

## The War Ends

When Russia withdrew from the war, the Germans launched a massive offensive on the western front. At first the German gamble appeared to be successful, but with the arrival of fresh troops from America, the German advance was halted. As more American troops entered the battlefields, German leaders realized that victory was impossible. William II abdicated, and on November 11, 1918, a new German government signed an armistice.

The war devastated Europe. Some 9 million soldiers died; 22 million were wounded. The social fabric of European society was torn apart. Germany and Austria-Hungary experienced political upheaval. In Germany, radical socialists vying for political supremacy lost when leaders of the moderates instructed the army to kill the radicals' leaders. The senselessness of the war led many Europeans to search for peace. They found a voice in U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, who drew up an outline for lasting peace, the Fourteen Points. Key provisions were the elimination of secret diplomacy, the right of self-determination, and a "general association of nations" to help ensure democracy around the world.

## The Treaty of Versailles

Wilson's popularity throughout Europe did not soften the ambitions of the victors. Meeting in Paris in early 1919, David Lloyd George of Britain and Georges Clemenceau of France agreed that Germany should be held responsible for the war and pay harsh reparations. The British aimed to secure their overseas empire, while the French wanted to protect themselves from future German aggression. After much compromise, they agreed to Wilson's League of Nations. On June 28, 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed. The Germans were outraged by the terms, particularly Article 231, the so-called War Guilt Clause.

Eastern Europe was also reconfigured. New nation-states were created to satisfy ethnic nationalism and serve as potential allies to France and Britain. Austria-Hungary was dismantled; Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia emerged as new nations, while the Balkans were reshaped to provide land for Romania and Serbia. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved into new Arab states; however, Britain and France controlled them as mandates on behalf of the newly created League of Nations.

The peace process put into place a structure that might have prevented future world wars. But protecting peace would require a vigorous effort by the global powers, and when the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, it was doomed. When the United States retreated into isolationism, Britain followed suit, and France found itself alone to face the wrath of Germany.

## A Precarious Peace

One of the most difficult post-war situations involved Germany and France. In the name of national security, France insisted that Germany make reparations for World War I. After an initial payment, Germany realized that reparations were not economically or politically feasible. To force Germany to pay, France occupied the Ruhr valley, precipitating a German economic disaster. The Deutsche Mark became worthless, and German extremists grew in popularity.

To address the situation, an international commission proposed the Dawes Plan, calling for a reduction in reparations and U.S. loans for German economic recovery. The Dawes Plan relied on foreign investment, primarily from the United States. Although Germany's economy improved in the short run, the dependency on foreign economies proved detrimental at the onset of the Great Depression. France and Germany kept up momentum with further diplomacy, resulting in the Treaty of Locarno (1925), which established Germany's western borders. The agreement produced great optimism, later reinforced by the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which was designed to outlaw war as an "instrument of national policy." These diplomatic measures, however, were unenforceable.