Explaining History

By Nick Shepley
Introduction

In December 1918 Paris became the focus, for six months, of the aspirations of millions of people from Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. At the end of the most devastating war in human history at that point, the First World War that had lasted between 1914 and 1918, the leadership of the victorious powers gathered to re-shape the global order. In this ebook you will learn about the politicians who shaped the post war world during the conference and the problems they faced.

You will also learn about the nations that attended the conference and the aspirations many of them had. You will learn about the conference’s decisions and the impact they had on Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In the final part of this book there will a summary of the different interpretations of the Paris Peace Conference and advice on how to answer essay questions on the topic.

The First World War

In order to keep this ebook concise and focused on the topic of the conference, there isn’t the space here to discuss the war in its entirety, however, there needs to be a brief overview in order to make sense of the negotiations that followed it.

The war was fought not only on the Western Front in France and Belgium, but in the east between Germany and Austria Hungary on one had and Russia on the other. It was fought after 1915 between Italy and Austria Hungary in the Alps and between the British and the Ottoman Empire in the Dardanelles and the Middle East. It engulfed the Balkans, it was fought on the high seas at key battles such as Jutland and saw a prolonged U-boat campaign in the Atlantic that ultimately drew the USA into the conflict. The war devastated large parts of East Africa as the British and German attacked one another from their colonies, using large numbers of African troops.

France relied on large numbers of colonial soldiers from Africa and the British deployed over a million Indian troops on all fronts, be predominantly in Mesopotamia in the Middle East. Over a hundred thousand Chinese workers were used on the Western Front, manning railways and digging trenches, and war came to China as the British and their ally, Japan, dislodged Germany from her Treaty Port at Tsingtao. In four years 17 million people lost their lives as a result of the war and a further 20 million were injured or maimed. In combatant countries entire generations of young men were lost and deep psychological scars lingered long after the fighting had ended.

On the Western Front, a stalemate had emerged in 1914 as Germany’s plans of a swift war of manoeuvre to deal a ‘knock out blow’ to France failed. When the Ottoman Empire joined the war on Germany’s side in October 1914, the British and French believed it was the weak link in the German led alliance the ‘Central Powers’. Throughout 1915 the British and French, along with troops from Australia, New Zealand and other parts of Britain’s empire laid siege to the Ottoman Empire in the Dardanelles Straits. The operation ended in disaster and in early 1916 the allies were forced to withdraw.
The British and French Armies matched the strength of Germany and in 1916 the western allies, along with Italy and Russia attempted a series of ‘concentric attacks’ against Germany and Austria, coordinating all their efforts on all sides of which the only real gains were made by the Russians in the Carpathian Offensive. Germany quickly counter attacked, rolling back Russia's successes and on the Western Front, at the start of the year, she attacked the French at Verdun, hoping the ‘bleed France white’, to cause such huge losses that the French would no longer be able to carry on the fight.

The British and French counter attacked at the Somme, resulting in biggest single loss of life to the British Army in any one battle. In February 1917, the the war resulted in a revolution in Russia and the downfall of Tsar Nicholas II. The Germans, feeling the economic strain of the conflict and the effect of a naval blockade by the British, launched a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, meaning that any and all ships sailing to Britain would be sunk, including those of the USA. Attacks on American shipping were a main contributory reason for the intervention of America in the war, joining the British and French as an associate power, not a full ally.

Germany, now well aware of the economic power that America could bring to bear was desperate to win the war as quickly as possible. In October 1917, Russia’s Provisional Government, which replaced the Tsar, was swept away by the Bolshevik Party, a hitherto obscure and extreme revolutionary group, determined to impose a bloody Marxist social revolution on Russia. The Bolsheviks pledged to withdraw Russia from the First World War, claiming it was a struggle between capitalist exploiters, using the workers of the world as expendable cannon fodder. Instead, they hoped that the war would transform into a global war of the working classes against the bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty with Germany in March 1918, at Brest Litovsk in Poland, giving Germany Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic States.

They signed over vast territories reluctantly, only at the threat of a German invasion of Russia. The exit of Russia from the war enabled the Germans to throw their forces at the Western allies in one last bid for victory and in the spring of 1918, General Ludendorff of the German Army launched five waves of attacks in the west. They came close to overwhelming the French, British and the newly arrived Americans, but the failure to deliver a knock out blow for a second time was too much for the over stretched German Army. The Kaiser’s troops were so short on resources that some were close to starvation as the Ludendorff offensive finally collapsed.

The allied counter attack between August and November 1918 finally drove the German Army from France and Belgium, and by October, it was clear to both Ludendorff and Hindenburg, the two generals effectively governing Germany, that the war was lost. Food shortages and collapsing morale led to unrest in Germany and a naval mutiny at Wilhelmshaven on the North Sea coast quickly developed into a revolution that saw the Kaiser flee for exile in the Netherlands. An armistice was signed between the allied powers and Germany on November 11 1918, bringing the First World War to an end.
Part One: The Powers

Overview:
In January 1919 the conference officially opened with 32 nations participating from Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. They comprised four rough groups.

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The countries that sent representatives to the conference had a wide range of often contrasting aims and ambitions. Some, like France, sought to punish Germany and to gain territory. Others, like China, hoped that the conference would serve a very different purpose and overturn treaties imposed upon them by European nations in the 19th Century. The Conference was seen by many of the delegates there as a historically unique opportunity to establish a world order favourable to the nations they represented. However, the great powers at the conference were able to draw up the final document, the Treaty of Versailles, in a way that primarily suited themselves. There were 52 commissions (smaller meetings) involving delegates from 27 nations, where a wide range of issues were debated, ranging from the creation of an International Labour Organisation to arms limitations, the question of what to do with prisoners of war and how to divide up the vanquished German, Austrian and Ottoman Empires.
Section One: The Victorious Powers

The Paris Peace Conference was initially dominated by five powers, Britain, America, France, Italy and Japan, but by the end of the conference, the last two powers had left the negotiations.

The USA and Woodrow Wilson

Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States of America, had set sail for Europe in December 1918. When he arrived in France he was treated as a hero, streets were named after him and in Paris his name was lit up in neon lights. The US president who had brought America so decisively into the conflict on France’s side was cheered by the public, but there was another reason for the jubilation of the French. Many assumed that the reason Wilson had come to France was to help impose a punitive peace treaty on Germany and to allow the French to have their revenge. This, however, was not one of Wilson’s main priorities.

Wilson had initially pledged to keep America out of the First World War. During his first term from 1913 to 1916 he avoided American entry into the war, but by 1916, when he was re-elected for a second term, the situation was starting to change. One of Wilson’s chief priorities was to allow American merchant ships full access to the seas. America eclipsing Britain as the world’s most powerful trading nation and the sea lanes were the key to this growing wealth. Not only had a German U-boat campaign in 1915 jeopardised that, but Wilson also believed that the war presented an opportunity to challenge Britain’s dominance of the high seas. Wilson embarked on a programme of warship building during 1916 in order to directly challenge the British. In 1917, when Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking any ship that sailed to Britain, irrespective of where it was from, American lives began to be lost at sea. This, combined with the revelation that Germany had attempted to conspire with Mexico to wage war on America if the USA should choose to go to war in Europe, left Wilson little choice but to declare war.

America had not been a full ally of the British and French Empires, instead the USA was an ‘associate power’ meaning that it fought alongside the two older empires but did not necessarily endorse their goals. Woodrow Wilson looked upon the French and the British Empires by 1917 as having no more legitimacy than that of the Germans and had no desire to shed the blood of American soldiers to prop these empires up in their hour of need. Instead, he hoped that the pressures of war would weaken all European empires and enable America to become the supreme global power after the end of the war. The principal way Wilson weakened the British and French was through both powers’ desperate need for wartime finances, which American banks lent to them in vast quantities during the conflict.

Wilson’s 14 Points.

On January 8th 1918 Woodrow Wilson made a speech on ‘war aims and peace terms’ in which he spelt out 14 points that would be the basis of a European peace. Some historians have suggested that the 14 points were Wilson’s announcement of democratic values which he hoped the world would be based on. However, the list of peace objectives that
Wilson gave in the speech simply spelt out how he believed Europe should be re-ordered and how American trade should be allowed to benefit from the peace. His main liberal demand was the establishment of a League of Nations.

**Peace Without Victory.**

Even before the First World War had ended Wilson had attempted to negotiate with Germany and had not included the British or the French in the discussions. He had repeatedly spoken of a ‘Peace Without Victory’, meaning that he wanted the war to end, but without the kind of peace treaty that European powers tended to impose on one another, where the loser was punished. Wilson and much of the American public viewed the European powers as equally responsible for the conflict and there he was determined to see all European combatants in the war treated equally at the Paris Conference.

**The League of Nations**

As Wilson made his way to Europe by ship in December 1918, he made it clear to the rest of his negotiating team that he was planning to do more than to bring peace to Europe. He wanted to bring about not just a European, but a world peace, based on a new international organisation, the League of Nations. Wilson hoped to see an end to old colonial empires, not because of his hostility to the colonisation of Africa and Asia by Europeans (Wilson had a very poor record on race relations in America and had little concern for the plight of black Americans in the deep south), but because countries like India, Kenya, Algeria or Vietnam were markets that America could not trade into easily because of British and French colonial domination.

From 1917 onwards Wilson said that he wanted to create ‘a world safe for democracy’, and for the first time introduced democracy as a war aim. Up to this point, not only did Britain deny the vote to all women and approximately forty percent of adult working class men, but both Britain and France were allied with the autocratic Russian Empire. Following the Russian Revolution and the possibility of a democracy emerging after February 1917, it suited the British and French to begin to speak Wilson’s language of democracy. Therefore even though America had been a late entrant into the war and had only played a supporting role in the final military victory over Germany:

* She wielded immense financial power.
* Wilson was interested in extending American trade interests.
* He advocated the creation of the League of Nations.
* He argued for ‘peace without victory’.
* He wished to see the end of European empires, mainly as a way of extending American power globally.
* He wanted to challenge Britain’s control of the seas and believed Britain’s naval dominance should be replaced by America’s.

**Britain and David Lloyd George**

By 1918, Britain and her empire combined had lost nearly a million men in four years of fighting in Europe and the Middle East. The British had lost their position as the world’s most powerful and wealthy trading nation, going from being the world’s biggest creditor in 1914 to the world’s biggest debtor. The popular view of the war in Britain by 1918 was that it had been a tragedy and a disaster, and that Germany was to blame. In March 1918 the
Representation of the People Act gave nearly the whole adult population the right to vote and a month after the end of the war, a general election was held that was fought in large part on the question of punishing Germany at the Paris Peace Conference. The man who was re-elected at the head of a coalition government had led the country as Prime Minister since 1916, David Lloyd George.

**Lloyd George’s War**

Lloyd George had begun the war as the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Herbert Asquith’s Liberal Government. From the start, Lloyd George and his cabinet colleague, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, along with the Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener and First Sea Lord Sir John ‘Jackie’ Fisher, dominated the running of the war. Asquith was distant and detached from military planning and by 1915 a crisis in the shortage of artillery shells brought his government near to collapse. He formed a coalition with the rival Conservative Party, but a year later was replaced by Lloyd George, when he opposed the introduction of conscription (compulsory military service). Lloyd George, by this point had been made Minister of Munitions and had developed a war industry with over 50,000 workers and control over much of the economy in order to defeat Germany. Lloyd George dismissed a number of peace initiatives in 1917 in favour of total victory over Germany, but also was keen to pursue the final destruction of the Ottoman Empire and made the acquisition of Palestine and Mesopotamia in the Ottoman Empire key war aims. He came to the conference interested in Wilson’s idea of an international organisation like the League of Nations, but had no desire to see either of Wilson’s key aims, to dominate the seas and to see an end to European empires, fulfilled.

**The Problems of Peace**

By late 1918 and early 1919, Lloyd George’s government was de-mobilising thousands of troops each week. There had been small mutinies at army training camps like Pirbright in England and Calais in France as soldiers feared they might be sent to Russia to fight the new Bolshevik regime. The rapid decline in troop numbers meant that the possibility of invading Germany, should the Germans not submit to the the terms of the Peace Conference was declining month by month. Therefore, Lloyd George knew that time was not on his side to get a peace treaty that benefited the British. On the day that an armistice was signed in November 1918, he announced to crowds that Britain would heavily punish Germany financially for the war, but a month later, during the election campaign, he began to distance himself from these ideas. He knew, as a lawyer, that the demands to ‘hang the Kaiser’ would be impossible to enforce, and he also feared the possibility that Germany might fall to communism as Russia had if it could not economically revive itself quickly. By the end of 1918, Germany was facing starvation from the British naval blockade and in January 1919 there was an unsuccessful bid by the communist Spartacist League to seize power. Lloyd George believed that European stability depended on a viable German state and wanted to make sure that Germany had sufficient resources within her borders. When planners were drawing up the borders of new nations like Poland, he prevented the Poles from having too much German territory in Silesia, the richest coal mining territory within the former German Empire.

**Lloyd George and the other leaders**

Lloyd George was most interested in the question of the former Ottoman Empire. He wanted to extend a British mandate over Palestine (see part two, section two), and demanded that Britain be given Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). He was interested in the
northern city of Mosul, in large part because of the oil that had been discovered there. Britain had begun to transform its navy from coal fired to oil powered engines and control of this new resource was essential. When Clemenceau (see below) agreed to allow Britain a free hand in Mosul, in return for a mandate over Syria, he did not fully understand the city’s real worth and was furious when he learned about the oil, feeling duped. Lloyd George believed that Wilson appeared to the conference as a high minded idealist and Clemenceau as an aggressive French nationalist. He said: “I think I did as well as might be expected, seated as I was between Jesus Christ and Napoleon Bonaparte.”

France and Georges Clemenceau

Neither Britain nor America had been invaded during the war, they had lost large numbers of men but, with the exception of some air raids over London and a German naval attack on Scarborough, there was no physical damage. France’s experience of the war was completely different, a vast portion of the east of France was devastated by war, French farms, villages and towns, livestock, machinery and manpower were destroyed. Clemenceau was appointed the president of the peace conference and he several clear objectives:

* To punish Germany
* To permanently weaken Germany
* To secure new mandates or colonies for France from Germany and the Ottomans
* To create a permanent guarantee of France’s security in Europe from a renewed German threat.

Clemenceau’s War

Clemenceau had lived through the a previous invasion by Germany, as a younger man he had returned to France shortly after the Prussian Army had crushed the French in 1870 and the German Empire had been established at Versailles in 1871. During the First World War he was critical of the French Government’s efforts to win and believed that their strategy against Germany was weak and ineffective. In 1917 the French Government came close to negotiations with Germany, an act which would have broken their alliance with Britain and given the Germans a major military and diplomatic advantage. Clemenceau criticised the mere suggestion of peace talks and was later accused of derailing a possible peace. The Germans had offered the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine but in reality had little intention of offering France any compromises. It was in 1917 that Clemenceau became the Prime Minister of France during a period of widespread defeatism and despondency amongst France’s political classes. Many leading statesmen wanted to negotiate with Germany but Clemenceau was committed to a policy of total war and outright victory. He rallied the troops by frequent visits to the front line and built up morale among the French Army, many of whom quickly came to view him as the embodiment of French resolve. In 1918 Clemenceau declared that attempts to broker a peace with Germany amounted to a surrender and this was tantamount to treason. He had several leading politicians, including Joseph Caillaux, a former Prime Minister, arrested and imprisoned. It was feared by some commentators and politicians that for former radical Clemenceau had become a dictator, though he justified his actions by claiming that he was doing only that which was essential to win the war. He accepted Wilson’s 14 Points because they served France’s agenda, they offered a return of Alsace Lorraine and the chance to permanently weaken Germany.
Clemenceau’s Misgivings

As the conference began, Clemenceau was pessimistic about the chances of avoiding a second war. He believed that the key to peace was to keep Germany economically weakened and he did not think that Lloyd George or Wilson had any intention of allowing this. He was sure that the British and Americans had little interest in French security because they could both abandon France and have the security of the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean respectively. Because Germany had invaded France and the allied armies had stopped short of a full invasion of Germany, the industrial areas of the former Kaiserreich were not damaged in any way and Germany’s advanced industries, such as her chemical giants Bayer and Hoechst would be able to resume their operations soon. In addition to this Clemenceau suspected that Germany would be able to quickly pay off any war reparations through printing money and devaluing their own currency. A revived Germany, in Clemenceau’s eyes, was a dangerous Germany and he was therefore frustrated that the question of punishing the Germans became lost in the many separate issues that the Paris Peace Conference debated and discussed.

Italy and Vittorio Orlando

Italy had joined the war on the allied side in 1915. There had been a protracted debate within the country about entry into the war, commentators such as the journalist (and future dictator) Benito Mussolini, argued that Italy should take part in the war. He believed that it would fuse an otherwise disparate and divided society together as one, and the experience of shared sacrifice and struggle would make the people of Italy into an Italian nation at last. Other, less impassioned voices, mainly on the left, saw the war as a catastrophe that would impact mainly on the lives of Italy’s working classes. The Italian Government was attracted by the prospect of a swift war that would result in a peace treaty that would entitle them to territory in the Adriatic, the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East.

The war resulted in catastrophic losses for Italy, with 650,000 men killed, captured or wounded alone at the Battle of Caporetto. The Italians directed their efforts against the central power to their immediate north, Austria Hungary. Much of the war was fought in the Italian and Austrian Alps, Italy’s generals were frequently incompetent and in the case of Marshal Luigi Cadorna, who presided over the disaster at Caporetto, cruel and harsh. Following the disastrous battle the British and French sent 11 divisions between them to prop up the Italian front and the poor showing of Italy on the battlefield led many senior military figures and allied politicians to question why the Italians deserved to receive the spoils of war at the peace conference.

Italy was represented by Vittorio Orlando, that country’s prime minister and Sidney Sonnino, the Italian foreign minister. Orlando did not speak English and was in a precarious political position in Italy, making it difficult for him to negotiate for Italy effectively. Orlando and Sonnino did nothing to dispel allegations of incompetence as they both pursued separate negotiating strategies at the conference that cancelled each other out. Sonnino demanded the former Austro Hungarian province of Dalmatia and was prepared to sacrifice Italy’s claim on the city of Fiume, and Orlando demanded the complete opposite, compromising over Dalmatia to get Fiume. In the end, Italy got neither territory (which came to be known as the ‘Irridenta’). The Italian delegation left the
negotiations in April 1919 in anger, believing themselves to have been betrayed. Their failure to get anything other than a few minor territorial concessions in return for the 1.2 million war deaths that Italy had suffered was seen as a national humiliation and was one of the key contributory factors for the rise of fascism from 1919 onwards.

Japan and Saionji

Japan had fought on the side of the allies during the war and had been allied to Britain since 1902. The war had been an important opportunity for the Japanese to expand their sphere of influence in the Pacific and Asia at the expense of Germany. The Japanese declared war on Germany in return for the right to annex Germany’s treaty port in China at Tsingtao and her colonies in the Pacific. Japan’s role was mainly maritime throughout the war, protecting allied shipping in Asia and the Mediterranean but they also took the opportunity to expand their control over China, where they had first acquired territory in 1894. In 1915 Japan gave the Chinese Government a list of 21 demands, giving Japan control over the Chinese economy, legal system and military, reducing China to the status of a Japanese colony. Japan finally withdrew these demands after pressure from the USA, who wanted an ‘open door’ policy in China, and feared the Japanese might be attempting to force them out. At the end of the war the Japanese sent a delegation to Paris, led by the Marquis Saionji Kinmochi, who was one of Japan’s most revered and respected politicians, and had twice served as Prime Minister. He had two main objectives, the acceptance of Japanese claims in China, particularly over the Shandong Peninsula near Beijing and the establishment of racial equality for Asians in America, Australia and Europe. With the second goal, he was largely thinking about the unfair and discriminatory treatment that many Japanese people experienced in America and Australia. He wanted racial equality to be enshrined in the charter of the new League of Nations, but Wilson and the Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes had no intention of agreeing to these demands.
Section Two: The Defeated Powers

Germany

By October 1918 it was clear to the Kaiser that the war on the western front was lost. The war had extracted a terrible economic and human toll on Germany and as a result of a British naval blockade, the country was close to starvation. A new parliamentary government, made up of the moderate Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democrats had been formed in a last ditch attempt to create a representative government and preserve the Kaiser’s rule. A revolution broke out on October 29th 1918 as sailors at the ports of Wilhelmshaven and Kiel mutinied after being ordered out on a suicidal attack on the British Royal Navy. The revolt spread across Germany and the Social Democrats used it as an opportunity to force the Kaiser to abdicate on November 8th. The new government, established in the town of Weimar, knew that they were in a race against time to end the war and put down the revolution, before more extreme socialists, similar to Lenin’s Bolsheviks, managed to seize power. The armistice on November 11th 1918 was signed by the German delegation out of sheer desperation, but many returning soldiers and figures on the extreme right viewed it as an act of betrayal.

Austria Hungary

Throughout the war the main threat to Germany’s ally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, came from their main rival, Russia. The empire, ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty, was allied to Germany as was the weaker of the two central powers, and as the war progressed, Austria became progressively dominated by Germany. Austria-Hungary divided her forces between wars with Serbia, Russia and Italy. A weak war economy and poor military leadership led the Austrians to become increasingly dependent on the Germans for help. Many German generals in turn resented the drain that Austria had become on Germany’s resources. The Austro-Hungarian empire incorporated multiple nationalities from across Europe (Poles, Czechs, Croats, Ruthenes, Germans, Slovaks and others) and this often resulted in an army with low morale and men with more interest in fighting for their own national independence that for the Hapsburg monarchy itself. After 1916, the main successes of the Austrian army were really delivered with the help of Germany. By 1918 the Austro-Hungarian Empire was facing crisis, the war had crippled the economy and there was widespread hunger. Strikes in factories and mutinies within army regiments brought the spectre of a communist revolution closer, but the forces that tore the empire apart were nationalist, not socialist. Sensing that the empire was on the brink of collapse, in 1918 the Czechs, Slovaks, Croats and Bosniacs declared themselves independent and when Hungary declared herself independent from Austria and broke free from the union with the Hapsburg crown, the army fought on briefly for a non existent empire. When the allied powers informed the Hapsburg monarchy that they were committed to the independence of the Czechs and the ‘South Slavs’ (Croatia and Bosnia), it signalled the final break up of the empire. King Charles I of the Austro-Hungarian Empire stepped down in November 12th 1918 and both Austria and Hungary became republics. Both Austria and Hungary would be subject to harsh peace treaties at the end of the deliberations in the Paris Peace Conference.
The Ottoman Empire

The third empire to collapse at the end of the war was another German ally, the Ottoman Turks. Two days after the armistice was signed on the western front, the city of Constantinople in Turkey was occupied by British, French and Italian soldiers, it was the only capital city of any of the great powers in the war to fall to foreign armies. When the allies agreed an armistice on October 30th 1918, they gave both written and verbal promises that Constantinople would not be occupied by their armies. This made the occupation illegal under international law and only in 1920 was it given legal recognition. A large part of the deliberations at the Paris Peace Conference would be taken up with the fate of the former Ottoman Empire. Her territories stretched from the Balkans to North Africa, Mesopotamia, the Levant and Arabia. In 1920 the empire’s new government was forced to sign the treaty of Sevres which resulted in the division of the empire and the recognition of British and French mandates over large swathes of Ottoman territory. For more on the fate of the Ottoman Empire see part two, section one on National Questions and part two, section two on Empires.

Bulgaria

For most European countries, the war began in 1914, but the Bulgarians had been at war in the Balkans since 1912 as they fought with other Balkan powers (in an alliance called The Balkan League) to seize Ottoman territory. Following the the successful defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the seizure by Bulgaria of Northern Macedonia, a second war with her former allies Greece, Romania, Montenegro and Serbia began, which resulted in devastating losses for the Bulgarians. In 1914 the country was officially neutral when war broke out following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The country had endured huge losses in the previous two wars and was divided, with Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria favouring an alliance with Germany, but the ethnically Slavic population preferring to support Russia. The Bulgarian Government, who had lost most of Northern Macedonia to the other members of the league now saw the war as a way to reclaim the province. In September 1915 the Bulgarian Government joined the central powers, believing they the British and French were losing the war, attacking Serbia and Greece and seizing Macedonia. For the rest of the war the Bulgarians simply defended their gains and did not participate in other theatres of conflict, for them, the great war was simply a third Balkan war. As the fortunes of Germany, Austria and the Ottomans declined throughout the war, those of the Bulgarians also suffered and by 1918, Bulgaria was invaded by the British, French and the Serbs. Tsar Ferdinand abdicated and on September 29th the new Bulgarian Government signed an armistice. The three Balkan wars combined cost the small country over 550,000 dead and left it economically devastated. The war also left Bulgaria facing harsh terms at the Paris Conference as the Greeks and Serbs demanded compensation and territory.
Part Two: The Conference

Overview

As the conference began in January 1919, the British, Americans, French and others had to decide which of the many issues that the world faced were up for discussion. Each leader had to work out precisely what the others wanted. Some issues such as the establishment of the league of nations took centre stage, others, such as the fate of China, became secondary issues that were more of an inconvenience for Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau than a source of interest. The fact remained, however, that the war had shattered four empires and created dozens of new successor states, all of which required new boundaries to be created and control of natural resources in order to be economically viable. This section will explore the difficult choices the peacemakers had to make in an attempt to create stability.
Section One: National Questions

Russia

The great power missing from the conference was Russia. In October 1917 a small extremist socialist group, the Bolsheviks, had seized power in coup. They promised an immediate cessation of hostilities with Germany and in March 1918 signed the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, a peace treaty with Germany, finally breaking the alliance with the British and French. The vast scale of territorial gains in Russia, including Ukraine and the Baltic States, and the freeing up of hundreds of thousands of troops, enabled Germany to launch the devastating spring offensive against the western allies. It also resulted in Russia becoming an economic colony of Germany and created fears within the British, French and American Governments that Germany would be able to use Russian resources and manpower to fight on indefinitely. In 1918 all three powers, along with Japan, invaded Russia to overthrow the Bolshevik Regime and by the start of the Paris Peace Conference, allied forces were at war in Russia, supporting Russian opponents of the regime, the white armies. The British and Americans sent emissaries to Russia to see if contact could be re-established with the Bolshevik regime, Wilson was particularly keen to have Russian delegates at the conference to help participate in the creation of the League of Nations. His view of the Bolsheviks is at times unclear but his statements at the time suggest he had a naive and unrealistic view of the regime, believing they offered the chance of democracy for Russia. It was generally agreed between both Lloyd George and Wilson that the Tsarist regime had suffered the fate it deserved, but as the months of the conference wore on, the enthusiasm for Bolshevism, if there really had ever been any, began to wane, as it became clear that in Russia, a violent and repressive regime had established itself. Lenin, the revolutionary leader of the new Bolshevik government dismissed the conference as a meeting of the capitalist powers to carve up the world between them and no Bolshevik delegate ever attended the conference. This began a fifteen year period of isolation for Russia, as she joined the League of Nations finally in 1934.

Poland and the Ukraine

One of the many new nation states that emerged from the collapse of the central powers and the Russian Empire was Poland. The Polish homeland had been partitioned between Germany, Russia and Austria since the 18th Century. In Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points he made the creation of a Polish nation a key goal, but the Germans had already done much of the work to create a viable Polish state. When they imposed the Treaty of Brest Litovsk on Russia, they created a weak Polish state that was intended to be economically and politically dominated by Germany as part of the German Empire’s new regime in Eastern and Central Europe. By the time of the armistice, therefore, the concept of a Polish state was established, but with western backing it was now able to become far more than just a German puppet state. A nationalist statesman and composer Ignacy Jan Paderewski represented Poland at the Paris Peace Conference. He had spent the war in Paris as the head of the Polish International Committee, recognised by the British and French as the legitimate Polish government in exile.
Paderewski inspired a national uprising against the occupying German forces on December 27th 1918. The German Army had been significantly weakened in the east at this point and following the armistice there was little will by the German government to fight over Poland, making it easier for the Poles to succeed. Because the Poles had fought for their freedom the peacemakers at the Paris Peace Conference looked upon their plight sympathetically. The Poles had a more pressing problem than the Germans, however, as the Bolshevik Red Army began to march westwards on November 18th 1918 to invade Poland and establish a Bolshevik government there. They were stopped by a coalition of the Poles and the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). The Poles fought a war of national survival against Soviet Russia between 1919 and 1921, invading the Ukraine to seize part of its western territory and being fought back to the gates of Warsaw, where the Polish Army once again inflicted a devastating defeat on the Russian Red Army. At the conference, it suited Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau to create a strong and viable Polish state, partly to deny territory and resources to Germany, who were forced to sacrifice territory in the east, but also as a buffer against the new threat of Russia.

Czechoslovakia

Another new state to emerge at the end of the war was Czechoslovakia, which was comprised of two separate peoples, the Czechs and the Slovaks. The state emerged from the collapsing Austro Hungarian Empire, but the demands of both Czechs and Slovaks for independence had been growing for decades before the war. The head of state in 1918 was Charles I of Austria, who’s title was the king of Bohemia (another name for the Czech provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). When the Kingdom of Bohemia was dissolved as the monarchy crumbled, it was replaced by the Republic of Czechoslovakia. In May 1918, the Czech and Slovak exiles in America signed the Pittsburgh Agreement, stating their intention to join their two peoples together in a federation to create a new state. France was keen to support the creation of Czechoslovakia and Poland as they created a barrier between Germany and Russia. The French feared that if the two ‘pariah’ states formed an alliance then they would be able to attack France in the future. Czechoslovakia was granted the mountainous Sudetenland region, which had traditionally been part of the Kingdom of Bohemia, but which also had over three million Germans living in it. The peace makers at Versailles had to decide whether creating a new, democratic and strategically important Czech state that denied a German minority the right to self determination was more essential than sticking to Wilson’s 14 points, especially on the subject of national self determination. The British and French and eventually Wilson himself agreed that the rights of the Sudeten Germans were less important than the creation of a new Czechoslovakia. The new Weimar Government in Germany did not particularly raise the issue of the Sudeten Germans, but 20 years later it would become Adolf Hitler’s pretext for destroying Czechoslovakia.

Yugoslavia

A large new multi ethnic state in the Balkans emerged as a result of the Paris Peace Conference. Yugoslavia (meaning ‘South Slav Kingdom’), was the combination of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, with the Serbian Royal Family remaining as the heads of state for the new country. Throughout the war, because of Austria’s invasion of Serbia, some southern slavs (the ethnic peoples of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia), demanded a union of the slavic nations to fight off the invading enemy. by 1917 it had been agreed by the
parliaments of Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia that a union of their three countries under the umbrella of Yugoslavia would go ahead if the peace makers at Paris supported it. The Serbs were the largest and most powerful nation within the federation and they knew that there would be a lot to be gained for them from Yugoslavia. The new state also included the following territories

- Montenegro
- Croatia, Slavonia, and Vojvodina (once belonging to Hungary)
- Carniola, part of Styria, and most of Dalmatia (once belonging to Austria)
- The crown province of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Part of the territory of western Yugoslavia (Dalmatia) had been promised to Italy during the First World War, but the the British, French and Americans were quick to change their minds. The denial of Dalmatia to the Italians resulted in Orlando and his negotiators withdrawing from the conference altogether and in Italy angry nationalists began to refer to the Versailles Treaty when it was signed as ‘the mutilated peace’. One eccentric and anarchic Italian nationalist, Gabriele D’Annunzio led an armed force to seize the city of Fiume on the Dalmatian coastline that had been promised to Italy, and occupied the city until December 1920 when he was forced out by the regular Italian Army.

China

Just as Japan hoped to gain concessions for her contributions to the war from the peace makers at Paris, the Chinese had also contributed to victory and had demands of their own. The Chinese had contributed hundreds of thousands of labourers to the western front and to the Russian war effort to dig trenches, build railways and work on the docks, offloading supplies from ships. The Chinese government, which had come to power in 1911 as a result of the Chinese revolution, offered to send an army of 500,000 soldiers to the western front in 1916. They were desperate to participate in the war in order to have a place at the Paris Peace Conference in order to undo treaties that the British and French had imposed on China during the 19th Century. These treaties had given European powers the right to colonise treaty ports along the coast of China, to trade in China without restriction (the British controlled the trade of opium into China), and made European citizens immune to Chinese law. The allies turned down China’s request because they did not want to offend Japan or allow the Japanese to think that China would become too independent as a result of the war. Wilson had no love of the Japanese and saw them as a threat to American power in the Pacific and he was sympathetic towards China’s plight, he hoped that America would one day be the main power in China and would have access to the markets and resources that such a vast country possessed. However, he could not risk offending Japan and denying Saionji’s delegation the claims over China that they wanted. He feared that they would abandon the League Of Nations if they did not get their own way. When it was announced on May 4th that Japan would be given control over the Shandong Peninsula, there were angry riots in Beijing and protesters attacked the Japanese embassy. Many of the young students and idealists who protested against the Western powers (and particularly Wilson’s) abandonment of China, turned their backs on the US president’s brand of liberalism. Many had once seen Wilson as China’s saviour, but instead they looked to the Chinese nationalists of the Kuomintang to save the country. In 1920 the Chinese Communist Party was established and it also attracted young idealists who believed that revolutionary communism was the ideology that would lead China to freedom and strength.
The Arabs

In 1916 a British officer, Thomas Edward Lawrence helped to inspire a revolt amongst the Arabs of the Hejaz, a coastal province in Western Arabia, against the Ottoman Empire. The Arabs had been dominated by the Ottomans for centuries, and while they shared the same Islamic faith and the Sultan of Turkey was seen by the Arabs as the Caliph (a descendent of the Prophet Mohammed and leader of the Islamic faith), some Arab rulers were not happy about changes within the empire. In 1908 a revolt by army officers, the ‘Young Turks’ had forced the empire to become a constitutional monarchy and the power of the Islamic faith was curtailed. Sharif Hussein of Mecca and his sons Prince Feisal and Abdullah believed that the war presented an opportunity for the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula to break away from the Ottoman Empire. They were encouraged to do so by the British, who had been exploring since 1913 whether the Arabs would rise up against the Turks and whether they would make a skilled fighting force. The British and French had secretly agreed to divide the Ottoman Empire between them at the end of the war in 1915, with the Sykes Picot Agreement, which had initially placed Palestine (modern day Israel) under international control at the end of the war. Shortly thereafter, Sharif Hussein was informed by British official Sir Henry McMahon that Palestine would come under control of the Arabs. This gave the Arabs an incentive to wage a guerrilla war against the Ottomans with Lawrence and the British Army’s help. by October 1918 the Arab army had arrived in Damascus. Prince Feisal and Lawrence attended the Paris Peace Conference to demand that the British kept to their promises but by this time, Anglo French duplicity had already been exposed. The Sykes Picot agreement had also offered concessions to the Russians in the form of Constantinople. Following the February Revolution, Lenin published these secret agreements, showing how the Arabs had been tricked. In Section two we will look at how the Middle East was carved up between France and Britain and what the consequences for the region following this division.

Greece

In November 1916 Greece had joined the war on the side of the allies. King Constantine of Greece had wanted to keep his country out of the war, a decision that would have given the Austrians and Bulgarians in the Balkans a clear advantage. A military coup by army officers in support of former Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos saw him return to power in northern Greece but also resulted in the country being divided. The British and French forced King Constantine to abdicate in favour of his son by blockading the country with their navies, and they recognised Venizelos’ government as the country’s legitimate leadership. When the peace conference began Venizelos demanded territory from the Ottomans in Asia Minor, which Lloyd George was glad to help him acquire. Lloyd George saw the Greeks as a useful power in the region to keep Ottomans weak and was happy to help Venizelos but in doing so ignited a bloody new war between Greece and the new nationalists who had come to power in Turkey as the Ottoman Empire was partitioned. The Greco-Turkish war lasted from 1919 to 1923 and cost over 40,000 lives, with massacres of civilians reported on both sides.
Section Two: Empires

In the last section we learned that two of the most significant powers at the peace talks were empires - Britain and France. Both these powers were interested in creating a stable and secure world order and wanted threats to their security from Germany removed, but they were also interested in expanding their own territories. By 1918, however, both had a serious problem; there was a widespread belief among their own populations and internationally, that colonial empires had led to the tensions that caused the First World War. The idea that three quarters of a million British and 1.7 million French soldiers had died so that new colonies could be acquired in order to enrich a small elite was extremely unpopular. Following the Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks presented the ruling classes of both Britain and France as merciless exploiters. In Britain the pressure of the war had resulted in strikes and mutinies and the government was keen to prevent Bolshevik ideas from spreading, so they carefully avoided giving the impression that the war had been an opportunity to secure new colonies. Instead, the allies used the new system of the League Of Nations to establish mandates over former German and Ottoman territories. A mandate did not mean that the territory in question became an official part of the British or French Empires, instead Britain and France were given power to administer territories on behalf of the League of Nations until it was judged that they were able to administer themselves. However, in reality there was very little difference in the way colonies and mandates were governed. The process of deciding which territories would be allotted to each empire began during the war was undertaken throughout the conference in various subcommittees. The treaties that the Germans and Ottomans were forced to sign removed their imperial possessions from them and subsequent treaties transformed them into mandates. When the Treaty of Versailles was finally signed, however, there was nothing in the treaty stating that the decisions over mandates of Britain, America and France were legally binding, which led some statesmen and lawyers in the inter war period to claim that the mandate system was unlawful. The Americans were mainly unhappy with the mandates, believing that it was simply a ploy built into the League of Nations for the British and French to grow their empires. Wilson, in a bid to create the League was happy to compromise, but he also had very reactionary racial views and believed that non white colonies did need to be supervised by Europeans in order to prevent them from sliding back into anarchy.

There were three kinds of mandate in the eyes of the peace makers:

* Class A mandates (mainly those in the Middle East) which were close to self rule and, according the League of Nations“… have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.”
* Class B mandates (mainly those in Africa) which were a long way from self rule, but: "...the Mandatory [Britain or France] must be responsible for the administration of the territory under conditions which will guarantee freedom of conscience and religion.”
* Class C Mandates were countries that were thought to be so backward that they should be administered as colonies.
To the French

The French were given mandates over:

* Syria (from the Ottomans)
* Lebanon (from the Ottomans)
* French Cameroon and French Togoland (from Germany)

To the British

The British were given mandates over:

* Palestine (from the Ottomans)
* Mesopotamia (from the Ottomans - now Iraq)
* Transjordan (from the Ottomans - now Jordan)
* Tanganyika (from Germany)
* British Togoland (from Germany)
* South West Africa (from Germany)
* German Samoa (divided between Britain and New Zealand)
* German New Guinea (divided between Britain and Australia)

Other mandates went to

Japan - The South Pacific Mandate (Palau, Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Marshall Islands)
Belgium - Ruanda-Urundi (from Germany, now Rwanda and Burundi)
Australia - Nauru

Anti Imperialists

In the second half of the 19th Century, opposition to European empires had steadily grown and by the eve of the First World War there were numerous open and covert political parties and societies in colonies such as India and Vietnam, dedicated to opposing European imperialism. Most, like the Congress Party of India, did not initially demand full independence, but simply asked that they be given more autonomy within the empire and the chance to rule their own affairs. Many sent delegates to the Paris Peace Conference to demand that the new world that was being created by the peace makers would involve their emancipation. Some colonised peoples looked to one another for inspiration. In 1916 in Dublin there had been a failed uprising against British rule in Ireland, but following the election of a nationalist government in the Dublin Parliament in 1918, Ireland was declared an independent state and a war began between the British and the guerrilla movement the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The British feared that an uprising in Ireland might give Indian nationalists inspiration. Their fears were justified, in that the leaders of the Congress movement in India took a great interest in the events in Ireland and there was considerable unrest against the British (in large part due to inflation and the refusal to consider
democratic reforms after India’s sacrifices during the war). At the peace conference, the British refused to allow the question of Ireland to be discussed and delegates from across the empire (as well as uninvited nationalists and anti colonialists) were largely ignored and marginalised.
Part Three: Making Peace

Section One: The League of Nations

The creation of the League of Nations was Woodrow Wilson’s over riding passion throughout the conference, but it was not just Wilson who wanted a new international organisation. Both Britain and France wished to see a league emerge, but both powers had different motivations for this.

America and the League

Before his career in politics, Woodrow Wilson had been a law professor at Princeton University in the United States, and he believed that a new system of international law would not only make another world war less likely, but it would also reduce the power of European nations permanently. Wilson believed that Europeans had been able to build huge empires in Asia and Africa during the 19th Century, mainly because there had been little international law and no international body to prevent them. Wilson believed that the war had been America’s opportunity to embrace a new world role and that membership of the League of Nations would necessitate having a permanent international presence. For many in the USA, however, the reasons for entry into the First World War were unclear and the idea that the USA would have to fight in future European or Asian wars was deeply unpopular. In 1915 William Howard Taft, the former US President proposed a ‘League to Enforce Peace’, but none of the campaigners up to this point thought it would be a permanent body. Some thought that it would simply be an international court. Wilson hoped that trade would be the key to a more peaceful world and that cutting it off would bring a warlike nation to its senses: "blockading and closing the frontiers of that power to commerce or intercourse with any part of the world and to use any force that may be necessary..." When Woodrow Wilson returned to America he presented the Treaty of Versailles to the US Senate. A group of opponents to the treaty in the Senate called the ‘Irreconcilables’, led by three politicians (William E. Borah, James A. Reed and Robert M. LaFollette) dominated the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and opposed American entry into the League Of Nations. The Republican Party slowed down the debating of the treaty, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge opposed the commitment of American forces to defend the sovereignty of other nations. The League Of Nations would require all members to guarantee the independence of any nation invaded by another. Knowing that there was insufficient political support for the treaty, Wilson instead tried to build up public support. He travelled across America in a gruelling tour, giving 40 speeches and taking 8,000 miles of train journeys. He became gravely ill and suffered a stroke from which he never recovered. Wilson died five years later, by which time Lodge had included 14 Amendments to the treaty, which the Democrats voted against, causing it to fail in the Senate. This led to over 20 years of isolation for the USA.

Britain and the League
As we have previously seen, the British were able to use the league to declare mandates over former German and Ottoman territories. However, the British were also keen to find ways of defusing international conflicts before they became wars on the scale of the First World War. There was a deep sense of trauma in Britain during the inter war years about the horrors of the Somme and a deep seated desire to avoid a similar war. In Britain public support for an international organisation to prevent war grew from 1914 onwards. Many people in Britain and America believed that secret treaties had been the cause of the war and therefore having open negotiations at a forum like the League of Nations was essential. The British Liberal Lord Bryce put forward the argument for an end to secret treaties when he said: “The impossibility of war, I believe, would be increased in proportion as the issues of foreign policy should be known to and controlled by public opinion.” The South African Statesman and close friend of Lloyd George and Churchill, Jan Smuts drafted the League’s Covenant, along with British Diplomat Robert Cecil. The League had:

* A council of ‘Great Powers’ or permanent members and an assembly of lesser powers that were non permanent.

* A permanent secretariat (civil service).

* The responsibility for administering Mandates. The Mandates were former German, Austro Hungarian and Ottoman possessions that were deemed not ready for self rule and administered by France, Britain and other powers, normally as de-facto colonies.

* The League of Nations did not have its own armed forces and was unable to use military power to back up its decisions.

* It established the Permanent Court of International Justice which was the first major institution of international law established in the 20th Century

* In response to the establishment of a worker’s state in Russia, the league set up the International Labour Organisation, dedicated to protecting working conditions, wages and trade union rights around the world.

By December 1920 48 countries had pledged to join the League of Nations.

**France and the League**

Clemenceau had hoped that the league would be underpinned by an Atlantic military alliance between France, Britain and the USA. He saw the league as a means of keeping both the British and the Americans permanently involved in European affairs and a permanent guarantee against Germany. The league, in Clemenceau’s eyes, was a secondary consideration and Clemenceau tended to look upon Wilson’s ideas as naive, utopian and unworkable. The British, frustrated with Clemenceau’s inflexible attitude towards Germany held their own meeting at Fontainbleau, just south of Paris and Lloyd George delivered to Clemenceau the Fontainbleau memorandum. In in he set out the type of peace treaty that Britain viewed as acceptable, and it was one with the League of Nations at its heart. Lloyd George made it clear that the only guarantees of security that France was going to get would come from support for the league. Clemenceau had hoped that the league would have its own military force to enforce its decisions, but neither the American or the British populations were keen on committing troops to fight for the rights of countries overseas. Also, both Wilson and Lloyd George suspected that Clemenceau and his successors would use a league army against Germany, either as a permanent force in France or as an army of occupation.
Section Two: Punishing Germany

For Wilson, punishing Germany was not the sole point of the Paris Peace Conference, he had hoped initially to avoid a 'victor’s peace'. To Clemenceau, punishing Germany and making sure that she was permanently weakened was the most essential task that the peace makers faced. Following the Fontainbleau meeting, the British announced that they did not want to see Germany so punished that she faced collapse. Clemenceau was not the most radical of the anti German voices in French politics, there were other key political figures and commentators who demanded that Germany as a nation be permanently dismembered and never allowed to be a unified state again.

Germany’s Perspective

When the German Army marched back into Germany, they were hailed as undefeated heroes by the new president of Germany Friedrich Ebert. Ebert himself was no militarist and a member of the Social Democrat Party, therefore not given to making overt nationalist statements. However, his sympathies for the returning German Army and his claim that they were undefeated resonated with many millions of Germans who believed that because most of Germany had not been invaded (the Rhineland was occupied by the British, French and Americans), they should not be subject to punitive reparations. The allied armies had paused at the German border but were able to enforce the conditions of the peace by the threat of invasion, but a more powerful weapon at their disposal was the British naval blockade that reduced Germany to near starvation.

Another reason that the Germans had for believing that they would not be treated too harshly at the treaty were the words and actions of Wilson. Wilson’s claim to want ‘peace without victory’ led many Germans to believe that they would be treated fairly and that all the powers who had contributed to the catastrophe of the war would be punished or non would. Wilson’s 14 Points included no mention of any forfeits for Germany, and the fact that the Kaiser had been overthrown and Germany had made the transition to being a democratic nation also meant that Germans expected to be treated more leniently by another democratic power.

Weimar politicians could see the allied armies melting away through demobilisation (in November 1918 there were 198 allied divisions, six months later there were less that 40). This convinced them that if they simply played for time, the punishments meted out by the treaty would become unenforceable. However, the German delegation was not invited to any of the council or committee meetings at the conference. Instead they were only invited to the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles to sign the final treaty. From Germany’s point of view the treaty was enforced, or a ‘diktat’.

Allied Demands

German Territory

French demands for more punitive action against Germany became a higher priority after it emerged that the League Of Nations would have few real powers, and a permanent Atlantic alliance between France, Britain and America was not an option either. Clemenceau at first suggested that the western border of Germany, the Rhineland, could be detached from the rest of the country and be a separate state dominated by France. When this was rejected, he proposed that the coal producing region of Germany, the Saar,
fall under French control and be autonomous from the rest of Germany. There was a strong moral argument for French control of German coal, as the German Army deliberately destroyed some of France’s most productive coal mines before they retreated, permanently impoverishing France. Wilson deliberately made a point of not visiting the most war ravaged parts of France to see the damage Germany had done in order to prevent himself from responding ‘emotionally’. Allied leaders looked upon Germany unsympathetically when it came to the question of territorial losses. Germany had imposed two harsh treaties on Romania (the Treaty of Bucharest) and Russia (the Treaty of Brest Litovsk) during the war, in the second case taking vast swathes of territory from the Russians.

Alsace Lorraine

The provinces of Alsace and Lorraine that Germany had annexed from France during the Franco-Prussian War were reclaimed by Clemenceau. Wilson had referred to this in the 14 Points when he said: “All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.”

Demilitarisation

France’s initial demands for a military occupation beyond the Rhineland, encompassing other parts of Germany was rejected by Britain and America, but both the British and French could agree on de-militarisation. The British were anxious to see the German High Seas Fleet eliminated as a threat. The fleet had sailed to the British naval base of Scapa Flow to surrender and thousands of sailors were effectively prisoners aboard their battleships. The British were unsure of what to do with the German warships, they were obliged to share them with the French and Americans, which meant giving these two rival powers a huge advantage on the high seas. When the Germans sank their own fleet at Scapa Flow to prevent anyone owning the ships, the British Admiralty was quite relieved. The French wanted to dramatically reduce the size of the German Army and finally a token force of 100,000 men was agreed, ensuring that the German Army could defend Germany’s borders and put down communist threats to the government, but do very little else.

Reparations

Calculating the cost of war damages and deciding which country should receive the lion’s share of the compensation was an immensely complex and difficult task. In previous wars, such as the Napoleonic Wars and the Franco Prussian War, the losing side had to pay out reparations and lose territory, but Wilson had created a problem for this standard way of dealing with defeated nations by stating that the First World War should be a ‘war without victory’, meaning that before the conference began, he had undermined France’s desire for reparations. Lloyd George stated simply that ‘somebody had to pay’ for all the damage done during the war. The allies had to work out what Germany could actually afford and whether the reparations were compensation for damages done or whether they were fines and penalties for Germany’s alleged war crimes. The Americans did not want any reparation payments from Germany directly, but they did want European powers to be able to repay their debts. Britain had the largest debts and had spent more than any other nation, but France had incurred the most damage to her economy. The French and Belgians were suspicious that if the Germans were asked about their ability to pay they
would manipulate the statistics to show that Germany was poorer than she actually was. The British dramatically increased the size of the reparations bill after Jan Smuts of South Africa proposed that pensions and payments to widows and orphans of allied soldiers be included in the total reparations bill. A special commission was established at the conference to decide a final figure and it was allowed a two year period in which to deliberate. In 1921 a final figure was agreed (see below), by which time public anger in Britain and America had subsided and Clemenceau (voted from power in 1920), had conceded that France would never get as much as it wanted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clauses of the Treaty</th>
<th>Losses to Germany</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Territory</strong></td>
<td>Germany lost 25,000 square miles of territory to France, Belgium, Poland, Denmark, Czechoslovakia and Lithuania and seven million people. The Rhineland was occupied by allied troops and the Saar was placed under League of Nations control. In the east, the city of Danzig, now between Germany and Poland, came under League of Nations control.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colonies</strong></td>
<td>Germany lost all her colonies in Africa and the Pacific, along with the treaty port of Tsingtao in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military Restrictions</strong></td>
<td>The German Army was reduced to 100,000 men in ten divisions. The German General Staff (the leadership of the army) was abolished and the numbers of army training schools limited. New military fortifications were banned. Germany was not allowed to buy or sell weapons. Aircraft, tanks, armoured cars and chemical weapons were prohibited. Germany was allowed six battleships, six light cruisers and twelve destroyers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>War Guilt</strong></td>
<td>Germany had to accept sole responsibility for the outbreak of the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reparations</strong></td>
<td>Initially Germany was ordered to pay 20 billion gold (US$ 5 billion) marks to cover the cost of the occupation. Germany was presented with the vast sum of 269 billion gold marks to pay, but offered just 50 billion instead. Following this a figure of 132 billion gold marks was established for all the central powers to pay. The British and French knew that Germany could not pay the sum and created a series of stages of payment that gave British and French electorates the impression that the payments were being kept up, when in reality, the two countries were allowing a gradual German default.</td>
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Part Four

Section One: Interpretations

Throughout the 20th Century there have been several different approaches to evaluating the Paris Peace Conference. Inevitably, the way that the peace conference has been seen changed over time, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War. Below is a small selection of the writers and historians who have examined the Paris Peace Conference, there are obviously many thousands of books and articles that have been written about the conference, the authors below capture some of the changing attitudes towards the final peace treaty.

John Maynard Keynes

In 1920 the British economist John Maynard Keynes, who had been an advisor to the British Government at Versailles, fiercely criticised the treaty in his book, The Economic Consequences of the Peace. He claimed that the ‘big three’ had been short sighted and done nothing to restore Europe’s shattered economy, instead focusing on punishing Germany. Keynes was a brilliant economist but also extremely egotistical and was particularly angered that his own proposals on how to restore Europe’s economy and prevent future wars were ignored. In the decades since the book was published it

Lloyd George and Winston Churchill

In the inter war years, both men wrote memoirs of the war and the peace making in Paris which were highly influential in shaping public perceptions of their roles and the peacemaking process. By the 1920s, both men were convinced that the remaining threats to peace in Europe had been eliminated with the Locarno Pact and the Washington Naval Agreement. Therefore, in their writing, they were more conciliatory towards Germany and more willing to accept that the war had not all been Germany’s fault. Both men were concerned about the growing power of the Soviet Union and Lloyd George in particular believed by the 1930s that it was time to stop punishing Germany.

AJP Taylor

Taylor, the most celebrated and famous British historian of the 20th Century wrote a groundbreaking and (for the time) controversial book, The Origins of the Second World War in 1961. In it, he moved away from the popular idea at the time that the war was simply the work of Hitler’s evil genius, and instead placed much of the blame on the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty was not strong enough to weaken Germany sufficiently to prevent a future war, Taylor argued, but it was punitive enough to create the climate for Hitler to exploit. He disagreed with Keynes that the treaty was too harsh, a standpoint that many subsequent historians have come to endorse.

Margaret Macmillan

Margaret Macmillan, like Taylor, is a revisionist historian of the Paris Peace Conference. In her 1996 book Peacemakers, she largely agreed with the view that the conference was unable to punish Germany effectively due to internal divisions between the great powers.
However, she is less critical of the peace makers, claiming that they had an almost impossible job in trying to contain the new nationalisms that had exploded across Europe and Asia in the wake of the collapse of four empires. Macmillan argues that if anything, the conference should be seen as a success in that it managed to create a peace that lasted for two decades.

Section Two: Activity

Look at the question below and then read the guidance. If you want my feedback directly, you can email your answer to me here.

Question: ‘Making peace at the Paris Peace Conference was a virtually impossible task’

How valid is this statement?

Guidance: This is a deliberately provocative and controversial statement that is designed to elicit a judgement from you in response. If a person said something directly challenging or opinionated to you, you might naturally respond with an opinion of your own, either agreeing or disagreeing to some degree, and the same principal applies here. Based on everything you’ve read in this ebook, do you agree that the process of making peace was ‘virtually impossible’? If so, then why was there a period of relative peace throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s? Perhaps it’s possible to say that while the statement isn’t quite right, another way of looking at the conference might be more appropriate?

“In answering this question it is important to query the statement, which describes peacemaking at the conference as ‘virtually impossible’. This is not a sustainable argument because throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s a peace between the European powers did exist. This essay will argue instead that the compromises made at the Paris Peace Conference resulted in a treaty that did not sufficiently weaken Germany, but that inspired resentment and led to the rise of Hitler.”

Guidance: The next bit of your essay should be focused on the historiographical discussion. Obviously, you aren’t the first person to examine these arguments or debates. You can use historians like AJP Taylor and Margaret MacMillan and the writings of John Maynard Keynes to explore the debate, before introducing your own ideas. You might want to discuss the historiography like this:

“There have been several generation of historians and writers who have examined the Paris Peace Conference in the 20th Century, assessing the extent to which it could be viewed as an impossible task. John Maynard Keynes did not see it as impossible, instead, he was critical of the peace makers, claiming that there were missed opportunities to rebuild the European economy at the conference, but that the focus was too heavily on punishment. In the 1960s AJP Taylor highlighted the contrasting objectives of the British, French and Americans as the cause of an ineffective peace treaty. This was not to suggest that the conference was impossible, but that the peace makers made serious errors. In this way, Taylor and Keynes agree, but they disagree over the nature of the errors. MacMillan supports the idea that the conference was exceedingly difficult and suggests that the fact that any peace was decided at all was a huge achievement. This essay draws mainly from Macmillan’s viewpoint because…..’
Basically, you’ve discussed the field of debate (or some of it, it’s such a vast discussion that you’ll only ever get a fragment of it into your essay) and said which strand of the debate you agree with and support. Then you can go into your own examination of the evidence.

**Guidance:** Now you need to create paragraphs that will support the line of argument (cast your eyes back over the introduction and look again at what you are trying to say). Throughout the rest of the essay you need to present evidence and ideas that will support what it is you are trying to say. Therefore you should avoid simply ‘telling the story’ and going through a long and boring narrative about ‘what happened’. Instead you need to select knowledge that is appropriate the the point you are trying to make. An easy paragraph structure (though when you are feeling really confident, you can be more creative), is as follows:

* Point
* Evidence
* Judgement

Or more simply

* Here’s what I think
* Here’s why I think it
* Here’s what it means

**Point (making a clear and unambiguous statement)**

‘In the task of peacemaking, the British, French and Americans had to deal with a dramatic growth in nationalism, complicated by Woodrow Wilson’s promises of national self determination.

**Evidence (where you present evidence to support the statement)**

‘The collapse of four empires (Russian, Ottoman, German, Austro-Hungarian), had allowed peoples who had been colonised by these imperial powers to establish their own nation states in 1918-19. Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland were three examples of this. Many of these new nations had aggressive territorial demands and feuded with their neighbours, others were granted territories from the former great powers of Germany, Russia and Austria.

**Judgement (ok, so this is interesting, but so what? How does this relate to the question?)**

‘The emergence of new nations in Europe not only made the job of making peace more complex, it also stored up ethnic tensions for the future. It was impossible to ensure that all Germans, Poles or Czechs lived under governments of their choosing, and Hitler was able to exploit this fact in the late 1930s. This suggests that whilst nationalism did not make the conference impossible, it certainly made it extremely complicated and undermined hopes for long term peace.

Putting the paragraph all together it reads:

**Point (making a clear and unambiguous statement)**
'n the task of peacemaking, the British, French and Americans had to deal with a dramatic growth in nationalism, complicated by Woodrow Wilson's promises of national self determination. The collapse of four empires (Russian, Ottoman, German, Austro-Hungarian), had allowed peoples who had been colonised by these imperial powers to establish their own nation states in 1918-19. Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland were three examples of this. Many of these new nations had aggressive territorial demands and feuded with their neighbours, others were granted territories from the former great powers of Germany, Russia and Austria. The emergence of new nations in Europe not only made the job of making peace more complex, it also stored up ethnic tensions for the future. It was impossible to ensure that all Germans, Poles or Czechs lived under governments of their choosing, and Hitler was able to exploit this fact in the late 1930s. This suggests that whilst nationalism did not make the conference impossible, it certainly made it extremely complicated and undermined hopes for long term peace.

Glossary:

Throughout this ebook, certain key terms that students often find complex have been highlighted. Here are the terms and their definitions:

**Autocratic**: A government where all power comes from one individual and the population only have the rights that an autocrat chooses to grant them.

**Capitalist**: Someone who owns the means of making wealth (factories, businesses) and gets to keep the profits of that business.

**Carpathian**: The mountainous region between the Austro Hungarian and Russian Empires

**Colonisation**: The control of one nation, culture of race by another

**Creditor**: An organisation, individual or nation to whom money is owed

**Dardanelles**: The straits that separate the European from the Asian parts of the Ottoman Empire

**Debtor**: A person or group that owes money

**Deep South**: The southern, former slave owning states of America

**Diktat**: German word for ‘order’.

**Pariah**: A person or nation that is considered an outcast by the rest of the community

**Punitive peace treaty**: A peace treaty where the sole purpose of it is to punish

**Spartacist League**: A group of revolutionary German socialists who tried to seize power between December 1918 and January 1919 and were violently suppressed

**Treaty Port**: Ports on the Chinese coast that were controlled by European powers

**Tsar Nicholas II**: The last Tsar and autocrat of Russian.