

International Scenario: World War I (1914-1918)

World War I began as a local European war in 1914 but soon became a global conflict that lasted until 1918. The first war that involved nations (28) from all around the world, it's commonly called "The Great War" or "The War to End All Wars."

Background

By 1914, the Great Powers of Europe had divided themselves into two competing alliances. On one side, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the Triple Alliance. On the other, Russia, France, and Great Britain formed the Triple Entente. Both alliances were intended to be defensive, ensuring neither side attacked the other. Some members of both sides also had treaty obligations to other European nations.

Outbreak of War

On June 28, 1914, a young Serbian named Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, in the city of Sarajevo. Sarajevo was the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, an Austro-Hungarian province with a large population of Serbs. Austria-Hungary responded to the assassination with a series of demands on neighboring Serbia, culminating in Austria-Hungary's declaration of war one month later.

Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia brought the system of alliances into play, with Russia responding to the declaration by mobilizing its armed forces to come to Serbia's aid. Germany, bound to protect Austria-Hungary, in turn, mobilized its forces against Russia, with France then mobilizing to come to Russia's aid. When Germany opted to invade France by going through neutral Belgium, Britain joined the war as well; within weeks, the European Continent was at war. Italy remained neutral at the war's outset. Germany and Austria-Hungary, with the later addition of the Ottoman Empire, would come to be called the Central Powers, while Britain, France, and Russia were called the "Allies."

The Role of the United States

At the outset of the war, most Americans favored staying out of the conflict, viewing it as neither our business nor our problem. President Woodrow Wilson stated that the U.S. would remain neutral. Within three years, however, the U.S. would become involved in the war.

When the war began, Britain used its immense Royal Navy to implement a blockade on German shipping with the aim of cutting off their supplies. Germany responded by using its submarines, known as U Boats, to sneak up on Allied ships and sink them, hoping to break the blockade. Germany did not limit their attacks to Allied navies; instead, any ship, including commercial or passenger ships, found the war zone was considered a legitimate target, a practice known as unrestricted submarine warfare. On May 7, 1915, the British passenger liner *Lusitania* was sunk off the coast of England. 1,198 passengers were killed, including 128 Americans. Americans were enraged at the attack, demanding Germany end its unrestricted submarine warfare.

As the war progressed, American public opinion increasingly favored the Allies, and President Wilson began to campaign for American support for the Allies openly. For one, there was a closer shared history between Britain and France. Both nations were also closer in their systems of government to the United States. Lastly, Britain and France were close U.S. trade partners; From 1914 to 1916, trade with the Allies grew from \$825 million to \$3.2 billion. Germany, on

the other hand, was a dictatorship. All this, and the unrestricted submarine warfare policy, led Americans to increasingly see Germany as their enemy. While officially maintaining neutrality, Americans offered aid to the Allies in the form of loans and weapons.

In January 1917, the British intercepted a telegram from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to the German ambassador to Mexico. Zimmermann proposed that Mexico ally with Germany against the United States. In exchange, Zimmermann promised that Germany would help Mexico recover its former territories of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The Zimmerman Telegram proved to be the final straw. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson gave a speech asking Congress to declare war on Germany. In his speech, he said the U.S. would go to war to “make the world safe for democracy.” On April 6, the U.S. officially declared war.



Fighting on the Front & Ending

World War I was different from previous wars. Soldiers used deadlier weapons, such as machine guns and poison gas. The tank was introduced. Airplanes, only invented in 1903, became air forces. Military operations were concentrated along three major “fronts” in Europe: the Western Front (centered around eastern France and Belgium), the eastern front (inside Russia), and the southern front (Serbia and later Italy). Many of the deadliest battles in history occurred during WWI, such as the Somme and Verdun. American entry into the war on the Allies’ side in 1917 proved a crucial turning point towards Allied Victory. Exhausted, on October 3, 1918, Germany requested an armistice (cease-fire), which, after negotiations, went into effect at 11:00 a.m. on the 11th of November- the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. President Wilson, who hoped that the conflict would prove to be “the war to end all wars,” laid out his vision for the post-war world in a program called the Fourteen Points. Among the Fourteen Points was a proposal for a “general association of nations” to help settle future international disputes before they led to war. This organization became the League of Nations.

Adapted from: <http://www.kidzworld.com/article/5701-overview-of-world-war-i>,
http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/Lesson_75_Notes.htm, and https://www.ducksters.com/history/world_war_i/

Image Credit: “[Inf. advancing on path through barbed wire entanglements, which tank has just made. One man has fallen over the barbed wire. 107th Inf., 27th Div., near Beauquesnes, Somme, France](#)” from Library of Congress