CHAPTER 28

Descent into the Abyss: World War I and the Crisis of the European Global Order

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The First World War—"The Great War"—was one of several key turning points of the 20th century. A combination of imperialism, arms races, industrial might, and nationalism pushed the Great Powers of Europe into a regional conflict that quickly exploded into a global war of unprecedented devastation. Among the many results were a loss of global power for Europe, the rise of the United States and Japan, Bolshevism in Russia, increased nationalism among European colonies around the world, and political and social power shifts in several nations.

The Coming of the Great War. By 1914, diplomatic tensions, colonial rivalries, and arms races among the Great Powers of Europe—England, France, Germany, and Russia—led to the creation of two opposing groups, each dedicated to out-maneuvering the other.

The Long March to War. Fear of Germany’s growing power drove Russia, England, and France into an alliance, the Triple Entente. German Kaiser Wilhelm II formed the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy. These two rival groups maneuvered for advantages globally through their colonial holdings, as well as regionally through building arms and nationalism. However, these diplomatic and military competitions combined with social unrest—especially labor—at home to produce a tense atmosphere among the Great Powers by 1914.

The Outbreak of War. The focal point of political tensions in Europe in 1914 resided in the Balkans, where internal and external forces of nationalism triggered a crucial event in starting World War I: the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. A series of military and diplomatic moves by Europe’s two principal alliances led to mobilization of their armies. Quickly, war developed on two fronts in Europe, with Germany its nexus.

A World at War. Europe’s leaders expected the war to be brief and decisive, a war that would break the knot of tensions that had built up over decades. The Allies, principally England, France, and new colleague Italy, fought the Central Powers, mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Contrary to their expectations, the war quickly bogged down into one of long stalemate and unprecedented death.

The War in Europe. The war was fought on two major fronts. In the West, the Germans fought the French and British in France; in the East, Germany and Austria-Hungary fought the Russians. On the Western Front, advancements in weaponry combined with the mass production techniques of the Industrial Revolution to create enormous casualties and defensive tactics, most infamously trench warfare. After early gains, the Germans were stymied by the Allies. Both sides settled into wholesale slaughter of their men.
The War in the East and in Italy. In eastern Europe, most of the fighting was in western Russia and in the Balkans. The result was as devastating there as on the Western Front. Russia’s early and successful offensive was stopped by Germany. Russian leadership, tactics, and weaponry were little match for the Germans, but a superior number of soldiers kept the tsar’s forces from capitulating to the Central Powers. In northern Italy, the story was similar. Italian gains were quickly nullified by the Austrians. Support from England and France shored up weak Italian resistance, but not before hundreds of thousands were dead. The brutal realities of the war plunged both Russia and Italy into social and political turmoil.

The Homefronts in Europe. Each of the powers was able to mobilize large numbers of soldiers through the course of the war, despite food shortages and privations at home. Governments increased in power. Many industrial sectors of these nations were co-opted by the state. Government-run propaganda departments encouraged their citizens to keep the war effort going and drummed up support from neutral nations. Labor unrest became a worrisome matter, especially in Germany and Russia. In the latter, the tsar was overthrown and replaced first by a provisional government and later by a socialist-led revolution. As women replaced men in the workplace, calls for political and social equality increased. As a result, in Britain, Germany, and the United States, women gained the vote after the war.

The War Outside Europe. The presence of the West in all world regions spread the conflict. The British dominions supported Britain by sending soldiers to many fronts, most notably in Africa and at Gallipoli. Japan joined the Allied cause and attacked German holdings in the Pacific. The United States, at first neutral, also entered the war on the Allied side. U.S. assistance in manpower and materiel turned the balance to the Allies. On the seas, the principal combatants were Britain and Germany.

Endgame: The Return of Offensive Warfare. Late in the war, the United States introduced hundreds of thousands of men into battle against the Germans, who had little with which to counter. In desperation, Germany launched a final offensive on the Western Front after knocking Russia out of the war. When it failed, German commanders facing rebellion at home and on the battlefield agreed to an armistice brokered by the United States. The physical, economic, social, and psychological results of the war included the Great Depression and the rise of totalitarianism in the two decades that followed.

Failed Peace. The Treaty of Versailles left its signers dissatisfied. The English and French pushed the Americans into an agreement that punished the Germans while establishing the League of Nations. Japan and Italy’s hoped-for gains were largely ignored. Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire collapsed as political entities. The new communist government in Russia was not allowed to participate in the peace conference. Ultimately, the Treaty of Versailles failed to bring a lasting peace, for it angered the people of a defeated and humiliated Germany.

The Nationalist Assault on the European Colonial Order. Four years of war disrupted European colonial domination and encouraged nationalist movements that began before World War I. To shore up power in the colonies, the British and French made promises of increased self-determination to local elites but then engendered resentment by reneging on them after the war.
India: The Makings of the Nationalist Challenge to the British Raj. The Indian nationalist movement set the pattern of challenge to colonial authorities in Asia and Africa. Key themes emerged, such as leadership by Western-educated elites and charismatic figures and nonviolent forms of protest. The Indian Congress Party led its country's move toward independence.

Social Foundations of a Mass Movement. By the beginning of the 20th century, resistance to over a hundred years of British rule mounted in India. Charges of British racism and detrimental economic policy grew steadily. The British countered that their policies provided efficient government, but nationalists replied the price paid was too high.

The Rise of Militant Nationalism. Indian leaders, such as B. G. Tilak, demanded full and immediate independence and threatened violence. His rhetoric appealed to many Hindus, but frightened others, especially moderate Hindus and Muslims. Secret societies sprang up that promoted and carried out violence, but British crackdowns limited their effectiveness.

The Emergence of Gandhi and the Spread of the Nationalist Struggle. Unlike Tilak, Mohandas Gandhi appealed to both the masses and the Western-educated nationalist politicians. His emphasis on nonviolent but persistent protest weakened British control of India. His political savvy and dogged determination made him a formidable opponent to British authorities who consistently underestimated his abilities and appeal. Under his leadership, nationalist protest surged in India during the 1920s and 1930s.

Egypt and the Rise of Nationalism in the Middle East. Egypt's nationalist movement was unique in Afro-Asia because it preceded European domination. Britain responded to Egyptian nationalist agitation against the Ottoman Empire with occupation. At the end of the 19th century, Arabic newspapers in Egypt promoted independence from both English and Turkish rule. By the early 20th century, decades of ill will between the British and the population led to violence on both sides. In 1913, a constitution was granted. The outbreak of World War I saw a temporary diminution of hostilities in Egypt.

War and Nationalist Movements in the Middle East. A Turkish republic was formed on the basis of a Western model. Meanwhile, England and France divided the defeated Ottoman Empire's Arab holdings into mandates. They quickly faced Arab nationalist resistance to European occupation and the establishment of a League of Nations-approved Jewish homeland in Palestine. The latter was created through Britain's support of yet another form of nationalism, Zionism. These conflicting movements led to great tension in the Middle East.

Revolt in Egypt, 1919. By the end of the World War I, Egypt was ripe for revolt. Students and, significantly, women, led large demonstrations against colonial rule. British withdrawal began in 1922. Once in power, Egyptian leaders did little in the way of reform. Nasser led a military coup in 1952, promising sweeping social and political change.

In Depth: Women in Asian and African Nationalist Movements. Education provided to Asian and African elite women by European colonizers created a nucleus of remarkable leaders in 20th-century nationalist movements. Western-educated Indian women marched in mass demonstrations for national independence and social reform. In Egypt, both veiled and Westernized women participated in similar protests. In Algeria and Kenya, women participated in guerilla tactics against colonial forces. In many of these places, the reforms women sought in the first half of the 20th century have yet to be fulfilled.
CHAPTER 28

TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

Treaty of Versailles
pan-African Congresses
Dinshawai incident in Egypt
United States enters war

assassination of Archduke Ferdinand
Battle of the Marne

___ 1906
___ 1914
___ 1915
___ 1917
___ 1919
___ 1920s

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. On a separate sheet of paper, define each one.

Adolf Hitler
Aimé Césaire
alliance system
Allies
Archduke Ferdinand
Armenian genocide
armistice
Ataturk
Balfour Declaration
Battle of Gallipoli
Battle of Jutland
Battle of the Marne
Big Four
blank check
Central Powers
David Lloyd George
dictat

MAP EXERCISE

Eastern Front
Franco-Prussian War
Gamal Abdul Nasser
Georges Clemenceau
Ho Chi Minh
Indian Congress Party
Kaiser Wilhelm II
League of Nations
Léon Darnas
Leon Pinsker
Leopold Sédar Senghor
mandates
Mohandas Gandhi
Montagu-Chelmsford
reforms
Mutiny of Ahmad Orabi
pan-Africanism

Peace of Paris
self-determination
Society for the
Colonization of Israel
stab in the back
The Great Powers
The Great War
Treaty of Versailles
trench warfare
Triple Alliance
Triple Entente
Tsar Nicholas II
Wafd party
Western front
Woodrow Wilson
Zionists
The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

- Draw in the line of trenches on the Western Front.
- Draw in the line marking the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.
- Mark the site of the Battle of Jutland.

On the basis of the map above and your knowledge of the period, discuss the geophysical and geopolitical advantages and disadvantages the Central Powers faced in World War I.
MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. The event that triggered the outbreak of World War I was the
   A) invasion of Poland by the Germans.
   B) assassination of the Austrian archduke by a Serbian nationalist.
   C) murder of the Russian tsar by a Bolshevik.
   D) death of the German kaiser.
   E) sinking of the Lusitania.

2. During World War I, Japan
   A) seized German colonies in Asia.
   B) entered the war on the side of the Central Powers.
   C) remained neutral.
   D) lost power in devastating battles.
   E) allied with the United States to dominate the Pacific.

3. Russia made a separate peace with Germany after
   A) Germany surrendered in East Prussia.
   B) the Treaty of Versailles was ratified.
   C) the fall of the tsar.
   D) U.S. President Wilson brokered an armistice.
   E) the Allies declared victory.

4. Which of these was NOT included in the final set of treaties that ended World War I?
   A) A League of Nations was formed.
   B) Russia was rewarded for its service to the Allies by a grant of territories in the
      Balkans.
   C) Germany was forced to accept blame for the war.
   D) Austria-Hungary was divided into several nations.
   E) Germany lost its overseas colonies.

5. Which of these nations did NOT join the League of Nations?
   A) Japan
   B) Germany
   C) France
   D) United States
   E) Italy
6. Which of these was NOT a leader in the movement against British rule in India?
   A) Jinnah
   B) Tilak
   C) Herzl
   D) Gandhi
   E) Nehru

7. The movement to promote a Jewish homeland in Palestine was called what?
   A) Israelism
   B) Palestinianism
   C) Balfourism
   D) Imperialism
   E) Zionism

8. An American who promoted African unity after the war was
   A) Louis Armstrong
   B) Charles Lindbergh
   C) Woodrow Wilson
   D) Marcus Garvey
   E) Theodore Roosevelt

9. The French premier who argued at Versailles for German reparations was
   A) Alfred Dreyfus
   B) Georges Clemenceau
   C) Leon Damas
   D) David Lloyd George
   E) Aime Cesaire

10. The only major sea battle of World War I was the
    A) Battle of Jutland
    B) Battle of the Marne
    C) sinking of the Lusitania
    D) sinking of the Bismarck
    E) sinking of the Dreadnought
SHORT ANSWER. Write the word or phrase that best completes each statement or answers the question.

1. Russia signed the Treaty of ____________ in March 1918, giving Germany substantial territories in western Russia in return for peace.

2. The ____________, established after World War I, proved to be little more than a discussion group, as real diplomacy continued on a nation-to-nation basis.

3. The literary movement in France in the early 20th century, called ____________, promoted African nationalism.

4. Educated Indian women identified with the heroine in Tagore’s ____________, a book about the complexity of women’s lives in colonial India.

5. Germany issued Austria-Hungary a(n) ____________ in its dealings with Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914.

6. Defensive fortifications that ran along the Western Front were commonly called ____________, featuring an abysmal existence alongside death, rats, and disease.

7. Before World War I, England, France, and Russia formed the ____________, a military alliance in competition with Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

8. President Woodrow Wilson convinced all sides to sign a(n) ____________, an agreement to lay down arms without declaring victory or defeat.

9. A nationalist representative of Vietnam, ____________, went to Versailles seeking self-determination for his country but was ignored.

10. In 1952, a military coup led by ____________ overthrew the government in Egypt.

TRUE/FALSE. Write “T” if the statement is true and “F” if the statement is false.

1. In 1914, a Turkish nationalist shot the heir to the Russian throne, Archduke Ferdinand.

2. At the beginning of World War I, most combatants expected a long, drawn-out war.

3. Soon after hostilities began, Italy switched sides to join the Allies.

4. For most people on the home front, the war was a distant and often-ignored affair.

5. The labor movement gained strength in the political arena in western Europe during World War I.

6. British, French, and German colonies were fortunate to be able to stay uninvolved in the fighting during the war.