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# Historical Committee

RE-NEGOTIATING THE  
TREATY OF VERSAILLES

TSINGHUA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

# HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

Topic: Re-negotiating the Treaty of Versailles

## Committee Introduction & Structure

As a historical committee, procedures differ slightly from what may be expected from a standard conference. For experienced delegates, this committee may be unlike other conferences you've attended earlier, and for new delegates, this conference is going to be different from most of the ones you will experience later. A historical committee is meant to relive the possibilities of the outcomes that pertain to a historical event, but instead of following the past, we encourage you to come up with innovative, creative, and new solutions that rewrite the outcomes of history. For the sake of synthesizing a new effective treaty, delegates are expected to understand the history behind it through research and grinding the provided background guide. Here are a few things to keep in mind as a historical committee delegate:

You can rewrite history: It's okay to go off-script with what happens historically, so long as your actions adhere to your assigned character. The actual treaty can just be used as a reference, but nothing needs to be one hundred percent the same. Any solution is possible on the premise that everything proposed follows respective stances

Stay in character: Whilst historical committee stances take the form of actual historical figures instead of typical country delegations, the same rules and procedures still apply. Remember to always adopt the stance your figure holds.

Have fun and be creative: In historical committees, delegates undertake the role of human beings instead of countries- try to impersonate them, be them, think like them throughout the

conference. This committee values delegates with innovation and creativity. It is also important to keep in mind that history is *yours* to rewrite; the possibilities of what a different treaty would hold are endless. Use your imagination!

## **Statement of Problem**

The Treaty of Versailles was a peace treaty that brought World War I (1914–1918) to an end. It was signed on June 28, 1919, and was negotiated at the Paris Peace Conference, imposing harsh penalties on Germany, which was held primarily responsible for the war. Consequences were Economic Hardship in Germany lead to Hyperinflation and economic instability led to widespread suffering and political instability due to resentment. As delegates, you are tasked with examining the intricate web of internal and external factors driving this crisis, exploring the profound economic, political, and humanitarian ramifications that led to or affected. During conferencing, delegates are expected to propose actionable solutions that address the root issues in this treaty and ways to refine the solution.

## **History of the Topic**

The Treaty of Versailles was the outcome of a devastating global war, complex alliances, political upheavals, and a deep desire for lasting peace. The period between 1914 and 1919 was marked by unprecedented violence and transformations in international order, culminating in the need for a formal peace settlement to end World War I.

The immediate cause of World War I was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo. This act triggered a chain reaction of military mobilizations and declarations of war due to the intricate system of alliances among European powers. Austria-Hungary, backed by Germany, declared war on Serbia, a Russian ally. This brought Russia, France, Germany, and Britain into the conflict, transforming a regional crisis into a full-scale global war.

The war quickly escalated, involving not only European powers but also their colonies and allies across the world. The two major alliances were:

1. The Allied Powers: France, Britain, Russia (until 1917), Italy (joined in 1915), and the United States (joined in 1917),
2. The Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.

World War I introduced modern industrial warfare with trench warfare, machine guns, tanks, and chemical weapons. It resulted in massive casualties—over 16 million deaths and 21 million wounded—and widespread destruction, especially in France and Belgium. Civilians suffered enormously, and entire economies were redirected toward the war effort, leaving many nations deeply in debt.

By 1917, the war had reached a stalemate, particularly on the Western Front. The entry of the United States into the war in April 1917 tipped the balance in favor of the Allies. Meanwhile, internal unrest and the Russian Revolution led to Russia's withdrawal from the war following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918.

By the autumn of 1918, the Central Powers began to crumble:

1. Bulgaria surrendered in September,
2. The Ottoman Empire signed an armistice in October,
3. Austria-Hungary disintegrated into several independent states,
4. Germany, facing mutinies, economic collapse, and revolution, signed an armistice on November 11, 1918, ending the fighting on the Western Front.

The German Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated and fled into exile, leading to the proclamation of the Weimar Republic. Although Germany had not been invaded, it was forced to accept the armistice under the threat of continued Allied advances and internal revolution.

Even before the war ended, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson proposed a peace framework in his famous Fourteen Points speech to the U.S. Congress in January 1918.

These points emphasized:

1. Open diplomacy,
2. Freedom of the seas,
3. Self-determination for nations,
4. Reduction of armaments,
5. Establishment of a League of Nations to resolve future conflicts peacefully.

Wilson's ideas were idealistic and appealed to war-weary populations, but they clashed with the more traditional and punitive goals of European Allies—particularly France, which sought reparations and security guarantees.

## Possible Stances

In January 1919, the victorious Allied powers gathered in Paris to negotiate the terms of peace. The conference was attended by representatives of over 30 countries, and Germany and the other defeated Central Powers were not invited to participate in the initial negotiations. However, the key decisions were made by the "**Big Four**":

1. Georges Clemenceau (France),
2. David Lloyd George (UK),
3. Woodrow Wilson (USA),
4. Vittorio Orlando (Italy).

The Allies had differing goals:

1. France wanted to permanently weaken Germany,
2. Britain sought to protect its empire and maintain the balance of power,
3. The U.S. pushed for a more moderate peace based on Wilson's Fourteen Points,
4. Italy aimed to expand its territory, particularly in the Balkans and along the Adriatic coast.

# Key Topics

## 1. War Guilt

### a. *Should Germany accept full responsibility for starting the war?*

Central to the treaty's moral and legal foundation. How blame is assigned would shape public opinion, post-war justice, and the historical narrative itself.

### b. *What are the implications of assigning blame to one nation?*

Keep in mind that placing blame on one country alone can fuel national resentment, affect international relations, and may also influence future conflicts. This is also essential in determining how wars are judged and how peace is negotiated in the future.

## 2. Reparations

### a. *To what extent should Germany be financially responsible for the damage?*

Determining financial responsibility requires consideration of economic stability and justice. Excessive demands may cause an economy to cripple, while insufficient amounts may feel unjust to other countries.

### b. *How would the countries create a suitable enforcement mechanism for implementing financial aid?*

Without effective reinforcement, reparations may fail, but overly harsh measures can lead to long-term instability and resistance. Balance is essential.

## 3. Formation of the League of Nations

### a. *Should there be a league established to maintain peace?*

### b. *What powers should the league have? What are the limitations?*

*c. How should membership in the league be determined?*

## Possible Developments

The Treaty of Versailles remains under negotiation, and its eventual form will have far-reaching consequences not only for the defeated Central Powers but for the entire postwar international community. This committee will be responsible for navigating these divisions and determining what kind of peace will result after the Great War: one rooted in punitive justice, or one aimed at sustainable reconciliation.

Several key areas of potential development may emerge during the proceedings:

1. Reparations and Economic Settlements:

One of the most contentious issues is the extent of economic reparations to be demanded from Germany. French and British interests, particularly those seeking compensation for wartime destruction and debt, often conflict with the American inclination toward a more economically stable Germany. Delegates must weigh against the desire for justice and restitution against the risk of long-term economic destabilization and future resentment.

2. Territorial Realignments and National Self-Determination:

The redrawing of borders—especially in Central and Eastern Europe—poses significant challenges. Wilsonian ideals of self-determination frequently clash with the geopolitical interests of European powers. Disputes regarding Alsace-Lorraine, the Rhineland, the Polish Corridor, and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires may provoke controversy, especially if claims to sovereignty overlap or contradict.

3. The Future of International Governance:

The proposed League of Nations represents a novel experiment in global diplomacy and conflict prevention. However, its structure, authority, and the extent of its enforcement powers remain unresolved. The League's long-term legitimacy may be undermined if key powers, such as the United States, fail to commit to its framework.

#### 4. German Involvement and Reaction:

Germany's exclusion from the peace negotiations raises questions about the treaty's legitimacy and enforceability. Delegates must consider whether the imposition of terms without negotiation will provoke resistance, instability, or future revisionism. The possibility of domestic unrest within Germany or broader geopolitical backlash must be accounted for.

#### 5. Colonial Mandates and Global Equity:

The redistribution of German and Ottoman colonial holdings under the League's mandate system introduce complex questions about sovereignty, administration, and racial hierarchies. Some former colonies may assert claims to independence, while others may be reassigned without local consent, sowing seeds of future anti-colonial resistance.

#### 6. The Russian Question:

The ongoing Russian Civil War and the emergence of Bolshevik governance introduce a degree of unpredictability into the postwar order. While Soviet Russia is not represented at the conference, its ideological and military activities across Eastern Europe may shape delegates' decisions, particularly in border regions or former Russian territories.

In light of these uncertainties, this committee is tasked not merely with concluding a war but with constructing peace. Whether that peace will prove durable or dangerously flawed depends on the ability of delegates to negotiate with foresight, fairness, and a nuanced understanding of competing national and ideological interests.

## Key Terms

**Reparations:** Financial compensation imposed on a defeated state for the damage caused during the war. In the context of the Treaty of Versailles, reparations primarily refer to payments demanded from Germany by the Allied Powers, particularly France and Britain, to compensate for wartime destruction and economic loss.

**Self-Determination:** A principle popularized by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, advocating that national groups have the right to form their own sovereign states. Its implementation during the peace process was inconsistent and often conflicted with imperial interests.

**Mandate System:** A system established under Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, whereby former colonies and territories of the Central Powers were redistributed to Allied nations under the guise of “tutelage” toward independence. It replaced formal colonization with indirect control.

**War Guilt Clause (Article 231):** A clause in the Treaty of Versailles that placed sole responsibility for the war on Germany and its allies. It served as the legal basis for demanding reparations and became a source of deep resentment in Germany.

**League of Nations:** An intergovernmental organization proposed in Wilson’s Fourteen Points and formally established in the Treaty of Versailles. Intended to maintain peace and prevent future conflicts, it faced criticism for its limited enforcement power and lack of universal membership.

**The Big Three:** Refers to the leading figures of the Allied Powers at the Paris Peace Conference: Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of Britain, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States. Their conflicting visions for postwar Europe shaped the final terms of the treaty.

**Diktat:** A term used by Germans to describe the Treaty of Versailles, implying that the treaty was imposed upon Germany without negotiation or consent. The term reflects widespread German anger toward the peace process and its perceived injustices.

**Demilitarization:** The reduction or elimination of a state's military capabilities in a particular area. Under the treaty, the Rhineland was to be demilitarized, and Germany's armed forces were heavily restricted in size, structure, and equipment.

**Polish Corridor:** A strip of land awarded to the newly re-established nation of Poland, granting it access to the Baltic Sea. It separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany and was a significant source of tension in interwar Europe.

**Irredentism:** A political movement that seeks to reclaim and reoccupy a lost homeland, often based on shared ethnicity or historical claims. Many postwar border changes ignited irredentist sentiment in Central and Eastern Europe, especially among Germans, Hungarians, and Slavs.

**Fourteen Points:** A statement of principles for peace outlined by Woodrow Wilson in 1918, emphasizing open diplomacy, free trade, self-determination, and the establishment of a League of Nations. While influential, many of its ideals were compromised during negotiations.

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