did the public. Cheering crowds filled the streets of every European capital in the summer of 1914, greeting declarations of war with delirious enthusiasm.

Europeans had been taught that war was the real test of a nation's toughness. Only those past middle age could remember a war between major powers in Europe. For the young, war meant a short-lived colonial contest that occurred far away, involving someone else, and brought profit and prestige to the victor. For the last ten years, tension had been mounting domestically and internationally. Within each of the major powers, social conflicts had produced strikes and violence. Europe had gone from one diplomatic crisis to another, all ended unheroically through negotiation. Now a crisis had come along that diplomats could not solve, and many people felt relief. The whole society could unite against a common enemy.

As they rushed off to fight that enemy, the soldiers of 1914 could not know that they were embarking on the first of two European civil wars that would end Europe's domination of the world.

Battlefronts, 1914–1918

The war that began in 1914 led to fighting in almost every part of the globe. In Africa south of the Sahara, invasions from British and French colonies quickly captured most of Germany's holdings, though in East Africa a German force continued the battle against a British Indian

army until 1918. In the South Pacific, British imperial troops from Australia and New Zealand seized German outposts. Britain's ally Japan snapped up other German possessions and appropriated the German slice of China.

Closer to Europe, the long-decaying Ottoman Empire entered the conflict on the side of the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). This move threatened not only Russia's southern flank but also Britain's link to India through the Suez Canal. The British not only fought the Ottomans but also encouraged revolt among the Ottomans' Arab vassals, while making a conflicting promise—the Balfour Declaration—that Ottoman Palestine would become a national homeland for Jews. As a result, the war provoked by the frustrated aspirations of the Serbs, once Ottoman subjects, helped unleash the turmoil of conflicting national aspirations that still torments the Middle East in the twenty-first century.

All these conflicts were extensions of the European battle lines. Only in 1917 did the war become a world war in the sense that whole continents were pitted against one another. Then the weight of the United States, dominant in North and South America, had to be thrown into the scales to match a Germany that had overrun much of continental Europe, penetrated deeply into Russia, and fought Britain and France and their worldwide empires to a standstill.

The Entente Versus the Central Powers

Though hardly anyone in 1914 foresaw the bloody stalemate of the European war, calculation might have predicted such an outcome. The Central Powers and the Entente Powers were rather an even match. Britain's naval might gave the Entente the advantage on the seas. Though the construction of the German fleet had made Britain an enemy, the two nations had only one significant naval encounter, at Jutland in 1916. There the Germans sank more British ships than they lost but did not risk a second confrontation. Too precious a weapon to be hazarded, the German battleships rusted in port while the British blockade cut Germany off from the overseas world. Against blockade, Germany could muster only its submarines, the weapon that would eventually make the United States another German enemy.

On land the two alliances were more equally matched, despite the Entente Powers' two-to-one advantage in population. Russia's millions of peasants in uniform were so inadequately equipped that some were sent into battle unarmed and expected to find the weapons of dead or wounded comrades. France and Britain could do little to help, for their prewar lines of communication to Russia were blocked by the Central Powers and their Turkish ally. Indeed, Germany's enemies never successfully coordinated their strategies. The war effort of the Central Powers, by contrast, was effectively directed from Berlin.

Since the citizens of each nation were convinced that they were defending their homeland against unprovoked attack, neither alliance had an edge in morale. Both were sufficiently determined to fight the land war to a draw. Thus victory could be achieved only by mobilizing overseas manpower and materiel, either by squeezing resources from the colonial empires or by drawing the world's most powerful neutral nation, the United States, into the conflict. Since British control of the sea lanes gave the Entente Powers better prospects of developing these advantages in a long war, the Germans felt they had to score a quick victory.

Stalemate in the West

The campaign of 1914 failed to produce the hoped-for victory. Germany's initial rush through Belgium carried its advance guard up to the Marne River, scarcely twenty miles from Paris (Map 3.2). The French victory on the

Marne was a very close brush with destruction, but it was a victory.

The Battle of the Marne may have decided the war. By Christmas 1914 the armies' rapid advances and retreats had given way to stationary front lines. Both sides dug into the soil of a corner of Belgium and northeastern France. The French drive against Germany failed, and the Germans reversed the Russian advance on their eastern border. But these successes could not compensate for the loss of German momentum in the west. Germany found itself in the very situation its prewar strategy had tried to avoid: a protracted war on two fronts. Though few sensed it at the time, Germany had perhaps already lost the war. Many million lives were to be sacrificed, however, before that loss was driven home.

During 1915 and 1916 the war was dominated by the futile efforts of both sides to punch a hole in the enemy front. Launched against elaborately fortified lines of trenches, these offensives became massacres. The German attack on the French fortress at Verdun in 1916 cost each side a third of a million men. In the same year the British attack on the Somme River won a few square miles of shell-torn ground at the cost of over a half-million lives. The defending Germans lost nearly as many.

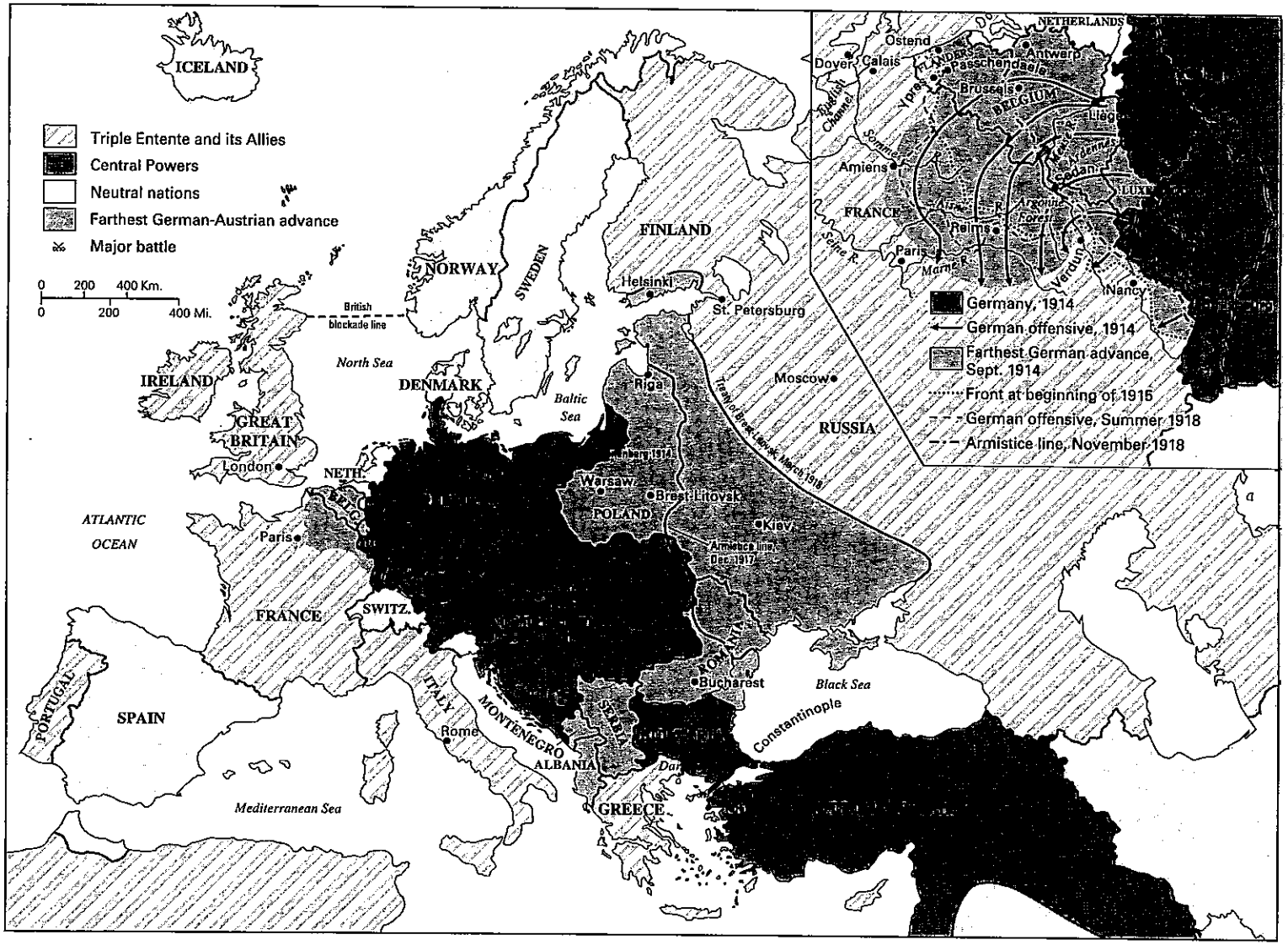
Numbers like these do not convey what life in the trenches was like. Probably no earlier war, and perhaps no later one, imposed such strains on fighting men. Soldiers spent months in a filthy hole in the ground, their boredom interrupted only by the occasional crack of a sniper's rifle or a dogfight between airplanes. (Both sides had quickly learned to put this new technology to military use.) Sometimes the clang of the gas alarm warned the men to put on their masks as a poisonous cloud drifted toward them. When the rumble of artillery fire in the background had risen for a few days or weeks to a roar, they knew they would soon have to go "over the top," out of their trenches and across no man's land toward the enemy's barbed wire, under a hail of machine gun and heavy weapons fire. The result of these offensives was always the same—failure to break through.

Both sides tried but failed to break through on other fronts. The Entente Powers attracted neutral Italy into the war by promising it a share of the spoils. The Italian challenge to the Austrians soon bogged down, however, giving the Entente's leaders another stalemated front to worry about. They also tried, half-heartedly, to establish a closer link with the Russians by sending an expedition to seize the Ottoman-controlled straits that connect the Mediterranean to Russia's Black Sea ports. Ottoman forces, led by the future creator of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal, offered effective resistance. The expedition to Gallipoli proved another fiasco.

The Central Powers also tried to break the deadlock by expanding the conflict. Bulgaria was encouraged to join the German side and successfully invaded Serbia. By 1917 Germany and its satellites controlled most of southeastern Europe, but this success was no more decisive than the continuing German victories against the Russians.

The German submarine effort to cut Britain's ocean lifelines had to be suspended after a U-boat torpedoed the British liner *Lusitania* off the Irish coast in May 1915. Though it was rightly suspected that the ship carried a secret cargo of munitions, most Americans did not believe that excused the drowning of more than twelve hundred people, among them over one hundred Americans. American outrage compelled the Germans to abandon the practice of torpedoing without warning.

Map 3.2 World War I in Europe, 1914–1918


ICELAND
Triple Entente and its Allies
Central Powers
Neutral nations
Farthest German-Austrian advance
Major battle
0 200 400 Km.
0 200 400 Mi.
British blockade line
NORWAY
SWEDEN
FINLAND
Helsinki
St. Petersburg
North Sea
Baltic Sea
IRELAND
DENMARK
GREAT BRITAIN
London
NETH.
Riga
Moscow
RUSSIA
Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918
Hungary 1914
Warsaw
Brest-Litovsk
POLAND
Kiev
Armistice line, Dec. 1917
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Paris
FRANCE
SWITZ.
ROMANIA
Bucharest
Black Sea
Constantinople
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
ITALY
Rome
MONTENEGRO
ALBANIA
GREECE
Mediterranean Sea
NETHERLANDS
Ostend
Dover
Calais
Antwerp
Passchendaele
Brussels
BELGIUM
Liège
Ypres
English Channel
Somme R.
Amiens
Meuse R.
Argonne Forest
Sedan
LUXE.
Marne R.
Reims
Verdun
Nancy
Seine R.
Germany, 1914
German offensive, 1914
Farthest German advance, Sept. 1914
Front at beginning of 1915
German offensive, Summer 1918
Armistice line, November 1918

The two sides staggered into 1917 with no hope of victory in sight. By now the enthusiasm of 1914 had evaporated, and the mood everywhere was one, at best, of determination to survive. Some people, particularly socialists, urged that the war be stopped by declaring it a draw. But leaders everywhere shrank from such a solution. Without a victory, the previous butchery would seem pointless. And there would be rich prizes for winning.

German industrialists and military men expected to annex Belgium and parts of northeastern France, as well as a hugh swath of Russia. For France, defeat of the Central Powers would mean recovery of the northeastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Victory would enable Italy to incorporate within its borders the remaining Italian-speaking regions of Austria. For Britain it would mean ending the German challenge to its commercial and naval pre-eminence. Hard-liners were now in control in almost every capital, and they used their wartime powers of censorship and arrest to silence doubters. Because technology seemed to have made defensive positions impregnable and offensives unbearable, the weary armies of Europe faced the prospect of apparently endless struggle.

1917: The Turning Point

Two events made 1917 the decisive year of the war. Russia withdrew from the conflict, and the United States declared war against the Central Powers. The net result was an advantage to the Entente side.

Why did the United States enter the war? Idealists point to a U.S. feeling of kinship with the Western democracies. Cynics note that an Entente defeat would have cost the U.S. industrial and financial communities a great deal in contracts and loans. In any case, U.S. entry probably became inevitable when the Germans decided, in January 1917, to resume unrestricted submarine warfare. This was a calculated risk. The German high command expected that renewed Atlantic sinkings would bring the United States into the war but hoped to starve Britain into submission before American intervention could become decisive. The Germans also tried to incite Mexico to reclaim vast territories lost to the United States in the nineteenth century. The disclosure of this plan by British intelligence showed Americans just how far the Germans were prepared to go.

The entry of the United States marked the turning point of World War I. But it took time for the Entente's new advantages in manpower and materiel to become apparent. Meanwhile, the emergence in Russia of a revolutionary government determined to make peace at any price seemed a devastating blow to Entente hopes. The Bolsheviks believed the war had given them a historic opportunity to make a revolution by fulfilling the yearning of the Russian masses for peace. Even so, they hesitated for a time to pay the price the Germans demanded. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) required them to hand over a quarter of Russia's prewar European territory, a third of its population, and half of its industrial plant. When Lenin signed, he ratified a decision many Russian peasant soldiers had already made by starting home from the battlefield.

The final phase of the war, from the spring to the autumn of 1918, amounted to a race between trains carrying German troops west to France from the Russian front and ships transporting U.S. soldiers eastward to France. Reinforced from the east, the German spring offensive did break through. Once again the Germans were at the gates of Paris. This second Battle of the Marne, however, was Germany's last gasp. In August the German army's chief strategist, General Erich Ludendorff, admitted to the Kaiser that he had no hope of victory. Germany's enemies were counterattacking its collapsing allies. As the Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated, its subject peoples declared their independence.

Inspection of Gurkha Troops by British Officers Before Being Dispatched to the Western Front. *The Gurkhas, recruited from the small Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, have formed part of the British army since the early 1800s. Copyright © The Gurkha Museum, Winchester*

The Hapsburg crown was the oldest but not the greatest to fall in 1918. In Germany, sailors mutinied rather than sail on a final suicide mission. This spark of rebellion set the whole country alight. Deserted even by the generals who had once been his staunchest supporters, the Kaiser fled. Democratic and socialist politicians proclaimed Germany a republic.

It was their representatives who met the supreme commander of the Entente and American armies, French general Ferdinand Foch, aboard his command train. The terms he demanded were stiff. Germany must withdraw its armies, which were still fighting deep in their enemies' territory, behind the Rhine River. Germany must renounce the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and hand over much of its railway rolling stock and shipping to the victors. With the British blockade threatening their country with starvation, Germany's representatives had no real choice. Protesting bitterly, they signed an armistice. Thus at 11 A.M. on November 11, 1918, the guns at last fell silent in ruined northeastern France.

Since 1918, there have been other wars, and Americans now celebrate Veterans Day in November, not Armistice Day. We do not always recall that the occasion commemorates men who died fighting what they believed was a war to end war. The generation that first observed November 11, however, was vividly aware that it had survived an experience unparalleled in

history, not only for the men in the trenches but even for those who remained at home.

Home Fronts, 1914–1918

World War I was fought on the "home front" as well as on the battlefield. Everyone in each country, not just the men in uniform, was in the battle and had to make his or her contribution to the national effort.

Though the air blitz and guided missile attacks of World War II were foreshadowed thirty years earlier by German bombing raids on London, the technology of 1914–1918 was inadequate to make every citizen a target of enemy attack. In a sense, however, Europe's shops, factories, and farms became another fighting front. As it became clear that neither side was going to win a quick victory, leaders realized that it was essential to harness the efforts of every individual. Unprecedented coordination and coercion would be required. No aspect of people's lives could be left unmanaged.

In this way, World War I had a revolutionary impact on the societies of all the major powers. The new controls imposed on citizens were justified as wartime expedients, and many were relaxed when the war was over. Even so, they established precedents that made the postwar world a very different place. Many of the basic trends in twentieth-century government, politics, economics, and thought can be traced back to the experience of total war in 1914–1918.

War and Government

The war gave a new dimension to the role of government. Before 1914, Western governments had gradually made themselves more and more responsible for the welfare of their citizens, insuring them against old age or disability, limiting their hours of work, forbidding unhealthy workplaces. Germany was the most protective; France and the United States were the least. Every new measure met vigorous opposition, however, for political thought was still dominated by the basic nineteenth-century liberal conviction that the best government is the one that governs least. Government today is the largest and most powerful organization in society. But in most major European nations in 1914 the "government" was a committee of legislators who exercised limited functions as long as they enjoyed the confidence of a parliamentary majority (or, in Germany and Russia, the confidence of the monarch).

A committee, or cabinet, of ministers oversaw bureaucracies whose numbers and powers varied from one nation to another. Nowhere, however, were bureaucrats very numerous, nor did their responsibilities extend much beyond providing the basic services for which governments had long been responsible. They maintained law and order and raised the modest taxes needed to balance the budget every year, while providing defense and the few other essentials not left to private initiative.

All this changed radically after 1914. Prolonged war demanded a more effective mechanism for planning and decision making than could be provided by the prewar parliamentary system, in which government was essentially a debating tournament. Even in countries with long-established parliamentary traditions, prime ministers emerged who personally exercised wide emergency executive power, tolerating little parliamentary interference: David Lloyd George in Britain and Georges Clemenceau in France. World War I pushed aside even venerable traditions "for the duration." The British Defense of the Realm Act, for example, allowed the government to censor or even silence newspapers, violating one of the most cherished British freedoms.

The number of government employees increased enormously. Twenty clerks had handled the purchase of munitions for the prewar British army. But by 1918, when the draft had put 3 million in uniform, the procurement of arms was the work of a Ministry of Munitions em-

ploying sixty-five thousand civil servants. The wartime concentration of power into a few hands and the extension of that power into every sphere of life were most marked in Germany, where the tradition of parliamentary government was weaker and political tradition had long subordinated the citizen to the state.

In Germany, as in the rest of the modern Western world, private economic power had become concentrated in trusts and *cartels** before 1914. Nevertheless, the belief remained strong that the best economy was one of free competition, with a minimum of government interference. Now, cut off by the British blockade from many essential supplies, the German government began to make all the economic decisions. Scarce commodities were rationed, and skilled workers were directed by government order to the jobs where they were needed. The government mobilized the scientific community in fields such as industrial chemistry to develop synthetic substitutes for unavailable imports such as rubber. A government bureaucracy headed by Walter Rathenau, the prewar head of the giant German General Electric Company, oversaw the distribution of available raw materials to the most efficient producers, usually the largest. In the process the prewar economy was altered beyond any hope of restoration.

By the war's end, the German government managed so much of the economy that the system was described as "war socialism." It was operated, ironically, by the conservative military men and industrialists who had been most hostile to socialism before the war. Individual Germans had become cogs in the military machine: every man between the ages of seventeen and sixty was mobilized under military discipline. And the German case is only the most extreme example. In each of the countries involved in the war, government authority was concentrated and expanded.

War, Economics, and Society

In addition to changing ideas about the proper functions of government, the war altered conventional notions of how governments should get and spend money. Traditional methods could not produce the vast sums needed. The British and French governments liquidated between a quarter and a third of their citizens' foreign investments to pay for essential goods purchased overseas, but they still emerged from the war owing enormous debts. In every belligerent country, new taxes were introduced and old ones raised. Nowhere was the resulting income more than a fraction of what governments were spending. They made up the difference by borrowing from their citizens, harnessing the new art of advertising to exhort savers to invest in the war effort. The supply of money was further enlarged by the easiest and most dangerous means of all: printing more of it.

The result was staggering inflation, though its full impact was not felt until after wartime price and wage controls were abolished. Only then did people realize what a new and terrifying financial world they lived in. The budget of the French government, for example, was forty times larger in 1918 than at the beginning of the war. The sum the French treasury had to pay out in interest alone was more than its entire annual budget before the war. The financial legacy of the war made the years 1918–1939 a period of almost constant economic strain.

Such economic changes inevitably produced profound social changes. For some social groups the war meant new opportunities. For example, as U.S. factories tooled up to produce the munitions the Entente demanded, industrialists took labor wherever they could find it. Thus began the migration of blacks from the rural South to the industrial North, a trend that

*Cartels are associations of private producers who agree to share markets and fix prices, thus limiting competition.

continued into the post-World War II years, profoundly transforming American life. In the increasingly interconnected world of the twentieth century, sharecroppers from Georgia found jobs in steel mills in Pittsburgh because farm boys from Bavaria were finding death in northeastern France.

European societies that had drafted a large proportion of their male populations, exempting only workers with critical skills, also recruited a "reserve army" of labor by hiring women for jobs monopolized before the war by men. Thereafter it was more difficult to argue that women's place was in the home. In fact, wartime necessity may have done as much as prewar agitation to break down the distinctions between the roles of men and women.

World War I created new opportunities for some groups but ruined others. Governments obsessed with maintaining production proved readier than prewar private employers to engage in collective bargaining. Trade unions thus won greater recognition. But workers felt they had not received just compensation for their contribution to the war effort, and a wave of strikes swept around the world with the coming of peace. In fact, workers' gains were vastly exceeded by the fortunes of profiteers who borrowed to build armaments factories, then paid their debts in a currency depreciated by inflation. Those hit hardest by the war, however, were the people who had lived comfortably before 1914 on a fixed income provided by a pension or on the interest from government bonds. In 1919 an income in British pounds (not by any means the most inflated currency) bought only a third of what it could purchase in 1914.

These economic distortions deepened prewar social divisions. When people had to accept a decline in their standard of living because of inflation, they naturally assumed that others must have gained at their expense. Wartime social upheaval laid the groundwork for the success of postwar political movements based, like those founded by Mussolini and Hitler, on hatred and an appeal to vengeance.

War's Psychological Impact

The postwar years were marked by a mood of cynicism and disillusionment, an inevitable reaction against the war enthusiasm every government had tried to drum into the heads of its citizens. World War I prompted the first systematic efforts by governments to manage information and manipulate mass emotions. Such efforts were inevitable in twentieth-century society. All the major powers except Russia were approaching universal literacy and universal male suffrage by 1914. People who could read and felt they had a right to vote could not be commanded to blind obedience; they would have to be shown reasons for making the sacrifices the national cause demanded.

Thus each government in World War I mounted a vast propaganda campaign to persuade its public, and potential allies, of the justice of its motives and the wickedness of the enemy. British propagandists convinced a generation that Germany had ordered its soldiers to chop off the hands of Belgian children. But even more damage was done by the *positive* slogans of the propagandists: that soldiers were fighting for the defense of civilization against barbarism, or for democracy against militarism, or for the abolition of war.

The postwar world quickly revealed that these slogans had been hollow half-truths. Postwar cynicism was a direct reaction to wartime campaigns that had played on pride, shame, and fear to mobilize opinion. When the Bolsheviks published the secret Entente treaties, showing that neither side's motives had been pure, when none of the lofty goals for which the war had supposedly been fought materialized even for the "winners," public opinion turned on the leaders whose official news turned out to be lies. The very values that had supposedly motivated the war were discredited. Wartime ideal-

Women riveters in a Puget Sound shipyard. *Wartime labor shortages gave new opportunities to women in many countries, including, in the United States, some women of color.* *National Archives*

ism, deliberately overheated, turned sour in the postwar world.

The postwar mood also reflected a more basic change in the human outlook. No generation since 1914–1918 has ever matched the nineteenth century's confidence in progress. The world had gone through an orgy of destructiveness that seemed to prove false everything the prewar world had believed in. In the words of a soldier in Remarque's classic novel *All Quiet on the Western Front,* "It must be all lies and of no account when the culture of a thousand years could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out." No wonder the postwar Dadaist movement of artistic rebels mocked the pretensions of the past by exhibiting a copy of the *Mona Lisa* wearing a moustache or suggesting that poetry should henceforth be written by cutting a newspaper into scraps and shaking them at random out of a bag. Such painting and poems might make no sense, but, as the war had just proved, neither did anything else. This was a dangerous discovery, for, as the great Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevski had warned, "If nothing is true, then everything is permitted." Today, when human beings permit themselves cruelties on a scale that earlier ages could not have imagined, we know what he meant.

In every sphere of modern life World War I accelerated trends already visible before 1914 and still powerful today. Politically it stimulated the growth of executive authority and government power. Economically it

spurred the concentration of economic power in large corporations increasingly interlocked with government, while destroying forever the comforting idea that money retains a constant value. The war leveled social distinctions between groups and destroyed some groups altogether. In every country, for example, the sons of Europe's landed aristocracies became the second lieutenants of elite regiments and were killed out of all proportion to their numbers. At the same time the war gave greater status to working men and women. By lessening the distances between social classes, however, the war may have heightened tensions, for now hostile classes were in closer contact.

Spiritually, too, World War I marked a turning point. Before 1914, only a minority doubted the nineteenth century's faith in the future. The skeptical mood became general after 1919, as the world began to guess how unsatisfactory a peace had been made.

Peacemaking, 1919 and After

No international meeting ever aroused such anticipation as the conference that convened in Paris in January 1919 to write the peace treaties. Surely, people thought, so great a war would result in an equally great peace.

The Wilsonian Agenda

Many hopes focused on U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. He arrived in Europe to a welcome greater than any other American leader has ever received. Wilson seemed to embody a new kind of international politics based on moral principles, rather than on selfish interests.

Early in 1918, Wilson had outlined American objectives in the war. Some of his Fourteen Points simply called for a return to prewar conditions. Germany must evacuate Belgium and restore its freedom, for example. But other points seemed to promise change in the whole international order. Wilson called for an end to the alliances that had dragged all the major powers into World War I. He advocated the removal of tariff barriers between nations and a general reduction of armaments. In settling the European powers' disputes over colonies, he declared, the interest of the colonized must be taken into account. The implication was that all peoples had an eventual right to choose their own government. This indeed was what Wilson promised to the subject peoples of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. To the Poles, too, Wilson promised a restoration of the country they had lost when Austria, Russia, and Prussia had carved up Poland during the eighteenth century.

For many critics of prewar power politics, the most hopeful of Wilson's Fourteen Points was the last, which proposed to reconstruct the framework of international relations. The countries of the world should form an association—a League of Nations—whose members would pledge to preserve one another's independence and territorial integrity. In this way, the system that keeps the peace in a smaller human community—willingness to obey the law and condemnation of those who defy it—would replace the international anarchy that had brought disaster in 1914.

Wilson had not consulted his allies about any of his proposals. The United States entered the war in 1917 with no obligation, Americans believed, to support the objectives of earlier entrants. The Fourteen Points seemed to promise Europe a just peace and to recognize the national aspirations of colonial peoples. Unfortunately the Paris Peace Conference produced no such results. To the rights of the non-Western peoples it gave little more than lip service. To Europeans it gave a postwar settlement—the Treaty of Versailles—so riddled with injustices that it soon had few defenders.

Colonial Issues in 1919

Four years of world war had undermined European rule over non-Western peoples. In their

frantic search for essential war materials, European powers increasingly treated their colonies as extensions of their home fronts. The non-Western peoples were thus subjected to many of the same strains that eventually broke the morale of European populations. In fact, European governments used much greater coercion on their non-Western subjects than they dared try at home. The British, for example, used methods of drafting labor and requisitioning materials that would have been enough in themselves to explain the postwar explosion of Egyptian nationalism. Colonies were also a reservoir of manpower. Almost 1.5 million Indians, for example, fought for Britain, and 62,000 of them were killed in the Middle East, Africa, and the trenches of France. The French recruited in their colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as among the Arab population of Algeria.

To dress a man in your own country's uniform is implicitly to admit that he is not your inferior. The French recognized this by opening French citizenship to Algerians who had fought under the French flag. But many Algerians had greater ambitions than becoming honorary Europeans. Their pride demanded an Algerian nation of their own. The image of European superiority had been drastically undercut by World War I. Hearing the propaganda that Europeans published against each other, non-Western people could conclude that the real savages were their colonial masters. As fighting spread around the world, some non-Western peoples actually saw their European conquerors beaten and driven out. A successful defense often depended on the help of the non-Western population. These developments—economic, military, and psychological—undermined the prewar colonial order and launched a wave of postwar restiveness from Africa to China.

Trusting Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination, some non-Western nationalists journeyed to Paris in 1919 to argue their case. But the peacemakers hardly acknowledged them. They handed over to Britain and France the territories in Africa and the Middle East that had belonged to Germany or to the Ottoman Empire. The only concession to Wilsonian rhetoric was that these territories became "mandates" rather than colonies. This new term implied that Britain and France did not own these lands but held them in trust for the League of Nations. The European country was responsible for preparing the territory for eventual self-rule. In practice, however, there might be little difference from prewar colonial rule. The French, for example, responded to Syrian complaints with tanks and bombers.

Ultimately, the statesmen in Paris not only refused to redefine the power relationship between the world's whites and nonwhites but rejected the principle of racial equality proposed by Japan, the nonwhite great power that could claim a place among the victors. The Latin Americans, the Italians, and the French supported the Japanese. The British, speaking for Australia—a thinly settled white outpost that greatly feared its neighbors on the Asian mainland—opposed the proposal. Without U.S. support, the Japanese initiative came to nothing. It was clear that the peacemakers intended, despite all the noble rhetoric, to re-create the European-dominated world of 1914.

This outcome had a tremendous impact on a whole generation of ambitious young Africans and Asians. Western ideas of democracy were shown to be reserved for Europeans. As the Wilsonian promise faded, some future Asian and African leaders turned instead to the country the Paris peacemakers had outlawed from the international community: revolutionary Russia. Only Lenin and his regime seemed inclined to offer sympathy and support to the wave of protest that swept the colonial world after World War I.

Whatever the intent of the Paris peacemakers, European colonial rule could never again be as secure as it had been in 1914. In Egypt, something close to full-scale revolution broke out against the British. In India, a local British commander in the Punjab demonstrated the firmness of British authority by ordering his

soldiers to fire on an unarmed crowd. Brigadier Reginald Dyer's troops killed nearly four hundred people and wounded more than a thousand. A century earlier, this massacre at Amritsar would hardly have been news. In 1919, however, the world reacted with horror. General Dyer was reprimanded by his military superiors and censured by the House of Commons.

Times had changed. Colonialism had acquired a bad conscience, perhaps in part because of all the wartime talk about democracy. By the early 1920s, Britain had launched both Egypt and India on the road to self-government. Indeed the colonial powers had little choice. Bled by four years of war, no European country could devote the same level of resources to colonial pacification as it had spent before 1914. But it took many years and another world war to persuade the British, and even longer to persuade the French, that their empires were too costly to maintain.

The Peace Treaties

The fate of the colonial peoples was a side issue for the peacemakers of Paris, whose real task was to draft the treaties ending the war with the Central Powers and their allies. They produced five such treaties. The Treaty of Sèvres imposed on the Ottoman Empire is discussed in Chapter 9. The three treaties that dealt with southeastern Europe essentially ratified what had happened in 1918. Out of the wreckage of the Austro-Hungarian Empire new nations emerged: Czechoslovakia for Czechs and Slovaks, Yugoslavia for the South Slavic peoples. Balkan nationalists like Gavrilo Princip got what they wanted. Whether their desires were wise remains a question. Most of these new countries remained economically little developed. Their ethnic animosities made cooperation among them unlikely. Miniature versions of the Hapsburg empire they had replaced, most of them contained dissatisfied ethnic minorities within their borders. Even so, most of these countries felt they had been cheated of the borders they deserved.

These new states were destined for a dismal fate. They were dominated after Hitler's rise by Germany and after his fall by the Soviet Union almost until its collapse. As separate victims of Hitler and Stalin, these countries suffered much more than when they had all belonged to the Hapsburg emperor. But there was no hope of resurrecting his regime in 1919, even if the peacemakers had wanted to. Even today, almost every ethnic group insists on having its own nation: in the 1990s, both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, multinational creations of 1919, disintegrated.

The hardest task in Paris was to decide what to do about Germany. To justify the loss of millions of lives, the statesmen had to ensure that future generations would not have to fight another German war. One approach that appealed to much of European public opinion and to military minds, notably in France, was to destroy Germany's military capability and economic strength. Now that Germany had surrendered, it should be broken up, so that there would be several weak Germanies, as there had been through most of European history.

The emotions that prompted demands for such a drastic solution are easy to understand. Would it have worked? After Russia's collapse, the Entente Powers had not been able to defeat Germany without the help of the United States. Was it likely that this wartime alliance could be maintained indefinitely in the postwar period to hold down an embittered German population? Moreover, in a world of economic interdependence, a country's former enemies are its future trading partners. A bankrupt and broken Germany might drag the whole world's economy down.

Considering such dangers, some concluded that a harsh peace was not the answer. The Kaiser and his regime, who bore responsibility for the war, had been driven from power. Germany was now in the hands of democratic leaders. Why not let it return on relatively mod-

erate terms to membership in a world community ruled by law?

Not surprisingly, this point of view was far more widely held in Britain and the United States than in France, on whose soil the war had been fought and whose richest farming and industrial regions the Germans had devastated. It would be difficult to convince the French to give up their guns. In 1919 the prevention of aggression by the League of Nations was only the dream of idealists.

The peacemakers of Paris failed because of this conflict of views between the wartime allies. It is just possible that World War II might have been avoided if one of these approaches to the German problem had been fully applied. The Treaty of Versailles, however, was a compromise that combined the disadvantages of both approaches. Despite some Wilsonian language, it imposed on Germany a peace no patriotic German could accept. But it did not cripple Germany enough to prevent it from eventually challenging the verdict of 1919 by force.

This outcome may have been inevitable. Wartime alliances usually come apart as soon as the common objective has been attained. Though all twenty-seven countries that had declared war on the Central Powers sent delegations to Paris, most of them, notably the Latin Americans, had made insignificant contributions to the war. The major powers shunted them into the background. Though Italy was considered a major power, it fared little better. Believing that their country had been denied its fair share in the spoils of victory, the Italian delegates left the conference for a time. Neither their departure nor their return could win them a larger share of the remains of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or any of Germany's former colonies.

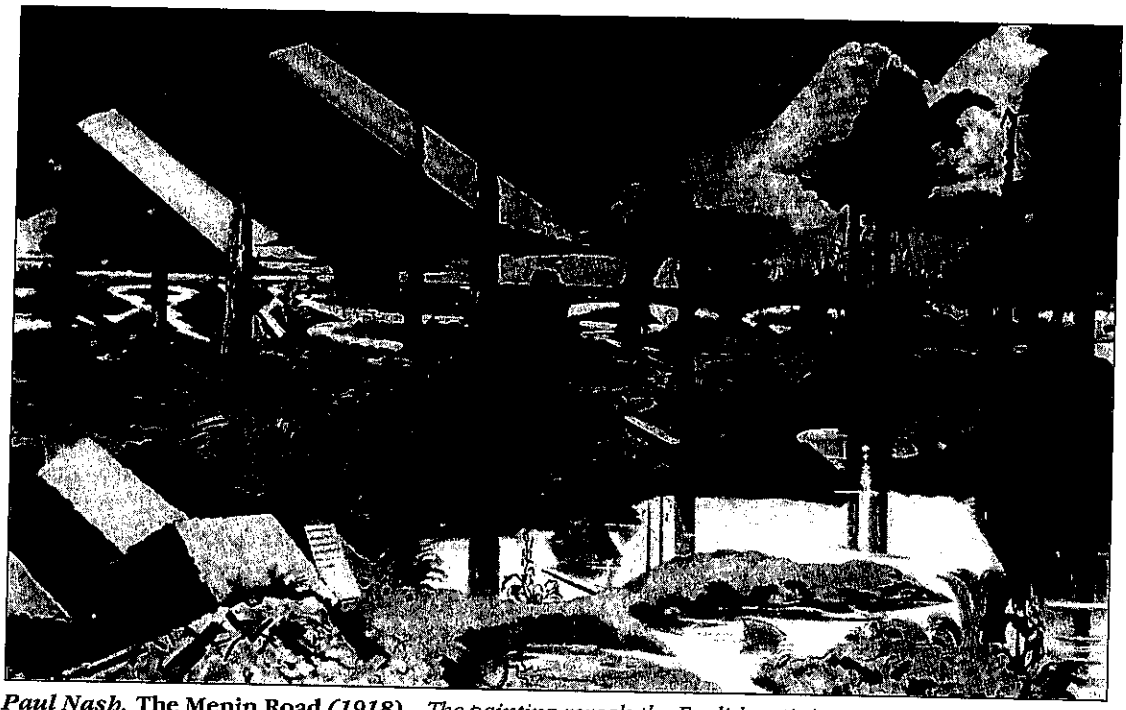
The important decisions of the Paris Peace Conference were the work of the Big Three: President Wilson, French Prime Minister Clemenceau, and British Prime Minister Lloyd George. Lloyd George was caught in the middle. He could foresee the dangers of a harsh peace, but he represented an exhausted, bankrupt country, some of whose newspapers had mounted a campaign to "hang the Kaiser." The worst clashes were between Wilson and Clemenceau, who were temperamentally far apart.

Clemenceau Versus Wilson

Clemenceau's determination had made an unmeasurable but real contribution to France's victory. Cynical and sarcastic, the French prime minister cared for nothing but his martyred country. France had suffered, he believed, as a result of incurable German aggressiveness; in time the Germans could be expected to attack again, and only force would stop them. All the talk about new principles in international affairs left him cold. "Fourteen Points!" he snorted. "Even the Good Lord only had ten points." Yet Clemenceau knew that France's safety depended on British and American support, especially since Russia had disappeared into a dark cloud of communist revolution.

Wilson, the sublimely self-confident former professor, believed that his country had no selfish motives—a position easier to maintain in relation to the United States' role in Europe than to its role in Latin America. He thus spoke from a position of moral superiority that Clemenceau, and others who did not believe that morality ruled international affairs, found hard to endure. Wilson spoke with the zeal of a missionary from the idealistic New World to the corrupt Old World. But he may not have spoken for U.S. public opinion. The congressional elections of 1918 had gone against his party, and a reversal of wartime enthusiasm would soon lead the United States back to its traditional isolation from European affairs.

Only the necessity of producing some conclusion enabled two such different men to hammer out a treaty both could sign. When its terms were published, both were bitterly attacked by their countrymen. French hard-liners condemned Clemenceau for not insisting on the territorial demands they thought essential to



Paul Nash,* The Menin Road *(1918). *The painting reveals the English artist's horror at the landscape of modern war: trees stripped bare by gunfire, earth cratered by shells, soldiers dwarfed by destruction. Imperial War Museum, London*

French security. Many of Wilson's advisers thought he had too often given in to European-style power politics, sacrificing the principle of a people's right to choose its own government.

Wilson's supreme goal was the creation of the new international organization, the League of Nations. Clemenceau could hardly take the idea seriously, for Wilson could not promise that membership would require any nation, least of all the United States, to help a future victim of aggression. The same difficulty arose when the United Nations was created in 1945. Sovereign nations proved unwilling to subject their freedom of action to international authority.

In return for French agreement to the establishment of the League, Wilson allowed Clemenceau to impose severe penalties on Germany. The German army was to be limited to a hundred thousand men. Germany could have neither submarines nor an air force. Characteristic of the compromise nature of the treaty, this virtual disarmament of Germany was described as the first step toward the general disarmament called for in the Fourteen Points. The Treaty of Versailles was full of provisions intended by Clemenceau to weaken Germany. The new Republic of Austria, the German-speaking remnant of the former Hapsburg state, was forbidden to merge with Germany, though a national vote made it clear this was the solution preferred by most Austrians.

With the Russian alliance gone, Clemenceau intended to surround Germany with strong French allies to the east. The new state of Czechoslovakia was given a defensible mountainous border that put millions of Germans under Czech rule. The Poland the Paris peacemakers resurrected included a "Polish

corridor" cutting through German territory to the Baltic Sea. Such terms made sense if the aim was to cripple Germany. But they flouted Wilsonian principles, and the Germans complained that the principle of self-determination had been honored only when it worked against them.

The Paris peacemakers also demanded that Germany should pay reparations. The word implies that Germany was to repair the damage its war had caused—not an unreasonable demand. But the bill drawn up by the victors was so astronomical—132 billion gold marks—that the Germans would still be making huge payments today if anybody were still trying to collect them.

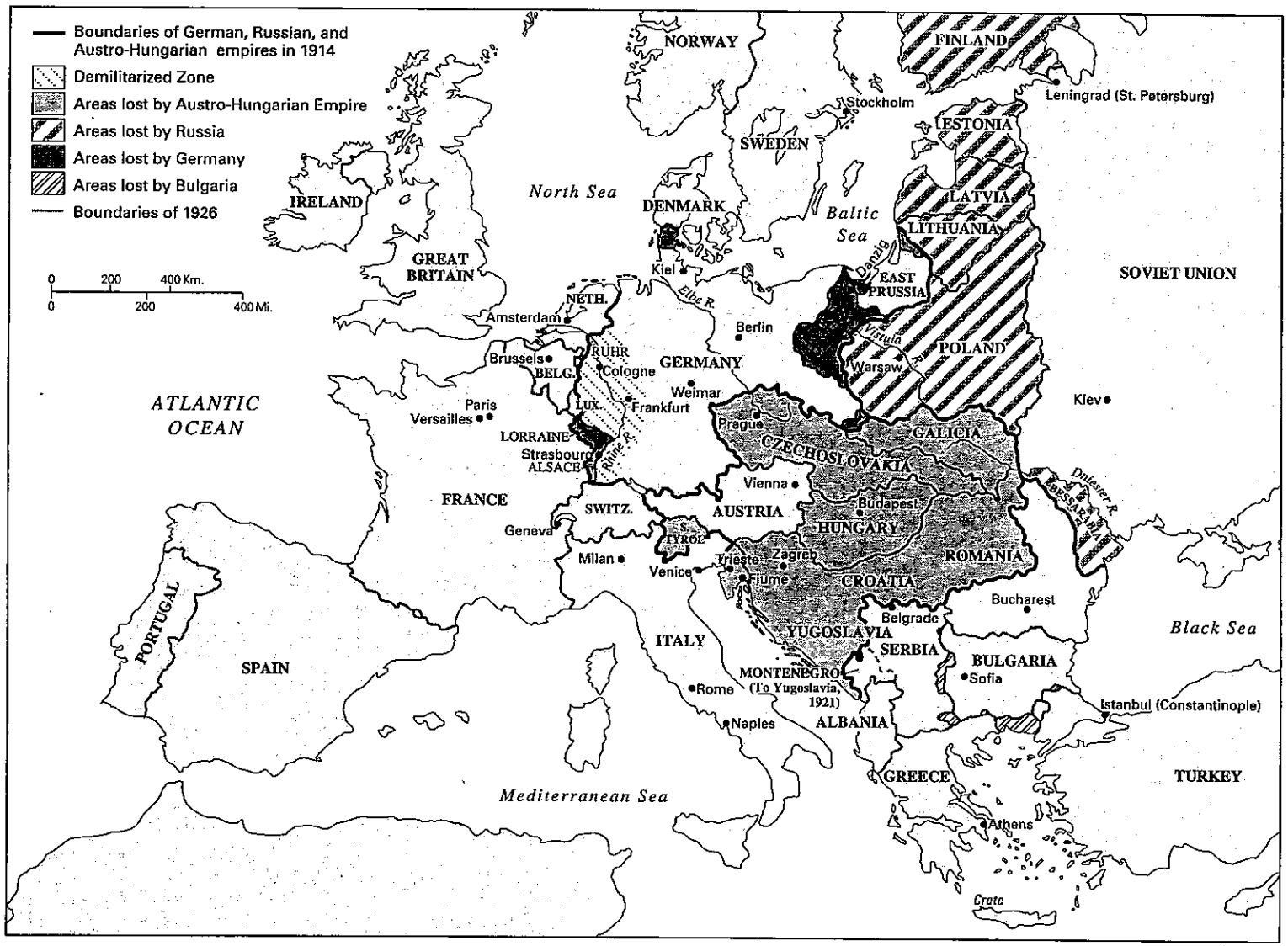
The old idea of collecting large sums from a defeated enemy may have been outdated in the twentieth century, when national economies were so interdependent. If the Germans had to turn over everything they earned, they would be unable to buy the goods the victorious nations wanted to export. The economists who raised such questions were drowned out by the insistence that "the Germans will pay." Indeed when the Germans did not pay enough, soon enough, French and Belgian armies reoccupied German territory to collect what was due. Germans then concluded that reparations were not a bill for damages but an excuse for Germany's enslavement.

To prevent another German invasion like those of 1870 and 1914, many Frenchmen felt German territory should be amputated in the west as well as in the east. In particular, they wanted to detach the Rhineland—the region between the French-German border and the Rhine—and place it under reliable French control. (Map 3.3 makes clear why the French would have liked to control this territory.) Even as the conference was meeting in Paris, renegade Germans working for the French tried to establish a separate Rhineland Republic, though the effort soon collapsed. The Rhineland issue provoked the bitterest of the many quarrels of the Paris conference. Wilson, backed by Lloyd George, warned that taking the Rhineland from Germany would create a permanent German grievance, comparable to Germany's taking of Alsace-Lorraine from France in 1871. Speaking for a country that had suffered casualties at thirty-six times the American rate, Clemenceau insisted that French control of the Rhineland was essential for French security. But he finally agreed to a compromise. The Treaty of Versailles stipulated only that the Rhineland be demilitarized. The Germans would keep it but could not fortify it or station troops there. In return for this concession, Wilson and Lloyd George signed a separate treaty committing their countries to help France if it was again attacked by Germany.

After months of argument, the Treaty of Versailles was complete. The victors handed it to the Germans to sign—or else. Germany's representatives were horrified. Their contacts with Wilson before the armistice had led them to expect a compromise peace. Now they were told to confess that Germany alone had caused the war, as Article 231 of the treaty proclaimed, and to pay a criminal's penalty.

By accepting the Treaty of Versailles, Germany's new postwar democracy, the Weimar Republic, probably signed its own death warrant. But its critics, like Adolf Hitler, never explained how the republic's representatives could have avoided the "dictated peace" of Versailles. Germany had lost the war. Because the fighting ended before Germany had been invaded, many Germans did not recognize this harsh reality. They saw the Treaty of Versailles as a humiliation to be repudiated as soon as possible. The treaty's reputation among the victors was hardly better. French hard-liners charged that Clemenceau had conceded too much and thrown France's victory away. "This is not a peace," said Marshal Foch, "but an armistice for twenty years."

The pessimism of these critics was confirmed within six months as the United States repudiated the agreements its president had negotiated. In November 1919 the Senate


Boundaries of German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires in 1914
Demilitarized Zone
Areas lost by Austro-Hungarian Empire
Areas lost by Russia
Areas lost by Germany
Areas lost by Bulgaria
Boundaries of 1926
0 200 400 Km.
0 200 400 Mi.
NORWAY
FINLAND
Stockholm
Leningrad (St. Petersburg)
SWEDEN
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
North Sea
Baltic Sea
IRELAND
DENMARK
GREAT BRITAIN
Kiel
Danzig
EAST PRUSSIA
SOVIET UNION
Elbe R.
NETH.
Amsterdam
Berlin
Vistula
POLAND
Brussels
BELG.
RUHR
Cologne
GERMANY
Warsaw
Weimar
Paris
Versailles
LUX.
Frankfurt
Kiev
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Prague
GALICIA
LORRAINE
Strasbourg
ALSACE
Rhine R.
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
Vienna
Dniester R.
BESSARABIA
FRANCE
SWITZ.
AUSTRIA
Budapest
HUNGARY
Geneva
S. TYROL
Milan
Trieste
Zagreb
ROMANIA
Venice
Fiume
CROATIA
Bucharest
Belgrade
PORTUGAL
ITALY
YUGOSLAVIA
Black Sea
SERBIA
BULGARIA
SPAIN
MONTENEGRO (To Yugoslavia, 1921)
Sofia
Rome
Istanbul (Constantinople)
Naples
ALBANIA
GREECE
TURKEY
Mediterranean Sea
Athens
Crete

refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles or the treaty promising American help to France. Americans were increasingly impatient with Europe's messy, faraway problems. The Old World, which had seemed so close in 1917–1918, again became remote: another world, a week away by the fastest ship. The 1920 presidential election was won by a likable, small-town newspaper publisher from the Midwest, Warren G. Harding. The choice reflected Americans' longing for a return to what Harding called "normalcy"—the way things had been before the United States became involved in a European war.

This American return to isolationism suggests the fatal weakness in Wilson's vision of a new world order. As an international organization, the League of Nations could keep the peace only if its members committed themselves to use force against any country determined to be an aggressor. Yet Wilson himself could offer no such commitment on behalf of the United States. The Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles showed that Americans, like other people, still insisted on judging international conflicts in terms of their national interests. With no power of its own, the League of Nations proved pathetically inadequate to the task of keeping the peace when international tensions mounted again in the 1930s.

The limitations of the League were particularly serious because the balance of power in Europe had been destroyed. The collapse of Austria-Hungary had left a vacuum of power in Central and southeastern Europe. Russia was in the hands of revolutionaries who encouraged the overthrow of all other governments; no one could form an alliance with such an outlaw regime. Indeed the new states the peacemakers had created in Eastern Europe were intended to contain not only Germany but the Russian communist threat. Britain, like the United States, now decided that the costs of getting involved in Europe outweighed the likely benefits. Using as their excuse the American failure to honor Wilson's commitment, the British also repudiated their pledge to defend France. This left an exhausted France alone (except for resentful Italy) on the continent with Germany. And Germany, though disarmed and diminished, was still the same nation that had held off the British Empire and two other major powers for most of the war. Its fundamental strengths—its numbers and its highly developed economy—could be mobilized by some future regime less willing than the Weimar Republic to accept the Versailles verdict.

World War I did not end until U.S. troops became combatants, along with many from the British overseas empire. If peace were to be maintained by some renewed balance of power, that balance had to be global. But many people in all countries were unable to draw this conclusion. Americans tended to see their intervention in international politics as a choice rather than as a necessity of the twentieth-century world. Over the next decades, they continued to come and go as they pleased on the world stage. Similarly, the British Empire soon became the British "Commonwealth of Nations," whose members did not automatically follow where Britain led. It would take a second world war to persuade all these peoples that they had a permanent stake in the global contest for power.

Map 3.3 Post–World War I Boundary Changes

Conclusion

Although it is sometimes said that wars do not settle anything, World War I resolved several prewar questions, though hardly ever in the way the people who started the war had hoped. It settled the fate of the ramshackle Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires. It showed that Europe, the smallest though the most developed of the continents, could not indefinitely dominate the globe. The war also

settled prewar uncertainties about the possible limits of government power over individuals. The disciplined fashion in which millions had marched to their deaths showed that power was virtually unbounded. At the same time, the war settled some questions about inequalities of civil rights based on birth or sex. Distinctions among citizens had given way to the demands of total mobilization (though discrimination had certainly not disappeared in 1918). And certainly the war gave a shocking answer to the prewar question of whether progress was inevitable. The art of surgery, for example, had advanced significantly during the war—prompted by improvements in the design of high explosives to blow people to pieces. It was hard to see this as "progress."

World War I also created a whole new set of postwar questions. If the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire proved that multinational states could not survive and that each people must have its own country, how could nations be established for all the hundreds of peoples around the world? And what would happen in places such as Ireland, Palestine, and South Africa, where more than one people claimed the same territory as their home? What would happen if government expansion continued? If the mobilization effort had created a greater social equality, would that eventually mean equal rights for everyone or an equal loss of freedoms? Would the mechanization of human life, so dramatically accelerated by the war, result in greater comforts or greater dangers?

By the mid-1920s some optimists thought they could see hopeful answers to all these questions. They found them in a country that was seeking to replace the European-dominated world system with a new system based on worldwide revolution. There, in Russia, an experiment in unlimited government power was taking shape. The country's goal was said to be the creation of a society based on literal equality. Its officially anointed heroes were its steelworkers and tractor drivers, whose machines would modernize a peasant land and make it the model for the twentieth century. Like those optimists of the 1920s from the West, but with a more analytical eye, we shall next look at the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)—the country that emerged, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, under Lenin and Stalin.

Note

1. Quotations from Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928), Fawcett Crest edition, pp. 203–207.

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