

WEEK 9

Notes on the Causes and Course of World War I

Overview

- **Tensions:**
 - Rooted in the clash between **nationalism and imperialism**.
 - **Nationalist movements**, emerging from the Age of Romanticism, sought self-rule, conflicting with the imperial ambitions of empires.
 - **Colonial Rivalry:**
 - **Competition among European powers for overseas territories**, driven by imperialism, created friction.
 - Most colonizable land had already been claimed, leading to disputes over smaller regions and unresolved boundaries.
 - **Immediate Trigger:**
 - Assassination of Archduke **Franz Ferdinand** of Austria-Hungary by **Gavrilo Princip**, a Slavic nationalist, in Sarajevo (1914).
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Major Powers and Their Motivations

1. **Great Britain:**
 - Focused on maintaining its **naval supremacy** and consolidating its vast global empire.
 - Initially **distanced from continental disputes** but became involved to counter **Germany's militarization and protect Belgium**.
2. **France:**
 - Humiliated after losing **Alsace-Lorraine** to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).
 - Aimed to regain these provinces and sought security through **alliances with Russia and Britain**.
3. **Germany:**
 - **Unified in 1871; rapidly industrialized under Otto von Bismarck and later Kaiser Wilhelm II**.
 - **Sought a larger share of colonies and global influence, engaging in militarization and aggressive diplomacy**.
4. **Austria-Hungary:**
 - A **multi-ethnic empire struggling with nationalist uprisings**.
 - Clashed with Russia and Serbia in the Balkans over influence and territorial claims.
5. **Russia:**
 - **Protector of Slavic nations, aligning with Serbia against Austrian dominance**.

- **Internal weaknesses** (e.g., the **Russo-Japanese War loss in 1905** and political unrest) limited its effectiveness.
6. **Italy:**
- **Recently unified but economically weaker compared to other powers.**
 - Initially part of the Triple Alliance, later switched sides to join the Entente for promises of territorial gains.

Key Causes

Nationalism:

- **Emerged as a unifying force** (e.g., in Germany and Italy).
 - **In multi-ethnic empires like Austria-Hungary, nationalist movements created tensions.**
 - **Serbian nationalism inspired Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Franz Ferdinand.**
2. **Imperial Rivalries:**
- **European powers competed for colonies and influence** (e.g., in Africa and Asia).
 - **Territorial disputes** (e.g., **Alsace-Lorraine** between France and Germany) **deepened hostilities.**
3. **Military Buildup (Militarism):**
- **Nations invested heavily in armies and navies, creating an arms race.**
 - **Germany built a powerful military, threatening Britain and France.**
4. **Alliance Systems:**
- **Triple Alliance:** Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.
 - **Triple Entente:** Britain, France, and Russia.
 - **Alliances turned small conflicts into a large-scale war.**
5. **Diplomatic Failures:**
- **Kaiser Wilhelm II** of Germany pursued aggressive policies, isolating Germany diplomatically.
 - Failed treaties (e.g., the lapse of the **Reinsurance Treaty** with Russia) left Germany vulnerable.

Pre-War Crises

1. **Moroccan Crises (1905, 1911):**
- Germany opposed French influence in Morocco, attempting to disrupt the Anglo-French alliance.
 - Both crises backfired, isolating Germany and strengthening the Entente.
2. **Bosnian Crisis (1908):**
- **Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, angering Serbia and Russia.**
 - Russia, weakened by its 1905 defeat, backed down, fueling Serbian resentment.
3. **Balkan Wars (1912-1913):**
- **Balkan states defeated the Ottoman Empire, creating regional instability.**
 - Serbia emerged stronger, intensifying its rivalry with Austria-Hungary.

Outbreak of World War I

1. **Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand:**
 - Gavrilo Princip, a member of a nationalist group, assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.
 2. **Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia:**
 - Austria issued harsh demands, expecting rejection to justify war.
 3. **Chain Reaction:**
 - Austria declared war on Serbia → Russia mobilized to support Serbia → Germany declared war on Russia and France → Britain entered the war after Germany invaded neutral Belgium.
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Warfronts

1. **Western Front:**
 - **Schlieffen Plan:** Germany's strategy to quickly defeat France by invading through Belgium.
 - Stalemates led to trench warfare, with massive casualties in battles like **Verdun** and the **Somme**.
 2. **Eastern Front:**
 - Slower to develop due to Russia's logistical challenges.
 - Germany decisively defeated Russia at **Tannenberg** and **Masurian Lakes**.
 3. **Balkan Front:**
 - Austria struggled to subdue Serbia, leading to prolonged fighting.
 4. **Naval Warfare:**
 - British naval blockades restricted German supplies.
 - Germany's **U-boat campaign** targeted Allied shipping, provoking U.S. involvement.
 5. **Gallipoli Campaign (1915):**
 - Allied attempt to open a supply route to Russia through Turkey; ended in failure.
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Technological and Strategic Aspects

- **Trench Warfare:**
 - Defenses dominated due to advancements in machine guns, artillery, and chemical weapons.
 - Minimal territorial gains came at high human costs.
- **Air and Tank Warfare:**
 - Airplanes were used for reconnaissance and attacks.
 - Tanks debuted but had limited effectiveness due to their novelty.

- **Submarine Warfare:**
 - German submarines targeted Allied shipping, sinking vessels like the **Lusitania** and straining relations with the U.S.
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Endgame

1. **U.S. Entry (1917):**
 - Sparked by unrestricted German submarine warfare and the **Zimmerman Telegram**, where Germany encouraged Mexico to attack the U.S.
 2. **Collapse of Central Powers:**
 - German defeat at **Amiens** and Austria's internal collapse marked the end.
 3. **Treaty of Versailles (1919):**
 - Germany accepted war guilt, paid reparations, and ceded territories.
 - Empires like Austria-Hungary disintegrated; new nations like Czechoslovakia and Poland emerged.
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Impact of World War I

- **Political Shifts:**
 - Ended monarchies in Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary.
 - Set the stage for revolutions (e.g., Russian Bolshevik Revolution) and the rise of ideologies like communism and fascism.
- **Economic and Social Effects:**
 - Widespread devastation and loss of life.
 - Economic strain on Europe, leading to instability.
- **Legacy:**
 - Creation of the **League of Nations** (although the U.S. did not join).
 - Unresolved tensions contributed to World War II.

Failures and Successes of the League of Nations

Purpose of the League of Nations

- Established in **1920** after World War I to promote **peace, cooperation, and security** worldwide.
- It aimed to:
 1. **Prevent wars by resolving disputes through dialogue.**
 2. **Reduce armaments to ensure safety.**
 3. **Promote justice and uphold territorial integrity of nations.**

Key Principles of the League

1. Nations agreed **not to resort to war** unless necessary.
2. Disputes were to be resolved by arbitration or through the **Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ)**.
3. **Collective security** was enforced, meaning any act of war against one nation was treated as war against all.

Moral and Practical Foundation:

- a Built on the ideals of democracy, racial and social justice, and cooperation.
- b encouraging members to harmonize their interests with global objectives.

Strengths and Successes

1. Dispute Resolution:

- o Settled disputes like:
 - **Åland Islands (1921)**: Resolved tensions between Finland and Sweden over sovereignty by neutralizing the islands and guaranteeing autonomy.
 - **Upper Silesia (1921)**: Prevented hostilities between Poland and Germany through a plebiscite and territorial partition.
 - Frontier issues in **Albania, Memel**, and the Balkans.
 - **Greece-Bulgaria Conflict (1925)**: Promptly intervened to prevent escalation after a border incident, organizing reparations and an inquiry.
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- o Introduced treaties for arbitration and peaceful conflict resolution. \

2. Efforts in the China-Japan Conflict (1931):

- o **Halted open warfare and initiated diplomatic talks after Japan's military intervention in Manchuria (China)**.
- o Despite limitations, demonstrated the League's moral influence even on Great Powers.

3. International Peace Initiatives:

- o **Created the Kellogg Pact (1928)**, rejecting war as a tool for national policy.
- o **Encouraged nations to view war as immoral and abnormal.**

4. Promotion of Arbitration and Legal Frameworks:

- o Encouraged treaties for arbitration, leading to over 200 agreements among nations.
- o Established the **Permanent Court of International Justice**, which resolved disputes and set precedents for international law.

5. Economic and Social Efforts:

- o **Helped stabilize economies like Austria and Hungary post-WWI.**
Fostered intellectual cooperation through institutions like the **International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation**.

6. Promoting Disarmament:

- o Attempted to reduce military forces through the **International Disarmament Conference**.

7. **Social and Humanitarian Achievements:**

- Addressed global crises:
 - Refugee relief.
 - Combating epidemics and drug abuse (notably opium).
 - Protecting women and children's rights.

Failures and Limitations

1. **Lack of Key Members:**

- The **United States and Soviet Union** were not League members, weakening its global influence.

2. **China-Japan Conflict:**

- Failed to prevent Japan's military aggression and the establishment of a puppet state in Manchuria.
- Did not enforce sanctions or apply the Covenant's articles effectively, weakening its credibility.
- Highlighted its inability to address conflicts involving Great Powers.

3. **Failure to Prevent Aggression:**

- Failed to stop conflicts like the **Italian invasion of Corfu** (1923) and the **Manchurian Crisis** (1931) involving Japan and China. ○ Japan's actions in Manchuria were not punished effectively due to delays and hesitation.

4. **National Interests vs. Global Objectives:**

- Member nations, particularly Great Powers, prioritized internal politics over collective League goals:
 - Germany, Italy, and Russia were influenced by revolutionary ideologies (Nazism, Fascism, and Communism).
 - Countries often used the League to further their agendas rather than pursue collective peace.

5. **Great Power Dominance:**

- Major powers like Britain, France, and Italy often pursued their own interests rather than collective goals.
- Smaller nations resented the dominance of Great Powers in decisions.

6. **Disunity and Sovereignty Issues:**

- Decisions required unanimous consent, making quick resolutions difficult.
- Nations often prioritized national sovereignty over collective agreements.

7. **Inadequate Action on Disarmament:**

- Despite efforts, no effective system of disarmament was achieved, as nations remained distrustful. The League lacked an independent military force to enforce its resolutions, relying on member states for compliance, which weakened its authority.

Legacy and Positive Contributions

1. **Advancement of Peaceful Ideals:**

- Helped normalize the concept of arbitration and peaceful conflict resolution.
 - Fostered the moral conviction that war is a crime and violence as a political tool should be abolished.
2. **Institutional Innovations:**
- Established mechanisms for dispute resolution, economic cooperation, and humanitarian aid, laying the groundwork for future organizations like the United Nations.
3. **Social and Cultural Integration:**
- Created a network of international cooperation, promoting unity in fields like health, education, and cultural exchange.
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Future Outlook and Challenges

1. **Reforms Needed:**
- Calls for aligning the Covenant with the **Kellogg-Briand Pact** to prohibit war completely.
 - Suggestions to replace unanimous decisions with majority rule to enhance efficiency.
 - Proposals to give the Council greater executive power, though fears of creating a "super-state" persisted.
2. **Global Education:**
- Advocated for educating nations to prioritize collective interests over national egotism.
 - Emphasized fostering trust and cooperation to build a cohesive global order.
3. **Enduring Relevance:**
- While the League did not fulfill all expectations, it demonstrated the potential of international cooperation.
 - Its achievements in fostering peace, arbitration, and collaboration remain significant milestones in global diplomacy.
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Conclusion

The League of Nations succeeded in resolving smaller disputes, promoting peace, and pioneering international collaboration. However, its inability to address major conflicts, enforce decisions, and reconcile Great Power interests with global goals led to its eventual decline. Despite these limitations, its legacy influenced the creation of more robust international systems, proving its enduring relevance in shaping global governance.