

World War 1

Prepared by Hodey Johns, Zach Ripple, and Chris Spangle.

Causes

(Eric Sass)

Writer Eric Sass wrote a list of 14 causes of World War 1. As we take a look at this list, we should think about how these might have been avoided and how they shed some light on why we find ourselves involved in violence around the globe even today.

“1. Nationalism

In the medieval period, Christianity united Europeans across language and culture—but then the Reformation fractured the “universal” Catholic Church and the Enlightenment undermined religion’s hold on the collective imagination. Nationalism emerged to fill the spiritual void with an idea of community based (loosely) on shared language and ethnicity.”

Without religion as a unifying factor, they sought unity by language and ethnicity, two attributes that people shared with their communities, but not with Europe at large.

“By the 19th century Europeans took it for granted each nation had a distinct “character” and inhabited sacred, inviolable territory. So when Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, it injured French national pride and provoked “revanchism” (desire for revenge).”

There are two issues to look at here: Tax and borders. Our complex tax code makes such a thing almost impossible to imagine, but we would do well to remember that this complexity is quite modern. Alsace-Lorraine was an area full of both French and German citizens, but since taxes were not based on individual income and instead based on importation fees, there was no need to make people in a certain region specify nationality. After Germany seized the area, borders then became an issue. Where at one time countries were able to move and even live fluidly, rigid border design became a hallmark of policy that led directly to World War 1.

“At the same time, nationalism threatened Austria-Hungary, an old-fashioned medieval empire with a dozen nationalities who wanted out.”

The tragedy of Austria-Hungary cannot be understated; they were a nation built on diversity of ethnicity. They were one of the first European countries to ratify a constitution, and, while Austria and Hungary each had a Monarch, both monarchies established equal partnership and both yielded power to the new constitution. Creating a single political system for two different nations meant adopting policies that embraced both sides. By granting rights to both sides and ratifying laws that protected each nation’s ability to practice their different faiths, languages, and customs, they inadvertently created a place where many other smaller groups found themselves protected by law. As a result, the country became home to a dozen other smaller nations including, Serbians, Croats, and Jews. With each bringing a different set of customs and traditions to the table, Austria-Hungary became a hotbed for international trade and exchange.

For a brief moment, their collection of citizens had the highest standard of living in the world.

But then scholars and politicians began to place emphasis on involuntary heritage over voluntary alliances. The collection of races, languages, cultures, and religions were taught to compete instead of unify and Austria-Hungary dissipated under threat of civil war, not just into Austria and Hungary, but also into the fragmented Balkan states that we see today. In both World War 1 and World War 2, these smaller states were the easiest to conquer and a nation that would have been close to untouchable instead became a myriad of countries that could be taken over one-by-one. In World War 1, specifically, Democratic countries fought against Authoritarian countries and had Austria-Hungary been able to maintain its alliance under the Constitution, Germany likely never would have attempted such a war. Instead of facing the opponent of a single country unified under the banner of freedom, Germany gained an ally by appealing to the leaders of these diminutive nations who were now seeking power for themselves instead of liberty for their citizens.

“2. Racism and Social Darwinism

Nationalism was never particularly rational, but any contradictions could be papered over with racism and Social Darwinism. Racism, another product of the Enlightenment, linked human cultural differences to variations in appearance that supposedly corresponded to fundamental biological traits, like intelligence. In the 19th century, racism got a more scientific gloss from Social Darwinism, which applied the theory of natural selection to human races locked in a “struggle for survival.” Front and center was the rivalry between the Slavs and Germans.”

While nationalism is a frightening indoctrination in a belief of controllable cultural superiority, racism is perhaps more insidious, fostering a belief that superiority is in someone’s uncontrollable DNA and not controllable lifestyle. Nationalistic violence had existed since the dawn of human history, with nations enslaving, murdering, raping, and thieving from one another. Racism via Social Darwinism was new to this time period, born by those who warped scientific theory. The old evils, while vile, at least respected borders; this racism brought the ancient wickedness from someone’s distant border to someone’s next door neighbor.

Our researcher Hodey Johns, who majored in Theology, wanted to make the following note before we explore Social Darwinism: “When we discuss religious issues, it’s easy for people to feel personally attacked through association. Most Christians feel no association with the Westboro Baptist Church or Catholic pedofiles. However, speakers will carelessly call these groups “Christians” no matter how far out of step they are with the tenets of Christ, simply because they either use or hide behind that mask of faith. My studies showed me how saying things like “Christianity is responsible for millions of deaths” is not just reprehensible and ignorant, but downright bigoted and idiotic. We must apply this same rule when we examine Social Darwinism; Darwin himself never called for sterilizing blacks or murdering Jews. While a select group of Atheists supported such practices, this is hardly in line with any scientific Atheistic value. Christians would do well to remind themselves how hurtful and mindless it is to be blamed for the wickedness of the Crusades or Manifest Destiny before saying something like “Atheism is responsible for both World Wars and the Holocaust.” While some prominent atheists contributed to the cause and defended those contributions behind their beliefs, it was political convenience and not religious doctrine that enabled the atrocities of the 20th century.”

Social Darwinism could be a show all by itself, but for expediency, let’s simply use dogs as an

example to illustrate the idea. All dogs belong to the same genus “canis” so they are all “canines.” However, they differ in terms of intelligence, size, hair, and ability. These different types of dogs, whether labrador or chihuahua, while they can mate, they have different attributes and genetic alleles, and we categorize these separations by “species.”

Keep in mind that we did not find out all humans were genetically the same species until advanced genome mapping began in the 1970s and 80s. Astonishingly, we don't even have a sub-species, we are all Homo Sapiens. What appears to be different “races” are actually just tendencies among the same genetic alleles and not different alleles altogether, as was assumed. By observing that every other organism in the animal kingdom had a genus with an ever-expanding species, Social Darwinists applied this same rule to humanity as well. The idea was two-fold: For the first part, mixing the human species around would result in a stupid mixed breed, like in dogs. The second part was teaching that if we only permit superior humans to breed, we would have a superior race; this specific study and practice is called eugenics.

Therefore, in the case of both World Wars, people assumed their own genetics were superior, resulting in an aggressive divide. Based on the extrapolation of Darwinism by Herbert Spencer, Thomas Malthus, and Francis Galton, it was not enough to only mate with your own race, but that other races proliferating and having children was a pox upon humanity and diluted the human race as a whole. Therefore, for certain scientists and ravenous politicians, it was not enough to breed within one's own borders; it was imperative to stop other from breeding inside their own borders.

The single biggest problem, and indeed the fatal problem, with this scientific notion is that it did not withstand the scrutiny of observation. “Mixed” humans were of equal intellectual capability as any other human. In other words, these scientists used correct mathematics, but failed to follow the Scientific Method, which would have revealed their equation to be flawed, rendering any mathematical claim of superiority simply useless. Even at the height of this fervor, the evidence to the contrary was right before the world's eyes. Americans and Germans alike had either sterilized or murdered blacks and Jews in their efforts to create a more superior race. And yet, in the 1930s, Joe Louis, a black man from America, and Max Schmeling, a Jew from Germany, squared off in two world championship title bouts, with each one winning one match apiece. In the U.S., America color-tinted the photographs of Louis, in hopes that the populus wouldn't recognize he was black. Similarly, Hitler himself altered the documents pertaining to Schmeling's heritage. Both countries were using race to gain political power, though history makes it painfully clear that the leadership in each country was aware that the concept of racial inferiority was a lie as we uncover their practices betraying their rhetoric.

Sadly, this scientifically destroyed philosophy still grips the leadership in many European nations; Putin blamed Olympic losses on mixed bloods, Italian World Cup coach Carlo Ancelotti explained his losses by not having enough “pureblood” Italians. After France won the World Cup last year, both their coach and president took to the airwaves to explain that the black members of their team were actually French at their genetic level with little to no roots in African ancestry.

“3. Imperialism

Technological progress during the Renaissance and Enlightenment gave Europeans a big advantage over less advanced societies, enabling conquest and colonization around the world. By the 19th century, European nations were competing to amass global empires—but Britain,

France, and Russia had a head start on latecomers like Germany, whose desire for a “place in the sun” was yet another source of conflict.”

Germany considered themselves equals to other global superpowers, but lacked the “global” part of that game. With very few countries outside of the influence of Britain, France, and Russia, Germany began by seizing the small areas around their own country that were not protected by these larger nations. History reveals some miscalculations; many of these smaller countries had both military and economic alliances with larger countries that were concealed from the public and, most importantly, unknown by German leadership. But the belief that seizing control of smaller countries would increase its overall strength was a falsehood in and of itself; by this time in history, land was a boon to diversity but not a generator of might. In fact, having to defend themselves on too many fronts ended up leading to significant military losses in both World Wars about to unfold.

“4. German Growth

While Germany lagged behind in colonies, its incredible growth at home scared France and Britain. From 1870 to 1910, Germany’s population soared 58 percent to 65 million,” They felt it was their duty under Social Darwinism to proliferate. “while France edged up just 11 percent to 40 million, and from 1890 to 1913 German steel production increased nine-fold to 18.9 million tons—more than Britain (7.7 million) and France (4.6 million) combined. Germany also had the best rail network in Europe, enabling more mobility and growth. With all this the Germans understandably felt they deserved a bigger role in world affairs ... but they went about it all wrong.”

It should be noted that it wasn’t just growth that scared the world; it was how they grew. Other European nations grew in an Imperialistic way that focused on bringing in resources from several foreign places, which was bad enough already. Germany’s expansion was focused on guns, bullets, tanks, and battleships. As you’ll see in the next section, however, this was not necessarily because Germany planned on going to war.

“5. Naval Arms Race

Kaiser Wilhelm II’s pet project was the German Imperial Navy, created in collaboration with Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, a sailor who happened to be Germany’s most skilled politician. But their naval obsession alienated Britain, an island nation that simply couldn’t afford to yield control of the seas. In the first years of the 20th century, Britain responded by building more ships and entering an informal alliance with its traditional rival, France—the *entente cordiale* (friendly understanding).”

Perhaps one of the most applicable lessons of World War 1 for today is that, if you build battleships, bombs, aircrafts, and guns at a rate that suggests you’re going to war, it has the effect of militarizing other countries as opposed to making them back down. Credible evidence suggests that Germany was attempting to peacefully trade overseas in an effort to catch up on the Imperialism that put France and Britain ahead. When those two countries aligned, it had the effect of forcing Germans to build a navy equal to the size of both other navies. While the alliance between big countries over small countries was thought to be a move that provoked peace, it actually inspired them to become more militaristic; this is similar to the situation the U.S. finds itself in today.

“6. German Fear of Encirclement

Even though it was Germany’s own stupidity that caused Britain and France to pull closer together, the *entente cordiale* (on top of the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1892) inspired German fear of a conspiracy to “encircle” Germany.”

This “stupidity” requires a short explanation. There was a scheduled meeting between Germany, France, and Britain to talk about scaling down each country’s navy so that trade could continue without worry of warfare. In a calculated move, Kaiser Wilhelm II released a plan detailing massive naval expansion right before the meeting. The intent was to make Britain and France negotiate favorably with the understanding that Germany was about to expand their military. Instead, it backfired, as Britain and France then cut Germany out of the meeting entirely, forcing Germany to carry out a military expansion that never intended to follow through on, and making Britain and Germany bring in Russia to help contain this new threat.

“This triggered more German belligerence, which—like any good self-fulfilling prophecy—just made Britain, France, and Russia pull closer together, forming the “Triple Entente.””

“7. Arms Race on Land

German paranoia about encirclement triggered an even bigger arms race on land, pitting Germany and Austria-Hungary (now under German occupation) against France, Russia, and Britain (later, Italy got sucked in too). From 1910 to 1913, total military expenditures by Europe’s Great Powers increased from \$1.67 billion to \$2.15 billion per year in contemporary U.S. dollars. And more increases were on the way, prompting both sides to wonder: would it be better to just fight now before their enemies grew even stronger?”

While the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand is fascinating in its own right, it cannot be denied that it was much too small of an event to trigger a war between every major superpower on earth. Why did the the murder of a low-ranking member of Austrian royalty, who had no real power except in the reputation of his title, by an obscure non-state-sponsored terrorist organization in Serbia, somehow cost the lives of millions of people in America, Britain, Germany, and Russia? Part of the answer is in this: With the weaponry growing in devastating ability and force and numbers in the population rapidly increasing, it became clear to some that war was going to happen and the brutality might be assuaged if the war was fought over something of minor significance rather than waiting for something of major significance to occur.

“8. Russian Growth

Just as Germany’s economic expansion scared Britain and France, a few years later Russia’s rapid growth terrified Germany and Austria-Hungary. From 1900 to 1913, industrialization sent Russia’s gross national product rocketing 55 percent to \$388 billion in today’s U.S. dollars. Over the same period its population soared 26 percent to 168 million—more than Germany and Austria-Hungary combined. In July 1914, the German philosopher Kurt Riezler, a close friend of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, wrote gloomily, “The future belongs to Russia...”

Social Darwinism and the responsibility of proliferation took a stronger hold on Russia than any of the rest of Europe, as evidenced by the numbers. Unlike the Imperialism in Europe, Russia was satisfied to take over countries nearby instead of overseas, making their battlefronts less multi-dimensional than the countries they would end up going to war with.

“9. Turkish Decline

As Germany and Russia grew more powerful, the Ottoman Empire was on its last legs, creating instability across the Balkans and Middle East. In the First Balkan War, 1912-1913, the Balkan League (Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro) carved up most of the empire's remaining European territories. Serbia's conquest of Albania put it on a collision course with Austria-Hungary, which didn't want Serbia to gain access to the sea. Meanwhile, Russia was plotting to conquer Armenia, Britain and France were eyeing Syria and Iraq ... and Germany feared it would be left out yet again.”

There's a frightening parallel to the middle east now and 100 years ago. With no stability, the middle east became an obvious battlefield for other superpowers who eyed the devastation through the eyes of Imperialism. The falling Ottoman Empire yielded several territories who were initially excited to gain independence, but unfortunately unaware of the lurking danger from external superpowers that saw the fledgling countries as easy targets. The theatre of war in the middle east will be addressed by our researcher, Zach, later on in the program today.

“10. Secret Treaties

Europe's complex alliance system was even more confusing because many of the agreements were secret, which prevented key players from making informed decisions. For example, if Britain had announced its promises to France it might have deterred Germany from going to war, and Italy had a secret non-aggression pact with France which even Italy's top generals didn't know about. The treaties didn't even have to exist to cause trouble: German fear of a possible secret Anglo-Russian Naval Convention fueled paranoia about encirclement, even though no agreement was reached.”

The need for government transparency can be evidenced no more than by the secret treaties that took the world by storm in the initial outburst of World War 1. Much like today, big countries make deals and alliances with a myriad of other nations without making the details public. As a result, no economist truly knows how to invest globally and no military leader knows their real enemies. As a result, everyone in business and national security treats each other like villains. Much like today, the governments of these nations kept the details secret for our protection. But if this secrecy has led to the deaths of millions of our youth in the last century and given us the strange alliances with terrorist-friendly countries in the middle east, is it really protection or bureaucratic convenience that keeps these treaties under wraps?

“11. International Law? No Such Thing

Despite the development of a truly global economy in the 19th century, there was no real system of international law that might be used to restrain one state from using violence against another state. There were institutions, like the Peace Palace, which were intended to serve as forums for arbitration of international disputes, but these had no power to enforce their decisions, so they were basically a joke. Not much has changed.”

The United Nations has been no better. Aggressors have gone into open war with countries under its protection and had most, if not all, allied nations look away. We would do well to remember that, whether it is Peace Palace, League of Nations, United Nations, or something else, these promises for protection and civility are just pieces of paper and have always been treated by the participants as such.

“12. Trouble at Home

WWI wasn't just the result of international conflict; domestic tensions played an important role too. In Germany, the conservative elite was frightened by the steady political gains of socialists opposed to militarism (above), and tried to use foreign policy to drum up patriotism and distract ordinary Germans from problems on the home front.”

Why yes, it was indeed Libertarian Socialists that were encouraging de-militarization. It's hard to remember that Socialism is not synonymous with authoritarianism, but we should remember and be proud of our brothers and sisters that, under the banner of liberty, were calling for policy that would stop this war before it started. However, they were silenced under the cry of patriotism and accused of being traitors for promoting a de-escalation technique.

“In Russia, the Tsarist government embraced Pan-Slavism to shore up its own legitimacy and draw attention away from its own failure to institute democratic reforms.”

And here's more racism; by associating a group of people with a set of ideals, it was rumored that they were incapable of thinking otherwise. Their “wrong ideas” attributed to them by under the brand of a lower evolutionary state. By appealing to the majority, who believed they were in a higher evolutionary state, they threw out ideas the Romanov minorities had; among those ideals; a hope for peace.

“13. No Going Back

In the 19th century, it became common practice for Europe's Great Powers to draw up detailed war plans in order to avoid getting caught unprepared—and hopefully get the jump on their enemies. These plans focused on logistics, especially the use of railroads to deploy armies rapidly. This, in turn, required elaborate schedules coordinating the movements of thousands of trains; Germany's Schlieffen Plan (above) is the classic example. As result, war plans became so complicated it was impossible to modify them or improvise new ones “on the fly.” It also meant there was no going back: Once mobilization began, your enemies were bound to respond in kind, so there was no way to stop the cycle of escalation without leaving yourself vulnerable.”

Somehow, every country's department of defense became a department of offense. We've already analyzed the power of the offense, but what we have yet to explore is the sheer ineptitude of the defense among these so-called superpowers, which manifested itself in a variety of ways.

The frames of these battleships were paper-thin, with the bulk of the ship used to carry absurd amounts of weaponry. But one indirect hit to any of these ships and it very well be assumed the entire crew was doomed to die.

Battlefield medical priorities manifested themselves in the medical kits the aides would carry. While countries that focused on defense upgraded their kits to have stitching, bandages, hot packs, rations, surgical equipment, and complex medicines, the offensive-minded countries could not spare such expenses; their kits had a saw, a Bible, tourniquets, and perhaps some liquor. This should not be mistaken for economic expediency; both the weight and cost of the inferior kit was higher than that of the complex and effective surgical kit.

It stands to reason that defense is less costly than offense since transportations costs are greatly diminished. However, in general, the supply costs of defense are a great deal more effective than the supply costs of offense. The cost of derailing invading trains is much more expensive than building the trains and rails themselves. One roadside bomb is hundreds of times cheaper than twenty trained soldiers and the military truck that carries them. A bunker with four soldiers cannot be overcome with fewer than one hundred soldiers. Even bombs and missiles are more expensive than the thick metal and concrete roofing that protects them. An anti-aircraft gun simply catapulted literal scraps and junks into the air, and it could destroy expensive aircrafts and their crew. As a result, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway all managed to defend themselves and prevent the war from infiltrating their borders, in spite of being vastly outpopulated, surrounded, and outspent.

To look at a specific example, not only did Switzerland protect their country, but, in contemporary dollars, Switzerland spent under \$10 million on their military during the entire war. In 1913 alone, the year prior to the war, France spent \$321 million and Germany spent \$573 million. And, though France and Germany surrounded tiny Switzerland on both borders, neither country elected to invade after doing a simple cost analysis. As a result, the Swiss experienced no notable battlefield losses during World War 1, in spite of being outnumbered and outspent by astronomical proportions.

“14. Don’t Fear the Reaper

This one’s a little out there, but worth thinking about. After WWI, Sigmund Freud theorized the existence of a “death drive” pushing humans to annihilate themselves and others. It exists alongside other drives that may hold it in check, like the desire for pleasure, but the death drive is always there in the subconscious, guiding our actions at least some of the time. Destruction is also linked to creation; it’s worth noting how many young people welcomed the war as the “dawn of a new era,” sweeping away Europe’s “old,” “stale,” “stagnant” civilization and laying the foundations for a new, better world (spoiler alert: it didn’t).”

Sass notes the importance of these 14 elements. Unlike World War 2, where persons like Hitler and Stalin could be blamed instead of the environment they were in, World War 1 had no scapegoat instigator. These factors are important to note because no world leader actually wanted the war, but the circumstances were such that no one could avoid it:

“The greatest irony of WWI was that none of the key decision-makers wanted it to happen (and death wish or no, neither did most ordinary people). Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II prided himself on his reputation as peacekeeper and frantically tried to avert WWI at the last minute. Previously Austria-Hungary’s Emperor Franz Josef went to extraordinary lengths to keep the peace, and Russia’s Tsar Nicholas II was known for his peaceful nature. Although this obviously wasn’t enough to stop the war on its own, it shows the will for peace was there, if only circumstances would allow.”

Division of the Middle East

A result of the central powers defeat was the dissolution of their colonial empires. This was carried out with a series of mandates: legal instruments used to transfer power over a territory from one country to another. This is different from an annexation because instead of directly moving the existing territories into a political sphere and staying there i.e Palestine is now part

of France, the border lines are arbitrarily drawn or re-drawn at the whim of the great powers; with no regard to the local population. Those said powers would then hold ultimate authority but install a local and usually unpopular “puppet” government. WW1 is a great example of this.

The Ottoman Empire pre-1918 held most of the middle east as we know it, The Ottoman empire was vast and had a weak central government, this allowed various cultures that made up the Ottoman empire to coexist in their own ancestral territory mostly unfettered for generations however, there were Arabs who no longer wanted to be under Ottoman control, but instead self determination and independence. These Arab rebels called upon Britain and France for assistance in their liberation struggles.

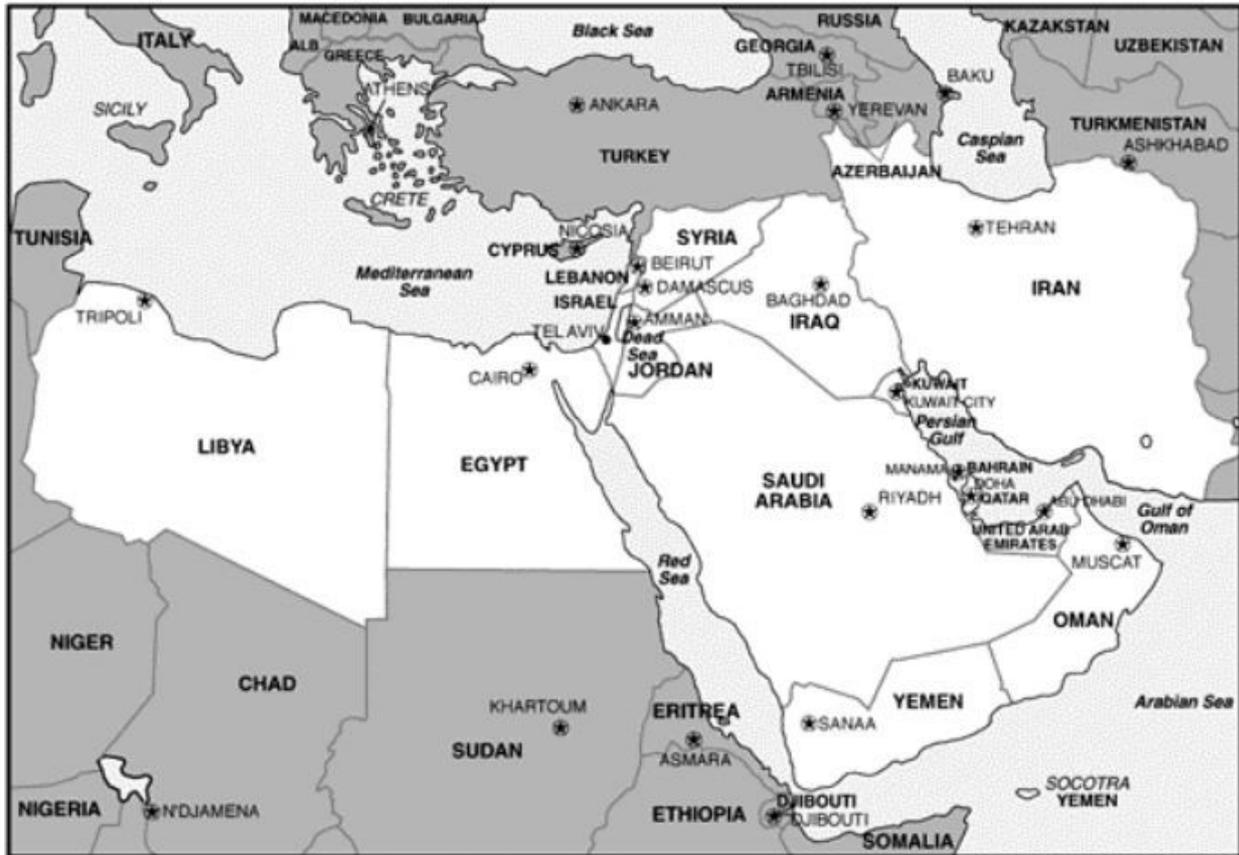
After Ottoman Empire's defeat in WW1. A series of Mandates, conceived in secret in the earlier Sykes-Picot agreement went into effect with the Treaty of Versailles . These mandates effectively formed new states complete with borders and installed governance. This was done with little regard to the local populations.

France took the regions now known as Lebanon and Syria under it's wing. Britain took Mesopotamia (Iraq), parts of Persia (Iran) and Palestine and what is now Jordan.

The Middle East pre war (source www.dodlive.mil)



Post War 1918 (source www.dodlive.mil)



Nations of the Middle East and North Africa

An article from by Kate Lange of *dodlive.mil* outlines how these events helped forge the modern middle east as it is today. In Iraq for example; The British installed rulers with a centralized government, In a part of the world that for generations, even under Ottoman rule, had been governed by a confederations of ethnic tribal sheiks a rebellion erupted and was smashed by 1920. She also writes of Kurdistan and how the British failed to deliver their promise of an autonomous region for the Kurds. To this date the Kurds have no homeland and are locked between Iraq and Turkey which has resulted in the Kurdish national liberation struggles. The Palestinian conflict also has its roots in the aftermath of WW1. This started with the appointment of King Faisal, an Arab rebel leader, as ruler of the new “Kingdom of Iraq” Kate Lange outlines this more effectively than I could.

(Lange dodlive.mil)

The appointment of Faisal as king.

..Faisal Bin Al Hussein Bin Ali El-Hashemi – Faisal, for short – was installed as Iraq’s king since he was pivotal in the success of the Arab revolt against the Ottomans. But as ruler, he rejected British control and wanted to form a single national identity, despite the aforementioned tribes, religions and ethnic groups. Since then, mostly Sunni Arabs have had political control over land that was largely populated by Kurds and Shiites, and each group’s grievances have brought about violent confrontations.

Palestine/Jordan:

The Cairo Conference’s decision to install Faisal as king in Iraq also deeply affected Palestine and Jordan. Faisal’s brother, Abdullah, had been trying to regain Syrian independence from the

French. But the British didn't want to cause conflict with France, so it threatened Faisal, telling him he wouldn't get to rule Iraq if Abdullah attacked Syria. To appease Abdullah, the British created Trans-Jordan from Palestinian land and made Abdullah its king. This split set the foundation for the Arab-Israeli conflict we see today, since it split in half the land that would be considered for a future Jewish national homeland.

Why did the U.S. get involved? What happened when we did?

(Smithsonian)

Woodrow Wilson promised to keep the U.S. out of the war. It was more than just a promise; it was literally the slogan for his re-election campaign:

“He had run on peace, after all, winning re-election in November 1916 on the slogan “He kept us out of war.” Most Americans had little interest in sending soldiers into the stalemated slaughter that had ravaged the landscapes of Belgium and France since 1914... A group of activists calling themselves the Emergency Peace Federation visited White House on February 28, 1917, to plead with their longtime ally, President Woodrow Wilson. Think of his predecessors George Washington and John Adams, they told him. Surely Wilson could find a way to protect American shipping without joining Europe's war... What the peace delegation didn't fully realize was that Wilson, caught in a series of events, was turning from a peace proponent to a wartime president. And that agonizing shift, which took place over just 70 days in 1917, would transform the United States from an isolated, neutral nation to a world power.”

Wilson used two reasons to justify breaking his promise: The first was an intercepted message to Japan and Mexico offering them U.S. land to join the war after the war was won. The other was an incident where a U-Boat sank a French passenger ship. Wilson, behind the media, projected that this would happen to U.S. ships soon. “on April 2, 1917, he asked Congress to declare war on Germany. Wilson's... decision over that period permanently changed America's relationship with the world: He forsook George Washington's 124-year precedent of American neutrality in European wars. His idealistic justifications for that decision helped launch a century of American military alliances and interventions around the globe.” As history teaches us, both fears were unfounded. Japan and Mexico had no interest in fighting the United States at this time (in fact, Japan was at war with Germany) and Germans were not making journeys across the Atlantic in submarines to blow up ferries on the Mississippi. (History) In fact, a German U-Boat accidentally sank a U.S. Merchant ship in 1915 and the Germans issued a formal apology and offered reparations for the error. The federal government created propaganda indicating both Japans and Mexicans were about to attack as well as U-Boats surrounding our shorelines in order to persuade public opinion.

Even after restoring the draft and getting permission to go to war, Wilson continued to lie to the American public, insisting war was not on the table. “We do not desire any hostile conflict with the Imperial German Government,” he told Congress on February 3. “We are the sincere friends of the German people and earnestly desire to remain at peace with the Government which speaks for them. We shall not believe that they are hostile to us unless and until we are obliged to believe it.”

With the economy tanking under the newly instituted progressive tax, Congress needed a way

to create a false economy in order to justify their increased wages from the taxpayer. It was believed that war would fix this problem, so most politicians made a vote on the war that was really more about their own salaries: “Cheers resounded through the House chamber. Later that week, Congress declared war, with 373-50 votes in the House and an 82-6 margin in the Senate. But after the speech, back at the White House... “My message today was a message of death for our young men,” Wilson said.”

The burst of income was hardly profitable in the long term. American troops suffered, of course, but the citizens who stayed home might actually have been worse off: “All in all, 116,516 Americans died in World War I... (More would die from the flu epidemic of 1918 and pneumonia than on the battlefield.) Wilson’s own administration struck blows against freedom and tolerance during the war, imprisoning anti-war activists such as socialist Eugene Debs.” Another Libertarian-minded Socialist, again punished by the government.

After the war ended quickly, the fragility of the economy came to light and America realized that war could not be sustained forever (our modern politicians are giving it a good go, though), the progressive tax forced any competitive businessman out of the country, and the folks at home were dying from treatable diseases (the money had been reinvested into the war instead of medicine). (J.R. Vernon) In 1919, this caused the single biggest recession in American history, setting records in unemployment at 11.7%, loss of business at 38.1%, cancellation of national trading at 32.7%, devaluation of the dollar at 18%, and, as most historians estimate record levels of homelessness, deaths by starvation, and deaths by disease (most of which were treatable).

The Demand for World War 2

In 1919, John Maynard Keynes published “The End of Laissez-Faire: The Economic Consequences of the Peace,” which called for either another war or immediate re-militarization to alleviate the painful economy, not just temporarily, but for perpetuity. In theory, by constantly generating weaponry, even if they never get used, people become employed and it creates an economy (though, even he granted, an unnecessary economy).

At the time, propaganda from Wilson, Hoover, and FDR all cited the additional taxes levied against business and the rich as the only thing saving the American people. It is only through historical examination that we find that even their own economists were aware of the problems caused by taxation (who can forget the attempt to hide the words of Henry Morgenthau Jr., architect of the New Deal and economist for FDR: “We have tried spending money. We are spending more than we have ever spent before and it does not work.”).

Lost in between World War 1 and 2 is the roaring twenties, a time of relaxed and repealed taxations. When the economy tanked again during the Great Depression of 1929, Hoover and FDR restored and created more taxes, which, of course, destroyed the economy again, and made the public think favorably about finding a war, as suggested by Keynes, to solve this economic crisis.

But let’s not skip the obvious; the peace negotiation after World War 1, the Treaty of Versailles, is right to be attributed to the causation of the next World War. Wilson’s 14 Point Plan was wholly inadequate for Europe, it argued that the Germans should relinquish the territories they

captured, but otherwise be held blameless for the war. Of course, those who had their families murdered by invading Germans were never going to agree to such a plan. Europeans argued that those who start wars should risk everything they have and called for a dissolution of Germany entirely. Germany, of course, was powerless to negotiate either way; saying no to anything they were proposed meant death as they were out of young men and ammunition.

So they compromised and let Germany exist as a country, but forced them to pay for the costs associated with the war. We can only wonder what would have happened had no compromise been reached. Had Wilson prevailed, perhaps Germany would have never had economic problems and turned to Hitler. Or perhaps their adherence to Social Darwinism simply would have made their preparations for World War 2 even better. Had Europe ignored America entirely, perhaps no Germany would have existed to start World War 2. Or perhaps those of Germany ethnicity would have risen up and overthrown the countries that took them over by weak diplomacy. Still, even in a worst-case scenario, it's highly unlikely that any of these outcomes would have been as bloody as the one set in motion through the Treaty of Versailles.

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