

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Notes

Causes and Consequences of World War I

Introduction

The World War I, which began in the year 1914 and lasted for four years and three months, proved to be entirely novel in many respects in the history of mankind. It was a war which was fought on worldwide scale and by whole peoples which had its repercussions on practically every country in the world. It was the first international war to call upon the resources of modern technology to find new war weapons of offence and defense. It was a four- dimensional war fought on land and above land and on sea and under sea.

A variety of factors and forces simultaneously contributed to the World War I.

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| 1. Secret Diplomacy | 8. International Anarchy |
| 2. Rise of Militarism | 9. Murder of Archduke Franz |
| 3. Economic imperialism | Ferdinand of Austria |
| 4. National Rivalries | |
| 5. Aggressive Nationalism | |
| 6. Newspaper Wars | |
| 7. Character of Kaiser William II of Germany | |

1. SECRET DIPLOMACY

“The greatest single underlying cause of the war”, in the opinion of Prof. Sidney B. Fay, “was the system of secret alliances which developed after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870”. The beginning of secret diplomacy was made by Otto Von Bismarck, the iron Chancellor of Germany. Germany was always fearful that France might any time take revenge for the loss of Alsace and Lorraine and national humiliation as a result of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Hence the main aim of her foreign policy after 1870, was to keep France diplomatically isolated in Europe.

1879- Dual Alliance- Germany and Austria- Hungary

1881-Three Emperor's league – Germany, Austria- Hungary and Russia

1882- Triple Alliance- Germany, Austria- Hungary and Italy

1887- Reinsurance Treaty- Germany and Russia

In 1890, Bismarck resigned from chancellorship and the German Emperor Kaiser William II did not renew the Reinsurance treaty with Russia. France was desperately waiting for an alliance partner.

1894- Franco- Russian Alliance

1902- Anglo- Japanese Alliance

1904- Entente Cordial- England and France

1907- Triple Entente- England, France and Russia

Thus, practically the whole of Europe came to be divided into two diametrically opposed camps. Germany, Austria- Hungary, Italy and Turkey, England, France, Russia and Japan. Most of these alliances were kept secret which bred suspicion and hatred of each other and made war between them inevitable.

2. Rise of Militarism

Mad race for armaments-After 1870, throughout Europe there began a mad race for military and naval armaments, they pointed out that it was meant for national defense and to produce a sense of security. This mad race was also to some extent result of the secret diplomacy.

Great influence of the Military and Naval officers over civilian Governments demanding preparedness in case of eventuality of war. Preventive war- belief in declaring war upon enemy while it is still weak.

3. Economic imperialism

Imperialist powers -Raw Materials, Markets and Reinvestment opportunities. The struggle for above resources and for colonies became acute during the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century mainly due to the fact that Germany and Italy entered the

race for colonies after their unification in 1870. By 1914, all the European Powers had secured slices of Africa. In China, it was only Italy, which failed to gain something for herself. Railway construction was one of the most significant forms of economic imperialism, because it involved both political as well as economic interests. It led to conflicts among European Powers. England- Cape to Cairo -conflict with German, Belgian and French. Russia Trans-Siberian Railway- led to Russo-Japanese War. Germany - Berlin-Baghdad railway-conflict with Britain, France, Russia.

4. Aggressive Nationalism

Aggressive nationalism partly contributed to the “Great War”. The love for one’s own country demanded the hatred of the other. Thus love of France demanded the hatred of Germany and vice versa. The spirit of aggressive nationalism generated a feeling of national superiority among world statesman. Moreover, nationalism among people under foreign yoke urged them to win political independence even through death and destruction.

5. National Rivalries

Another factor which is somewhat connected with aggressive nationalism was national rivalries which were mounting in the first decade of the 20th century. National Rivalry between Great Britain and Germany Franco- German Rivalry, Between Austria- Hungary and Italy, Russo-German Rivalry in the Balkans.

6. Newspaper Wars

The poisoning of the public opinion by the newspapers in all the countries contributed a great deal to the World War I.

During the period preceding the outbreak of the war, the newspapers of different countries took up some points of dispute, exaggerated it, made attacks and counter attacks until a regular newspaper war was endangered. This was specially so in Austria and Serbia, Germany and France. This led to mutual hatred and suspicion which contributed to the great war.

7. Character of Kaiser William II of Germany

Kaiser William II was haughty and arrogant but at the same time very ambitious. He wanted to make Germany the strongest power in the world. He strongly championed the policy of ‘world power or downfall’. Hence, he found nearly impossible to make any compromise in international affairs.

8. International Anarchy

World War I broke out in 1914, because of the existence of international anarchy. Every nation could do what it pleased or what it dared because there was no international government to make laws for the nations and to compel all nations to respect such laws. Practically no state

was ready to submit its dispute with another to any arbitration or seek any other way of peaceful settlement.

9. Murder of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria

Finally, when all the European countries were armed to the teeth, ready to fly to war, a little spark was needed to set the forces on fire. The murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir apparent to the Austrian throne and his wife on June 28, 1914, by a Serbian youth in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, became the pretext for the world conflagration.

CONSEQUENCES OF WORLD WAR I

- 1. Great Loss of Human Life
- 2. Economic Exhaustion of Europe
- 3. Reconstruction of the map of Europe
- 4. Collapse of Four Imperial Structures in Europe
- 5. Reduction in the Armaments of the Vanquished
- 6. Growth of Leftist and Radical Parties
- 7. Emergence of Great Powers
- 8. League of Nations
- 9. Germs of the World War II

Great Loss of Human Life

The World War I caused terrible loss of human life and property. Out of the 65 million men, who participated in the war, 9 million men were killed and 29 million men were wounded or missing. To the list of casualty must be added an extra 13 million, who died due to civilian massacres and disease and famine. "Never before had there been a struggle", writes Prof.

C.J.H Hays, "so gigantic, so deadly and so costly".

Economic Exhaustion of Europe

The direct as well as indirect financial cost of the World War I has been roughly calculated at about 400 million dollars. This naturally resulted in economic exhaustion of Europe. It became more apparent in Central Europe where mounting national debts and terrible inflation completely dislocated normal economic life. Unemployment and undernourishment on a large scale, struck very hard at the roots of the economic life of Europe.

Collapse of Four Imperial Structures in Europe

The following four Empires collapsed in the WW I-Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Turkey.

Reconstruction of the map of Europe

One of the most significant consequences of World War I was the reconstruction of the map of Europe by a series of treaties imposed on the vanquished by the victors.

The Treaty of Versailles – Germany, June 22, 1919

The Treaty of St. Germain- Austria, September 10, 1919

The Treaty of Traianon- Hungary, June 4, 1920

The Treaty of Nully- Bulgaria, November 27, 1919

The Treaty of Sevres- Turkey, August 10, 1920

By these treaties national boundaries of some nations changed, new independent nations based on the principles of self-determination as proposed by American president Woodrow Wilson were created in East Europe. A sovereign state Poland was created with all its original territories. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were formed out of Austria-Hungary. Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were born out of the Russian Empire.

Reduction in the Armaments of the Vanquished

The above treaties also aimed at reducing the armaments of the vanquished and keeping their military weak. The military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles made Germany to stand totally unarmed in front of the fully armed Allied Powers. The German army was reduced to 100,000, Her Navy and Airforce were totally reduced. Conscription was completely abolished. The right bank of the Rhine was demilitarized to a depth of 50 km. In the same manner the Treaty of St. Germain reduced the Austrian army to 30,000 soldiers and her naval force to only three police boats on the Danube.

Growth of Leftist and Radical Parties

At the end of the WW I, practically the whole of normal industrial and economic life was seriously affected; most industries were ruined. Unemployment and rehabilitation of soldiers who returned from the war caused serious problems. These and numerous other post-war problems created favourable conditions for the growth of leftist and radical parties under different names and brands. Socialist, Communist Fascist and Nazi parties captured power in most European countries after WW I.

Emergence of Great Powers

The following two countries emerged super powers after the first world War- England and France

League of Nations

In order to promote and achieve international co-operation, good-will and peace by discarding war as a means of settling disputes among nations, the American President Woodrow Wilson proposed creation of a League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference and it came into

existence on 10th of January 1920. It would function through its three organs A Assembly, a council and a Permanent Secretariate besides a International court of Justice and International Labour Organisation.

Germens of the World War II

The Treaty of Versailles contained the germens of the W. W II.

It economically crippled, politically segregated, militarily humbled, nationally humiliated and physically exhausted Germany. It was therefore, but natural that the Germans were reared and brought up in the “cult of revenge” under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, who was mainly responsible for the World War II. Had the Treaty of Versailles been revised in time, the crisis of World War II might have been averted.

Conclusion

The World War I had lasted four years and three months, involved thirty sovereign states, overthrown four empires, given birth to seven new nations, taken 10 million lives in the field of battle and perhaps an equal number of non-combatant lives by privation, disease and revolution and wasted incalculable wealth.