

The Treaty Of Versailles, The Fourteen Points, and League of Nations:
International Game Changers

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*“One day the great European War will come out of some damned foolish thing in the Balkans”
-Otto von Bismarck, German Chancellor (1862-1890)¹*

Introduction and Background On World War One

World War I claims the title as the first major, modern conflict. It took place after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Gavrilo Princip assassinated Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, coincidentally the Archduke's wedding anniversary and Saint Vitus Day.² St. Vitus day, known to Serbians as a day of remembrance for the humiliating loss of the Battle Of Kosovo in 1389, resulted in the loss of independence for the Serbian people at the hands of the Ottoman Empire.³ By parading in Sarajevo the Archduke's move rubbed salt into the wound of the annexation of Bosnia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Gavrilo Princip, who, along with many other Serbians, considered the Bosnian area a rightful part of Serbia. Princip “lit the spark of the powder keg of Europe” by assassinating the Archduke.⁴ Outraged by the assassination, Austria-Hungary determined to annex Serbia to put an end to the nationalism. The Austrians waited for their ally, Germany, to reassure their assistance in an offensive war against Serbia. Fortunately, Serbia's ally, Russia, agreed to assist Serbia in a defensive war against Austria-Hungary. On July 5, 1914, Austria-Hungary sent their ultimatum. The Serbian government refused, and on July 28 Austria-Hungary declared war. Within a week,

¹ Waugh, Joseph. “Prologue.” *Legion BC/Yukon Blog*, 22 Apr. 2015, legionbcyukonblog.org/2014/06/prologue-some-damned-foolish-thing-in-the-balkans-june-28-1914/

² Cleary, Vern. “The Powder Keg Explodes: The War Begins.” *Modern World History*, webs.bcp.org/sites/vcleary/modernworldhistorytextbook/wwi/section_2/thepowderkegexplodes.html.

³ Qafmolla, Ervin. “Serbs Celebrate Vidovdan and the Battle of Kosovo Amid Tight Security.” *Balkan Insight*, 16 June 2016, www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbs-celebrate-vidovdan-and-the-battle-of-kosovo-amid-tight-security-06-28-2016.

⁴ Simkin, John. “Gavrilo Princip.” *Spartacus Educational*, Spartacus Educational, 2016, spartacus-educational.com/FWWprincip.htm.

in a messy string of alliances, Germany and Austria-Hungary (Central Powers) joined together in a war against Russia, Serbia, Belgium, France, and Great Britain (Allied Powers).⁵

Lasting four years (July 28, 1914 - November 11, 1918) with an estimated 37,466,904 total casualties, many have dubbed WWI as The Great War.⁶ Resulting in an Allied victory, the war with Germany on the western front came to an official end with the signing of an armistice on the eleventh of November, 1918.⁷ The Treaty of Versailles formed a series of negotiations between the Allied and Central Powers. Former American President Woodrow Wilson participated in the negotiations, adding new ideas of a peaceful future with his Fourteen Points and League of Nations. Wilson's ideas helped determine the future of American involvement in foreign affairs and how the world would tackle international conflicts. The Treaty of Versailles has one of the biggest impacts on international conflict solving.

Treaties Before Versailles

Many times before WWI, peace between two nations resulted in the victor dictating the terms. Often, nations used the Carthage Approach. This approach usually fulfilled the motto of, "to the victor go the spoils" because the victor of the conflict determined the result. Usually that resulted in the loss of territory or war reparations.⁸ Prime examples consist of the Treaty of Tilsit and the Treaty of Frankfurt.

⁵ History.com Staff. "World War I History." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009, www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history.

⁶ Henson, UWOSH Faculty&Staff. "World War One: Casualty and Death Tables." *PBS: The Great War*, www.uwosh.edu/faculty_staff/henson/188/WWI_Casualties%20and%20Deaths%20%20PBS.html.

⁷ Duffy, Michael. "Firstworldwar.com." *First World War.com: The Armistice*, 22 Aug. 2009, www.firstworldwar.com/features/armistice.htm.

⁸ Clemens, Walter C. "How to Win at Peace: Creating New World Orders." *Dynamics of International Relations: Conflict and Mutual Gain in an Era of Global Interdependence*, Second ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, pp. 63–64.

The Treaty of Tilsit consisted of France, Prussia, and Russia. France won The War of the Fourth Coalition. Following the Carthage Approach, the French did not hold back, they set the harsh terms of 140 million Francs as their reparation, along with occupation until a payment, and the ruling of some Prussian territories.⁹

The Treaty of Frankfurt followed the Franco-Prussian war. Prussia dictated the treaty. Due to the lack of third party arbitration, the resentment between the countries grew. Prussia demanded the reparation of five billion Francs, France's heavily fought over Alsace-Lorraine region, and Prussian occupation of vital French territory.¹⁰

The absence of a negotiation system involving a neutral, third party to arbitrate resulted in harsh, unfair treaties, that usually debilitated the loser and greatly advanced the victor. Nations often achieved peace by these treaties but strong resentment followed in their wake. The Hague Conventions sought to make war and peace treaties less brutal.

The Hague Conventions (1899, 1907)

These conventions set the first international rules of warfare. The idea first came from the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs under Tsar Nicholas II. Twenty-six nations came to the convention to discuss limitations on the expansion of arms, the application of the principles from the Geneva Convention (1864) regarding naval warfare, and the revision of the unratified Brussels Declaration (1874) on the laws of land warfare. Unfortunately their main goal, the limitation of armaments, did not succeed, however they did achieve laws prohibiting the use of

⁹ Rickard, J. "Treaties of Tilsit, 7 and 9 July 1807." *Historyofwar.net*, 21 Oct. 2015, www.historyofwar.org/articles/Treaty_tilsit.html.

¹⁰ "Historical Atlas of Europe (10 May 1871): Treaty of Frankfurt." *Omniatlas*, omniatlas.com/maps/europe/18710510/.

asphyxiating gases, expanding bullets, and projectiles dropped from war balloons.¹¹ The Conventions formed the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). This court established a global, intergovernmental medium for settling arguments.¹² Article I states, “Signatory Powers agree to use their best efforts to insure the pacific settlement of international differences”. That put a system in place for the signed countries to use the PCA as best as possible. Article XVI further reiterates the necessity of arbitration by stating that the “...application of International Conventions arbitration is... the most effective and at the same time the most equitable, means of settling disputes which diplomacy has failed to settle”.¹³ The 1907 conference further elaborated the points of the 1899 convention. Another convention, scheduled for 1915, failed to meet due to WWI. Woodrow Wilson took the PCA into consideration when forming the League of Nations.

The Treaty Of Versailles

Subsequent to the armistice between the Allied and Central Powers the peace negotiations that ensued formed the Treaty Of Versailles. Almost thirty nations participated in the colloquy, but representatives from the United States, Great Britain, France, and Italy dominated the discussion. While American President Woodrow Wilson sought after a peaceful future, Britain, France, and Italy held onto their vengeful views.

Having the third most casualties in the war, France wanted heavy consequences placed upon Germany.¹⁴ Fearing another German invasion, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau requested assurance that such an invasion would not happen again. The French thought that

¹¹ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. “Hague Convention.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 28 Aug. 2014, www.britannica.com/event/Hague-Conventions.

¹² “History.” *Cour Permanente D'Arbitrage | Permanent of Court Arbitration*, pca-cpa.org/en/about/introduction/history/.

¹³ “The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA).” *NVVN*, www.nvvn.nl/artikel/the-permanent-court-of-arbitration-pca/.

¹⁴ “Casualties.” *WWI Facts*, ww1facts.net/quick-reference/ww1-casualties/.

peace negotiations should be treated with harsh terms towards Germany, due to the fact that the French blamed the war on them. Clemenceau believed no paper agreements would compensate for the losses suffered. He wanted to divide Germany into smaller states, which would weaken the German economy, he wanted control of the Rhineland, and payments for damaged French property, orphaned children, and widows.¹⁵

Vittorio Orlando represented Italy at Versailles. After joining the war in 1915 through The Secret Treaty of London. The Treaty promised the Adriatic Coast to Italy after the war. Orlando expected these promises to take place at Versailles. Instead of the whole area of the Adriatic, as promised, Italy received the small regions of Istria and South Tyrol. The rest of the Adriatic formed Yugoslavia.¹⁶

Great Britain suffered great casualties and put in a considerable amount of effort into the war. Although they did not share the same resentment that the French had, the British public opinion favored the same harsh treatment. The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, served as a middle ground between the peace-seeking ideas of Wilson and the absolute revenge attitude of the French. George pushed for the reparations for widows, orphans, and those no longer able to work. He also sought to expand the British Empire and prevent Germany from waging another war. George knew that a vengeful Treaty would result in an embittered Germany, so he looked to protect the interests of Britain and side with Wilson on some points of the Treaty to prevent animosity.¹⁷

¹⁵ Smitha, Frank E. "The Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles." *The Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles, 1919*, www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch09.htm.

¹⁶ British Broadcasting Corporation . *Modern World History: The Treaty of Versailles*, www.johndclare.net/peace_treaties5_bbcnotes.htm.

¹⁷ "Treaty of Versailles." *Treaty of Versailles - New World Encyclopedia*, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Treaty_of_Versailles.

Woodrow Wilson approached the Treaty to install peace for the nations of Europe. He wanted to use a “just peace” strategy. Wilson believed the international relationships of Europe had fundamental flaws. He called for a reduction of armaments, freedom of the seas, and an end to secret diplomacy. Also, he claimed that reduction of trade barriers, readjustment of colonies, and respect for self-determining nations would end the nationalistic ways that helped spur the war in the first place. He also advocated for the formation of a League of Nations. Unfortunately, the French and British advocated for their views more successfully.¹⁸

Negotiations did not come easily, due to opposing views from the four major players. Clemenceau once said, “It is far easier to make war than peace”.¹⁹ The Allied Powers came to an agreement and signed the Treaty on June 28, 1919. This resulted in redrawing German borders, requiring reparation payments from Germany, and forming the League of Nations. Written by the Allies with little German participation, the Treaty satisfied many of the desires of the major players. The Germans expected the Treaty to follow Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, but it did not meet that expectation.

The Treaty forced the Germans to accept Article 231, the infamous *War Guilt Clause*, which states:

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.²⁰

¹⁸ “The Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations.” *Ushistory.org*, Independence Hall Association, www.ushistory.org/us/45d.asp.

¹⁹ “War Quotes .” *Tentmaker Ministries*, 2017, www.tentmaker.org/wars/war-quotes24.html.

²⁰ “Treaty of Versailles.” *National Archives UK*, National Archives UK, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/transcripts/aftermath/versailles.htm.

It made Germany responsible for making reparations to the Allied nations. One could never estimate the exact amount of damage caused, but the Treaty set the payment required at thirty-three billion dollars or about 133 billion gold marks. Such a payment was astronomical for the time. Germany's economy suffered after the war which made such high payments even more crippling to their economy.²¹ The U.S. did not accept the Treaty; therefore, it did not get any reparations, even though it had loaned large sums of money to its allies. Coming out of its isolationist shell, the United States asserted itself as a major player during wartime and continued to do so afterwards. It sponsored international plans to help deal with German reparations. The U.S. initiated the Dawes Plan (1924) and the Young Plan (1929) to combat the issues. These plans dipped American toes in the pool of international affairs.²²

Other detrimental aspects of the Treaty for Germany included: reduced German population and territory by approximately ten percent. Germany returned the Alsace-Lorraine region to France, the Treaty reinstated Poland with many territories of former German West Prussia, and the Allied nations received all of Germany's overseas colonies in Africa, China and the Pacific. These terms added more humiliation to the Germans.²³

Germans reacted unhappily to the Treaty. Debilitated by harsh terms, the German economy suffered, unemployment rates skyrocketed, and the new government, named the Weimar Republic, struggled with inefficiency and unsuccessfulness. The war caused great distrust between the Allies and Germany thus placing Germany as an outcast in international

²¹ Castillo, Daniel. "German Economy in the 1920s." *German Economy in the 1920s*, Dec. 2003, www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/projects/1920s/Econ20s.htm.

²² "United States History." *Reparations*, www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1369.html.

²³ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Treaty of Versailles." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 29 Dec. 2017, www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Versailles-1919.

affairs. This period of isolationism and hatred caused by the Treaty proved dangerous.²⁴ The conditions following the Treaty created the rise of the NSDAP and Adolf Hitler. He used the humiliation caused by the Treaty to help boost him into power. The German people, feeling the same resentment towards the Treaty as Hitler, did little to stop Hitler. This would lead to the Second World War.²⁵

Wilson's Fourteen Points

Not sharing the same resentments as France and Britain, and Italy, the United States President, Woodrow Wilson drafted his vision for an end to the war that would bring just and secure peace. Wilson appointed a committee known as The Inquiry which helped him refine his ideas for peace. In December of 1917, Wilson asked his committee to design specific ideas for a comprehensive peace settlement. He used the committee's ideas to help draft the Fourteen Points.²⁶ The Fourteen Points he called for, open treaties, freedom of the seas, open economic activity, reduced armaments, redistributing German colonies, and evacuating Russian territory.²⁷ He also advocated for actions that would readjust territories to ensure peace and autonomous development of countries previously under another empire's control as well as the return of France's Alsace-Lorraine. Wilson's last two points that he spoke about restored Poland and affirmed the creation of a League of Nations.²⁸ Many of these points attempted to establish a peaceful future for Europe. Wilson did not hold on to any resentments of wrong doings that

²⁴ "Germany and the Treaty of Versailles." *Schoolshistory.org.uk*, schoolshistory.org.uk/topics/european-history/weimar-germany/germany-and-the-Treaty-of-versailles/.

²⁵ "The Nazi Rise to Power." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008206.

²⁶ "Wilson's Fourteen Points, 1918." *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/fourteen-points.

²⁷ "History - World Wars: Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points." *BBC*, BBC, www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/fourteen_points.shtml.

²⁸ "8 January, 1918: President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points." *Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, 2008, avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp.

European countries have done to the United States. By attempting to allow countries autonomous development and an open mindedness to new territories and territorial readjustment, Wilson showed his just and secure peace.

These ideas of a peaceful future set up America as the peacekeeper during the peace negotiations. Wilson hoped the Fourteen Points would serve as a basis of the Treaty. However, opposition to the Fourteen Points by Britain and France defined itself during the drafting of the Treaty²⁹. Unfortunately Britain, France, and Italy had more interest in gaining what they had lost and wished to punish Germany. Although they did not not all agree on most of the points, many of the nations agreed on the formation of an international collective security agency that would later develop into as the League of Nations. The U.S. never adopted the Treaty or joined the League but Wilson's ideas helped form a system of peaceful, international conflict solving.³⁰

The League of Nations

The League of Nations remains the biggest impact of the Treaty and Wilson's Fourteen Points. Further into the peace conference the Allies came to a unanimous agreement on the Covenant of the League of Nations. Mainly, the League assured the integrity and independence of sovereign nations and worked to protect them from aggression. To do this the League had an assigned Assembly of permanent members with representatives from the U.S, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan (along with four alternating members), and an International Court of Justice. Wilson believed that an effective League could safeguard peace for years to come and have the power to establish procedures for arbitration.³¹

²⁹ "Fourteen Points." *Fourteen Points - New World Encyclopedia*, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Fourteen_Points.

³⁰ "President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points (1918)." *Our Documents*, www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false.

³¹ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "League of Nations." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 29 Jan. 2018, www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations.

When Wilson returned home to submit the Treaty and Covenant to Congress for its consent and ratification, opposition in Congress had formed. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge led the opposition using fears that the League would drag the United States into an organization that would reduce the U.S.' ability to protect its own interests. League supporters saw the League as a positive way to solve international issues using collective system; whereas, Lodge's supporters feared the consequences of American involvement in Europe's even more complicated affairs.³² Although the United States never joined the League, Wilson's ideas asserted America's position in foreign affairs by creating the League.

Conclusion

World War I brought a new era of war and peace. United States involvement in the peace conferences that followed shaped both international and American involvement in conflict. The Treaty of Versailles, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the League of Nations shaped conflict solving. The Treaty of Versailles established the new way of making a treaty that both punished the aggressor and tried to assure peace for the future. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points placed America in the First World War as the peacekeeper as he tried to keep resentment out of his ideas. Lastly, the League of Nations attempted to establish an international community to prevent another devastating war from breaking out. Ultimately that failed. The impact of these three components sculpted the future of Europe and the future of the world with it. America would later get involved in WWII and once again act as a peacekeeper and establish another form of solving international conflict.

³² *The League of Nations, 1920*, U.S. Department of State, history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/league.

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