

The Peace Settlement and Post-War Problems: The period right after the war's end was one of great idealism and hopes for world peace, but these hopes quickly faded.

1st major problem: The Versailles Settlement (1919):

- ✓ The peace treaty created an unsatisfactory peace all around. Wilson pushed for lenient treatment of Germany and Austria, but was outvoted by France and Britain, both of whom were furious and wanted revenge.
- ✓ Wilson was so intent on protecting his League of Nations idea that he effectively gave in on most of his other 13 points as far as the peace treaty was concerned.
- ✓ In addition to the harsh financial reparations and land annexations demanded of Germany, the colonized subjects of the allies and the former empires found themselves still colonized, not self-determining.
- ✓ The Austro-Hungarian Empire was entirely dismantled, and a new nation of Czechoslovakia was set up (with a large unhappy German minority). The state of Poland was revived with new borders, Bulgaria and Hungary were reduced in size, and Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became independent states.
- ✓ The Ottoman Empire was also dismantled; and much of its former territory went under British and French control as protectorates.

The "Knife in the Back":

- ✓ The German and Austrian populaces at large, with their censored presses, had been kept in the dark about the recent military defeats of their armies, so that the surrender came as a complete, nasty surprise.
- ✓ As Germany itself had not been militarily conquered, its citizens expected a mild, negotiated settlement, and were stunned by the harsh peace treaty that their new leaders eventually agreed to.
- ✓ In the years after the war, conspiracy theories grew up in which Germany had been defeated not on the battlefield, but by treacherous politicians at home. Adolph Hitler would later use these theories to great effect in rallying opposition to German democrats, socialists and communists.

The **destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire** created a political and economic vacuum in central Europe.

The harsh treatment of Germany, which had been humiliated, forced to pay high reparations, and told to dismantle their army, enraged the Germans, yet **did little of substance to insure they would not regain their military strength and come looking for revenge.**

The Versailles Settlement could please no one: it was not harsh enough for those who wanted revenge, but still punitive enough to inspire hatred. Fighting over its terms helped poison the inter-war European diplomatic scene.

2nd major problem: Failure of the U.S. to join the League of Nations (its own idea):

- ✓ America's return to isolationist politics after the war caused them to reject Wilson's entreaties to join his new international peace-keeping community. Wilson had greatly overestimated his own domestic political strength, and America's participation was vetoed by the Senate.
- ✓ America's abstention destroyed any real hopes for international cooperation to keep the peace, since France and England were not strong enough to do it alone.

Consequences of W.W.I: "Rarely do wars, once begun, work out as anticipated."

Unexpected Consequences #1: The Russian Revolution

Unexpected Result #2: The Rise of the U.S.

- ✓ Europe, even the victorious powers, was left economically exhausted by the four-year war, and much of the European landscape was a mess.
- ✓ Europe, once the world creditor, now found itself borrowing from the U.S., which had been relatively untouched by the war and whose economy further benefited from the new lack of European competition.

Unexpected Result #3: The Disintegration of the Old Empires:

- ✓ Czarist Russia was gone after 1918; in its place stood a new, unpredictable socialist state, the first of its kind in the world.
- ✓ The Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled by the peace treaty, but in fact had already fallen apart; in its place were a patchwork of small independent states arguing over their borders.
- ✓ The Ottoman Empire also did not survive the war.
- ✓ Europe in 1918 was far less economically dominant and far more politically disorganized than it had been in 1914.

Unexpected Result #4 Psychological Effects of W.W.I:

- ✓ The war also had shattering psychological effects; it had been one of the most brutal in history, and had vividly demonstrated the dark side of the new technology which the 19th century had put so much faith in.
- ✓ The easy faith in progress and scientific advancement, which had characterized much of the last century, was dead.

The (largely unintended) consequences of WW I were enormous. The war changed the whole world, and the instability which marked Europe after it helped set the stage for WW II. WW I was truly global in scope; it was devastating in terms of casualties. The old methods of fighting had met new technologies and caught the military leaders off-guard. The scale of "The Great War" was truly unprecedented, as Europeans dragged their respective colonies around the world into it.

New Weaponry: tanks, submarines, airplanes were all new in W.W.I — and would become staples of war by W.W.II. One of most infamous weapons of W.W.I was banned afterwards: poison gas.

Proof of the Failure of the Peace: WW II.

- ✓ The peace created by the Versailles Treaty did not last, and the world created by settlement quickly broke apart.
- ✓ Pro-nationalist statements made by European leaders, like the 14 Points, were taken seriously by various colonials, who looked forward to self-determination; they were disappointed that the treaty still left Britain, France, the U.S. and Japan firmly in control of their own colonial regions.
- ✓ Tensions between European powers and their colonials were one source of instability in the interwar period; the domestic unrest and hostility between European nations sparked by the treaty was another.