

# The Great War and the Russian Revolutions, 1890–1918



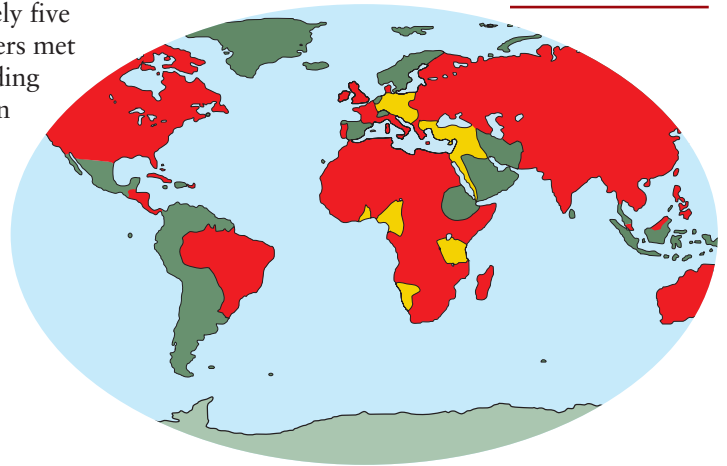
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## Over The Top

U.S. infantry goes “over the top,” emerging from a trench on the Western Front of the Great War in 1918. Trench warfare became the most memorable feature of this traumatic, bloody conflict (page 792).

It was Sunday, June 28, 1914. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary, paid a state visit to Sarajevo (*sah-rah-YĀ-vō*), capital of the Austrian province of Bosnia. As his motorcade entered the city, a terrorist seeking to free Bosnia from Austria threw a bomb at Franz Ferdinand's car. The assassin's aim was off, and the bomb blew up the car behind the Archduke's. Enraged, Franz Ferdinand shortened his visit by several hours. As he was leaving the city, however, his car took a wrong turn and stalled on a small side street. Watching from a nearby café was another assassin, who walked up to the car and murdered the Archduke and his wife with a revolver. Within five weeks all Europe was at war.

At the palace of Versailles in France, precisely five years after the shots at Sarajevo, European leaders met in solemn assembly to sign a treaty formally ending the conflict triggered by those shots, then known as the Great War. It had killed more than nine million people, devastated much of Europe, helped spark momentous revolutions in Russia, and spread fear across the globe. The experience was so horrifying that the peace-makers at Versailles hoped not merely to end the Great War, but to abolish war forever.



**Allied and  
Associated Powers  
(Red)**

**Central Powers  
(Tan)**

**Neutrals (Green)**

## The Path to War and Revolution

In 1890 Europe stood at the peak of world power. Industrial modernization and the technologies it generated gave Britain, France, and Germany unprecedented wealth and dominion, with global empires encompassing much of Africa and Asia. Italy and Belgium also gained African colonies, as industrial nations competed for possessions and access to raw materials. But the Russian, Austrian, and Ottoman Empires, for centuries dominant in Eastern Europe and beyond, had been slow to industrialize, and they had fallen behind. Liberalism and nationalism also threatened these three multinational realms, as their various peoples pressed for greater freedom and autonomy. After 1890 rivalries among all these powers intensified as each sought to improve its status and security. Europe divided into powerful and hostile alliances, leading to a series of crises that eventually culminated in catastrophic conflict.

### The Diplomatic Revolution of 1890–1907

In 1890 Europe was also at peace. The wars of Italian and German unification, fought decades earlier, had altered the balance of power in favor of a newly unified Germany. But under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, that new nation had emerged as a conservative power, maintaining its position by preserving the status quo. France, humiliated and hoping to regain Alsace and Lorraine, provinces lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), was kept isolated and powerless by Bismarck's skillful diplomacy. He engineered a series of alliances designed to isolate France and keep Austria and Russia from fighting each other in the Balkans.

Bismarck's Alliances  
maintain peace in  
Europe

Between 1879 and 1882, at Bismarck's initiative, Austria, Italy, and Germany put aside past animosities to sign the **Triple Alliance**, a defensive pact in which each promised to assist the others in the event of unprovoked attack by a third party (Map 31.1). Then, in 1887, a Reinsurance Treaty with Russia gave Germany additional leverage in the Balkans: in the event of war in that region, Germany would oppose whichever nation it considered the aggressor. Since neither Russia nor Austria alone could win a war against Germany, Austro-Russian tensions in the Balkans were effectively frozen in place. Moreover, since Italy, Austria, and Russia were each allied with Germany, France was left isolated on the continent with no anti-German allies. These twin pillars of Bismarck's diplomacy—*isolation of France and prevention of Balkan war*—kept Europe at peace throughout the 1870s and 1880s.



William II, Kaiser of  
Imperial Germany.

Germany unwittingly  
initiates a Diplomatic  
Revolution

**REVERSAL OF BISMARCK'S DIPLOMACY.** But starting in 1890, Bismarck's efforts were undone by a new German Kaiser. William I died in March 1888 at age 91; his son Frederick III died three months later of throat cancer. The throne thus passed to 29-year-old William II, a brash young man who dismissed Bismarck in 1890, regarding him as out of touch with contemporary problems. The new Kaiser wanted to play the leading role in German foreign affairs.

This prospect was dangerous for Germany because, although quick-witted, William II was an erratic ruler with no temperament for the hard work required of a monarch who wished to govern as well as reign. Lacking Bismarck's ruthlessness and skill, William took ill-considered actions that quickly compromised Germany's dominant position in Europe. He and his new ministers felt that Germany's Reinsurance Treaty with Russia (1887) violated the spirit of the Triple Alliance of 1882 (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy) by making it unclear whether Germany would support Austria or Russia in a Balkan war. They therefore refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty when it expired in 1890.

The decision for nonrenewal destroyed both of Bismarck's pillars. With one stroke it tilted Germany toward Austria in the Balkans and prompted Russia, which considered nonrenewal a hostile act, to seek an alliance with France. This ended France's isolation and compromised Germany's dominant position in Europe. War became a realistic possibility, and if it occurred, Germany would have to fight a two-front war against Russia in the East and France in the West.

The implications of the Franco-Russian alliance, initiated in 1891 and formalized in 1894, were not lost on William II, but he blamed Germany's weakened position on his enemy's intrigues rather than learning from his mistake. Certain of the purity of his motives, he was insensitive to how they were perceived by other governments. Thus in 1898, when he authorized a huge naval expansion so that Germany's fleet could rival Britain's and ensure German access to its overseas colonies, he was astounded to learn that London feared this buildup. As an island nation that had to import food, Britain responded with its own massive increase in naval production. The hugely expensive naval arms race that followed embittered both sides.

Abandoning their historic avoidance of peacetime alliances, the British also started seeking allies to counter the German threat. That threat was, from Britain's perspective, a global one. In 1902 Britain and Japan, both alarmed by German and Russian expansionism in East Asia, concluded an alliance. Now Japan's large Pacific fleet could protect the British Empire in Asia, relieving Britain's Grand Fleet for action in European waters.

## FOUNDATION MAP 31.1 European Alliances and Crises, 1905–1914

The Diplomatic Revolution of 1890–1907 divided Europe into two approximately equivalent alliance systems: the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. Observe that the Triple Alliance occupied a central position on the continent, surrounded by the nations of the Triple Entente. Between 1905 and 1914, a series of international crises, clustered in southeastern Europe and North Africa, brought Europe ever closer to armed hostilities. Yet between 1905 and 1913, each of these crises was settled peacefully. How did this succession of peaceful resolutions actually make war more rather than less likely in 1914?



Even more unprecedented was the Entente Cordiale (*ahn-TAHNT kord-YAL*), or “Cordial Alliance,” of 1904, in which longtime enemies Britain and France agreed to respect each other’s African domains and consult one another should a third party (such as Germany) threaten the peace.



Stunned by these developments, but considering Franco-British animosities too deep to permit genuine partnership, German leaders resolved to test the Entente by provoking a crisis. In 1905 Kaiser William II visited the North African sultanate of Morocco, which France had been trying, over German objections, to make into a French protectorate. There he gave a highly provocative anti-French speech. Fearing war with Germany, France reluctantly submitted its Moroccan policy to an international conference at Algeçiras (*al-jeh-SI-russ*) in Morocco early in 1906. Thirteen nations participated, and by a vote of 10–3 the Act of Algeçiras granted France a preferential status in Morocco. France received solid British backing, while Germany was supported only by Morocco and Austria-Hungary. A stinging diplomatic defeat for the Germans, it underscored Austro-German isolation and mutual dependence, since even their ally Italy voted for France. And rather than separating Britain and France, Germany's belligerence had brought them closer together.

Germany's sense of isolation intensifies its assertive conduct

As Germany's international position deteriorated, that belligerence grew. German leaders perceived the empire to be encircled by the Franco-Russian Alliance (which its own diplomatic ineptness had done so much to create), excluded from choice colonies in Asia and Africa that the older British and French empires had already seized, blocked by the British Grand Fleet from access to the colonies it did possess, and barred by British merchants and contracts from markets to which its rapidly expanding industrial might entitled it. Sensing its increasing isolation, Germany became more assertive with each rebuke. Meanwhile this assertiveness continued to cause other European nations to draw together. In 1907 Britain and Russia, each aligned with France, concluded an accord with each other. This development, unthinkable only a few years earlier, was made possible by dramatic developments in Russia.

**RUSSIA AND ITS CHALLENGES.** In the early 1900s, Russia suffered from many internal problems. Rapid population growth, which shrunk the average peasants' land allotments, threatened their self-sufficiency. Rising nationalism among non-Russian nationalities, which constituted roughly half the realm's inhabitants, threatened the empire's cohesion. Its slowness to industrialize left it lagging far behind the West and threatened its great power status. And its ruler, Tsar Nicholas II (1894–1917), rigidly opposed to reforms that would limit his powers, lacked the decisiveness needed to exercise those powers effectively.

Convinced nonetheless that Russia must modernize in order to survive, Sergei Witte (*VIT-tuh*), Minister of Finance from 1892 to 1903, promoted industrialization through government action. He borrowed vast funds from abroad (particularly from Russia's new ally, France) to support new enterprises and build railways, especially the monumental trans-Siberian line, which provided access both to Asian markets and to Siberia's abundant resources, including timber and oil. His policies brought impressive increases in Russia's state revenues and industrial output.

Russia wrestles with the dilemma of modernization

But his policies also destabilized Russia. As thousands of peasants moved to cities to work in factories, their dislocation strained the social structure. Uprooted from their villages, crowded into urban slums, and compelled to work long hours at low wages in dangerous, monotonous jobs, Russian factory workers soon became a powerful force for change. Poor harvests and a weak economy added to the general discontent, as did the

empire's efforts to "russify" its ethnic minorities by forcing them to adopt Russian language and ways.

As social unrest increased, various revolutionary groups emerged. *Liberals* wanted a Western-style parliamentary regime, complete with a constitution and capitalist economy. *Socialist revolutionaries*, rejecting Western capitalism, wanted a socialist revolution based on the peasant masses. *Marxists*, or *social democrats*, saw the industrial working class as the backbone of a socialist revolution that would transfer ownership of the means of production to the workers. In the early 1900s, growing social unrest was manifested in student demonstrations, industrial strikes, peasant uprisings, and political assassinations that rocked the Russian Empire. Minister of Interior Viacheslav Plehve (1902) and the tsar's uncle, Grand Duke Sergei (1904) were blown to bits by bomb-throwing assassins. Industrial growth, intended to build Russia's wealth and power, seemed to be tearing it apart.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) complicated the unrest (Chapter 29). At first Japan's attack prompted a patriotic surge that quieted revolutionary activity. But when military setbacks began to discredit the tsarist regime, factory workers rebelled against extended work hours and pressures to boost production for war. In January 1905, a sincere but naive Orthodox priest organized a massive workers' march in Saint Petersburg. The marchers called for shorter workdays, expanded civil rights, and an end to the war. Although they carried icons and sang patriotic hymns, imperial troops opened fire on them, slaughtering several hundred.

**Bloody Sunday**, as this event was labeled, stunned Russia's people and undermined support for Nicholas II. Within months Russia was engulfed in revolution, as strikes and demonstrations spread throughout the land. By October 1905, as massive general strikes—in which all workers, rather than just those in a particular industry, walked off the job—shut down major cities, Saint Petersburg was controlled by a council, or **soviet**, of elected workers' delegates.

Threatened by these events, the tsar ended the war and issued an "October Manifesto," promising a constitution and an elected parliament, or **Duma**. This action satisfied liberals, splitting the opposition and helping to save the regime. Radicals and socialists continued to rebel, but tsarist forces, reinforced by loyal troops returning from the war, eventually crushed the remnants of the revolt.

The tsar thus survived the Russian Revolution of 1905 by agreeing to share power with the Duma. His new constitution, however, severely restricted this parliament, and his government shut it down when it seemed too radical. In 1907 his prime minister imposed a new electoral system that ensured a loyal majority. The revolution thus did little to limit the regime's power. But it gave Russian workers a brief taste of freedom, taught them how to organize soviets, and provided revolutionaries with experience that they would put to use in revolutions to come.

The war and revolution also helped Russia and Britain overcome their longstanding animosity. Russia's defeat by Japan convinced the British that Russia was less dangerous than Germany, and Russia's reformed government seemed superficially similar to Britain's parliamentary monarchy. Mutually fearful of Germany's growing power, in 1907 the two countries signed an Anglo-Russian Entente, reconciling their claims to colonies and spheres of influence in Asia.



A textile mill in Tashkent, Russian Central Asia, around 1900.

The Revolution of 1905 forces Nicholas II to make political concessions

The Triple Entente balances the Triple Alliance

## The Crises of 1908–1913

The Anglo-Russian Entente completed the **Diplomatic Revolution of 1890–1907**, creating a **Triple Entente** (Britain, France, and Russia) to offset the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Europe had moved in 17 years from a continent dominated by Germany to one balanced precariously between equal alliance systems. This development was dangerous not only to Germany but also to European peace. Power relationships among nations are safest when they are *imbalanced*: war is unlikely when one side clearly dominates the other. When equilibrium exists, however, either side may be tempted to test its luck. Such would be the case in Europe after 1907.

In 1908 a crisis arose over Austria's decision to annex the Balkan provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*her-tseh-gō-VĒ-nah*), which it had administered since 1878 but which technically were owned by the declining Ottoman Empire. Claiming it had prior Russian approval, Austria annexed the provinces in October. Russia, however, perceiving itself as protector of the provinces' Slavic peoples, voiced strong objections and demanded that Austria give part of these provinces to Serbia, a neighboring Slavic nation long supported by Russia. But Germany, supporting Austria, forced Russia to back down by threatening war. Though resolved without war, this **Bosnian Crisis of 1908–1909** tied Austria even closer to Germany and provoked Russia into funding an immense eight-year military buildup designed to prevent similar humiliations.

A series of crises both frightens and reassures Europe

In 1911 came a Second Moroccan Crisis, prompted by German discontent with the first one's outcome in 1906. Watching in frustration as France slowly took over Morocco in violation of the Act of Algeçiras, Germany sent a gunboat to the Moroccan port of Agadir. The Germans later said they were trying to obtain French concessions elsewhere in Africa in return for German recognition of a French protectorate over Morocco, but that aim initially was not clear. War seemed a real possibility, and France's ally Britain starkly warned Germany not to treat Britain "as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of Nations." War was avoided when France agreed to cede Germany a large slice of French Equatorial Africa. But the crisis frightened Britain and France into concluding a 1912 naval agreement, pledging each to defend the other's interests in case of war. Once again, Germany's belligerence had further united its foes.

Italy, meanwhile, eager to expand its African holdings, took Tripoli from the Ottomans during a war fought in 1911–1912. Emboldened by the Ottomans' poor performance in this war, four small Balkan nations then formed an anti-Turkish alliance. Much to the world's surprise, the Balkan allies drove the Ottomans from the Balkans in the First Balkan War (1912), but then fought among themselves over the spoils in the Second Balkan War (1913). Since the European powers assembled a conference to prevent these wars from spreading and arranged a compromise to safeguard the interests of Austria and Russia, these events actually reassured Europe. By the end of 1913, Europeans felt confident that any future crisis could be managed by negotiation, which had resolved every recent confrontation.

## The Crisis of July 1914

In June 1914, as described at the beginning of this chapter, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, visited Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, to observe military maneuvers. The visit angered Serbs and Bosnians, embittered by Austria's

Franz Ferdinand's murder provokes a European crisis

annexation of Bosnia in 1908. When the Archduke and his wife were murdered on June 28 by Gavrilo Princip (*PRIN-chip*), a Bosnian assassin trained and equipped in Serbia, the Serbian government was widely seen as responsible. Although Franz Ferdinand was not popular in Austria, in a Europe ruled mostly by monarchs, the assassination of a crown prince was a very serious matter. The general expectation was that Austria would somehow punish Serbia.

Austria decided to go to war against Serbia but was uncertain of how Russia, Serbia's protector, might respond, and therefore asked for assurance of German support. Assuming that Tsar Nicholas II would sympathize with the family of the murdered Franz Ferdinand, and therefore considering Russian intervention unlikely, Kaiser William II promised to back any action Austria might take. This guarantee was the infamous “**blank check**,” a document that would allow Austria to lead Germany and the rest of Europe into war. Austria prepared a ten-point ultimatum, or set of strict demands, the refusal of any one of which would justify Vienna in breaking off diplomatic relations as a prelude to war. The harsh ultimatum was actually designed to prove unacceptable to Serbia and make war inevitable. But Serbia's reply was conciliatory, impressing even Germany's Kaiser with its effort to keep peace. It fell short of total acceptance, however, so on July 25 Austria broke off relations.

In light of Serbia's moderate response, European opinion, which three weeks earlier might have supported Austria, now swung firmly to the Serbian side. Britain, preoccupied with a dangerous crisis over Irish Home Rule (Chapter 27), assumed that Germany would be receptive to a conference like the one that had contained the Balkan Wars. This time, however, Germany was more interested in confrontation than cooperation. On July 28, Austria declared war on Serbia, and Russia, overcoming any sympathy the Tsar may (or may not) have felt for Franz Ferdinand, prepared to fight in support of the Serbs. France resolved to stand by Russia, and Britain warned the Germans that it might not be able to stay neutral in a Franco-German war. Sobered by these developments, Germany sought on July 30 to restrain Austria, but it was too late. The need to move large numbers of troops on railways placed European armies on rigid timetables. This necessity was particularly pressing in Germany, which, threatened with a war on two fronts, planned to defeat France in six weeks and then turn to deal with Russia, whose less-developed transport system would slow its mobilization for war.

Needing to move before its enemies could prepare, Germany declared war against Russia on August 1 and France on August 3 (Map 31.2). The next day, as Germany's army invaded neutral Belgium on the way to attacking France, Britain, like Germany a guarantor of Belgian neutrality, entered the war on the side of France and Russia. All the great powers of Europe except Italy were now at war.

The July Crisis of 1914, unlike its predecessors, resulted in war for several reasons. Austria wanted to end Serbian ethnic agitation. Germany wanted to back its Austrian ally, assuming it would be better to risk war now than to wait until Russia completed its military buildup. Russia wanted to avoid humiliation like that of 1908–1909. France wanted to avenge the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and support its Russian ally. Britain wanted to avoid a French defeat that would give Germany control of France's ports on the English Channel. And all military leaders wanted to mobilize before their enemies did so. None of these “wants,” however, made war inevitable. European nations had freedom of choice, and could have opted against war in 1914. They did not.



Archduke Franz Ferdinand (left) and Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary.

Germany's unconditional support of Austria leads to war in Europe

European powers choose war over peace



## Map 31.2 The Great War in Europe and Southwest Asia, 1914–1918

The Great War quickly became stalemated late in 1914. The Central Powers exploited their central position on the continent to attack on different fronts at different times, but trench warfare, barbed wire, and machine guns all favored the defensive posture of the Triple Entente. Note that German forces conquered an amount of Russian territory equivalent in size to all of Germany and Austria-Hungary combined. Despite this achievement, why did the Central Powers fail to win the war?



## Deadlock and Devastation, 1914–1916

Why didn't the European nations decide against war? First, the military capabilities of the rival alliances were so closely matched that each side was willing to take a chance on victory. Second, each nation's leaders expected to win quickly, in the sort of victorious flurry that had characterized European warfare since the defeat of Napoleon. None of them expected the war to do what it did—come close to destroying European civilization. This helps explain why they were all willing to roll the dice at a time when their forces were so closely balanced. Third, many people in each country actually welcomed the prospect of war as an escape, in the words of poet Rupert Brooke, “from a world grown old and cold and weary,” and believed it would be a purification that would create a stronger, cleaner world. So hundreds of thousands of young men, cheered by their families and sweethearts, marched off to war in August 1914, grateful for the opportunity to prove themselves, rejoicing with Brooke: “Now God be thanked who has matched us with His hour!”

### Stalemate on the Western Front

Reality set in quickly, and reality was devastating. Belgian resistance slowed the German army, the British arrived in France more quickly than anticipated, and Russia mobilized with unusual speed to attack Germany in the East. But Germany's strategy for dealing with a two-front war was unrealistic in any case, as it relied for success on more top-flight combat divisions than the German army possessed. The Kaiser's forces won some impressive victories, bringing them close to Paris. But at the Marne River, having mobilized the city's taxis to transport their troops, the French outflanked the Germans and forced them to retreat. By mid-September the opposing armies were stalemated.

This deadlock in the West produced a “race to the sea,” eight weeks in which each side attempted to outflank the other. It ended in mid-November at the English Channel. Meanwhile, in the East, a premature Russian advance into East Prussia, designed to relieve pressure on the French in the West, succeeded in doing that but ended in disaster. German Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff isolated and destroyed the entire Russian Second Army, ending the threat of invasion and saving Austria, which was being defeated farther south by the Russians.

In just a few months of warfare, losses were appalling. In three months France had lost 306 thousand soldiers, 3 percent of its military-age males, and more than the United States would later lose during all of World War II. Germany, with a military-age population three times larger than France's, had lost 241 thousand men. Farther east, Russia and Austria had suffered catastrophic losses, with 1.5 million Russian and 1.268 million Austrian troops killed or captured. Russia's huge population could replace those losses, but Austria's could not. So the danger to Germany and Austria stemmed not only from Germany's failure to defeat France quickly but also from the destruction of the cream of the Austro-Hungarian armies. To prevent total collapse on the Eastern Front in 1915, Germany transferred sizable forces eastward and held the defensive in the West.

That defensive gave the Great War its most morbid characteristic: **trench warfare**. From the English Channel to the Franco-Swiss border, the Germans dug an elaborate system of parallel and angled trenches that the French could neither outflank nor pierce.



The most famous recruiting poster ever devised, featuring the face of British Field Marshal Lord Kitchener.

Both sides anticipate a short, victorious war



Dead soldiers in a trench on the Western Front.

The Western Front stalemates into trench warfare

France, perplexed, built trenches of its own. For the next three years each of these opposing systems prevented any meaningful breakthrough and frustrated generals schooled in attacking rather than defending.

Trenches had been used before. In the American Civil War, Confederate General Robert E. Lee had employed so many of them that his men called him “the King of Spades.” But prior to 1914, trenches had been dug to fortify positions for a battle or siege and then abandoned when it was over. In the Great War, trenches became permanent installations. Their permanence was attributable to barbed wire, which slowed offensives to a crawl, and especially to the machine gun. Capable of firing 11 rounds a second through water-cooled barrels, machine guns swept the entire field in front of a trench, cutting off attackers at the knees. Eventually offensive technology would be developed to neutralize these factors. For the moment, however, bewildered commanders launched repeated attacks “over the top” of the trenches (see page 782), sending soldiers surging into the barbed-wire traps of “no-man’s land” between opposing lines in the vain hope of achieving a breakthrough.

Trench warfare consumed soldiers’ lives at unprecedented rates, transforming war from violence carrying the prospect of glory into violence of unending degradation (see “Charles Hamilton Sorley, ‘When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead’”). Men lived and died in ditches eight feet deep, standing in stagnant water, plagued by rats and vermin, and often living next to the decaying corpses of their comrades. The optimism of the nineteenth century died on the Western Front, as trenches scarred both the landscapes of northeastern France and the psyches of the men who occupied them.

### Efforts to Break the Stalemate

As casualties relentlessly mounted, each side added allies and sought to break the stalemate. Germany and Austria-Hungary, joined by Bulgaria and Ottoman Turkey in a coalition called the Central Powers, employed mass attacks and artillery bombardments,

#### Document 31.1 Charles Hamilton Sorley, “When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead”

The poetry of the Great War captured in vivid, unforgettable imagery the shocking hopelessness of the gruesome slaughters on the Western Front. Charles Hamilton Sorley was killed in action in 1915, but not before he had written what many have called the saddest poem of the war.

When you see millions of the mouthless dead  
 Across your dreams in pale battalions go,  
 Say not soft things as other men have said,  
 That you’ll remember. For you need not so.  
 Give them no praise. For, deaf, how should they know  
 It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?  
 Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.

Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.  
 Say only this, “They are dead.” Then add thereto,  
 “Yet many a better one has died before.”  
 Then, scanning all the o’ercrowded mass, should you  
 Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,  
 It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.  
 Great Death has made all his forevermore.

SOURCE: [website.lineone.net/~nusquam/mouthles.htm](http://website.lineone.net/~nusquam/mouthles.htm)

supplemented on land by poison gas and at sea by German submarine warfare. Britain, France, and Russia, joined by Britain's ally Japan and other nations in a combination called the Allied Powers, relied heavily on mass attacks and a British naval blockade of Germany. Hoping to gain Austrian territory in a peace settlement, Italy joined the Allies in 1915, abandoning its prewar alliance with Germany and Austria.

**OFFENSIVES IN THE EAST AND SOUTHEAST.** As 1915 began, General Erich von Falkenhayn (*FAHL-ken-hīn*), chief of the German General Staff, argued against a defensive posture in the West. Noting Britain's ability to draw reinforcements from Canada and Australia, he wanted to defeat France before these reinforcements made an impact. But although Falkenhayn outranked Hindenburg and Ludendorff, they, not he, had won Germany's only decisive victory in 1914, and they demanded an offensive in the East. So in the West Falkenhayn settled for smaller attacks using chlorine gas, a fearsome new weapon that, when inhaled, stimulated fluid production in the lungs to cause death by drowning. Eventually used by both sides, poison gas was limited in its usefulness by shifting winds, which sometimes blew the gas back on the side releasing it, and by the development of gas masks. It nonetheless killed tens of thousands of horses, on which all armies depended for transport, and heightened the impersonal doom of trench warfare.

Poison gas fails to break the stalemate

Hindenburg's insistence on an eastern offensive was logical. A victory there would prevent Austria's collapse and possibly force Russia, frighteningly short of rifles and artillery shells, to seek a cease-fire. From May to September 1915, the Central Powers' offensive captured more than 750 thousand Russian prisoners. This offensive saved the Austrian army but did not prevent the Russians from withdrawing into their vast interior. There they raised reinforcements to replace their dead and captured, hoping their increasing output of industrial weapons would eventually enable them to turn back the Germans. As in France in 1914, Germany won major victories in the East but lacked the overwhelming superiority required to win the war. Italy's entry on the side of the Allies further reduced German prospects. It also tied down Austrian forces in bloody, debilitating fighting for the remainder of the war.

If the Central Powers could not break the stalemate in the West or East, perhaps the Allies could break it in the southeast. Turkey's entry into the war late in 1914 on the side of the Central Powers had closed Russia's southern seaports, since Turkey controlled entry to the Black Sea through the Dardanelles Straits. Winston Churchill, Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, proposed an expedition to force the Straits open and force Turkey out of the war. On April 25, 1915, an improvised landing force of Britons, Australians, and New Zealanders went ashore on the Gallipoli (*gah-LIH-pō-lē*) peninsula. It quickly found itself pinned on the beaches under Turkish artillery fire from defensive positions coordinated by Captain Mustafa Kemal (*moo-STAH-fah keb-MAHL*), who would go on to rule Turkey after the war. The British did not have sufficient troops for a full-scale invasion, and they had underestimated the effectiveness of Turkish resistance. By January 9, 1916, the invaders evacuated the Gallipoli peninsula. Both sides suffered losses in the hundreds of thousands, and the stalemate continued.

The Allied landing at Gallipoli fails



Troops from Australia and New Zealand at Gallipoli.

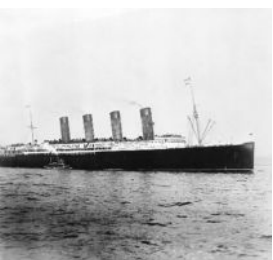
**THE WAR AT SEA.** By the end of 1915, although the Central Powers held a strong position in the heart of Europe, their impressive offensives had failed to defeat any of their enemies. Germany, moreover, was increasingly deprived of food and supplies by a tight British naval blockade. The British Grand Fleet outmatched the German High Seas



Fleet in both equipment and seamanship. It could maintain a tight blockade regardless of the number of merchant vessels sunk by German U-Boats (submarines), a number that ranged from fifty to one hundred per month but failed to stop supplies from reaching Britain.

U-Boat warfare damages Germany's relations with the United States

British naval efforts were therefore primarily defensive, forcing Germany to take the initiative or slowly starve. U-Boat warfare raised German hopes but proved frustrating: rules of the sea required that a submarine give warning before launching torpedoes and allow crews and passengers to be rescued. Since this process exposed and endangered these small boats, they often ignored it, casting Germany in the role of an outlaw nation. The sinking of neutral vessels by mistake caused diplomatic crises, as did the sinking in 1915 of the British passenger liner *Lusitania*. That ship was carrying more than a thousand American passengers as well as a cargo of contraband munitions destined for Britain. The heavy loss of life almost forced the United States to break diplomatic relations with Germany, which thereafter temporarily restricted its U-Boat raids.



*The Lusitania* while it was still afloat.

**THE VERDUN, SOMME, AND BRUSILOV OFFENSIVES.** By early 1916, the balance of forces was shifting to favor the Allies. Tremendous Russian industrial expansion provided adequate modern equipment for the tsar's armies; France had mobilized unprecedented numbers of women for factory work, releasing thousands of men for combat duty; and Britain, whose army in 1914 had seven combat divisions, now fielded seventy. Made confident by this increase in offensive power, Allied generals planned to attack German lines north of the river Somme in northern France. But they overestimated their own strength and underestimated German defensive capability. Meanwhile Falkenhayn struck first, unleashing an offensive against the French at Verdun, a fortress in eastern France.

Verdun was selected for its symbolic significance: as a fortress town since Roman times, it represented France's will to resist. Falkenhayn, not realizing how much French factory work had been shifted to women, believed that France must be running short of military-age men. By besieging Verdun, he meant not to capture it but to force France to defend it by sending in more and more men. Eventually France would either lose Verdun or spread its remaining forces so thin that Germany could break through elsewhere on the Western Front.

Germany attacked Verdun on February 21 with a bombardment so enormous that the roar of the guns was heard in England. For a few days it seemed the town would fall, but the French, deciding it must be held, appointed General Philippe Pétain (*PĀ-tan*) to hold it. Pétain entrenched his men in fortifications to wait out the shelling. Eventually, unprotected German infantry moved forward and were shot down. By the end of June each side had lost more than 200 thousand killed and wounded, and Verdun's crater-scarred landscape resembled the surface of the moon.

Falkenhayn's failure at Verdun would cost him his command in August, but on July 1 he was still in charge as the Allies opened their offensive on the River Somme in northern France. They, too, placed their faith in overwhelming artillery fire, but nothing worked as expected. The British Army alone lost 20 thousand dead in the first eight hours, the largest one-day loss in British military history. By August 1 the combatants combined had lost more than 350 thousand men, and the front lines had scarcely moved. The Somme offensive finally ended on November 19, after more than 1.2 million men had been killed or wounded.



Devastated landscape, Northern France.

Finally the lessons of trench warfare began to sink in. Throwing huge numbers of cloth-clad soldiers at positions protected by barbed wire and machine guns produced carnage without altering the tactical situation in any useful way. The foot soldiers cursed their generals; a popular analysis of the fighting is entitled *Lions Led by Donkeys*. But without technology that could overcome trenches, the generals had few options. Frustrated by their inability to break the stalemate, they could think of nothing more creative than to propel more and more men into the devastation of trench warfare. None of the generals yet advised his government to seek a negotiated peace, although deadlocked wars in centuries past had been settled by negotiation.

The deadlock in the West did not, however, prevent movement in the East. Falkenhayn had attacked Verdun freely because he thought the 1915 German assault had ruined Russia's offensive capability. He was mistaken. In June 1916, Russian General Alexei Brusilov (*broo-SEE-loff*) launched an offensive that henceforth bore his name. Brusilov's offensive split the Austrian Seventh Army in two, took 400 thousand prisoners, and cost the Central Powers a million casualties. He lacked the rail and road systems to follow up his victories, but he pushed Austria to the brink of collapse and achieved the greatest territorial gain since the beginning of trench warfare. The Central Powers were running out of manpower and resources. It was time for statesmen to find a way to make peace.

The 1916 offensives devastate the Western Front



Austro-Hungarian soldiers wearing gas masks.

## The War Against Germany's Colonies

Colonial issues did not, in themselves, cause the Great War. That conflict erupted over purely European issues. But colonial disputes had contributed significantly to the rising tensions between the new German Empire and the longer-established empires of France and Britain. Once war broke out, Germany was forced to fight on two fronts, leaving it unable to defend its overseas possessions adequately. Military actions by forces from Britain, France, Belgium, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand picked off those possessions one by one, making the Great War a truly global war long before the 1917 intervention of the United States.

**JAPAN OCCUPIES GERMANY'S PACIFIC EMPIRE.** In Asia, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 obligated Japan to come to Britain's aid if its possessions were attacked by a third party. On August 1, 1914, London informed Tokyo that it did not expect to ask for Japan's intervention. Three days later Japan declared itself neutral. But by August 6 Britain was having second thoughts. The Royal Navy wanted to blockade the German port of Qingdao on China's Shandong Peninsula while simultaneously hunting German warships and armed merchant ships in order to keep Pacific sea lanes safe for British commerce. These goals could not be achieved without sending additional British ships to the Pacific, and those ships were needed in the Atlantic. Britain therefore asked Japan for help in capturing or sinking armed German merchant ships, while German warships and the blockade of Qingdao would be handled by the Royal Navy.

This arrangement was limited collaboration, inconsistent with neutral status. On August 7–8 the Japanese cabinet decided to declare war on Germany and to move to eliminate German influence in China and the Pacific. This action frightened China, which feared Japanese more than European expansionism. Britain, recognizing Japan's intent to

Japan's entry creates a global war

partition China, then urged Japan to remain neutral. But Tokyo argued that Japanese public opinion demanded war with Germany and that the government could not resist the will of the people. Neither claim was fully true, but with Britain preoccupied with Germany in Europe, on August 23 Japan entered the war on its own terms (Map 31.3).

Japan moved at once against the German garrison at Qingdao, ignoring China's neutrality in doing so. Sixty thousand Japanese soldiers, with one British and one Indian battalion, laid siege to the city in early September. Qingdao's main defenses were designed to deal with an attack by China similar to those of the Boxer Rebellion, so they faced landward, but the Japanese, British, and Indians struck from seaward positions. Even so, it took until November 7 for the invaders to force the garrison of three thousand German marines to surrender. By that time all of Germany's Pacific holdings

### Map 31.3 The Great War in Asia, 1914–1918

When Britain asked Japan for assistance in tracking down armed German merchant vessels, Japan took the opportunity to declare war on Germany and occupy German possessions in East Asia and the Pacific. Notice that Australia and New Zealand occupied other German holdings on behalf of the British Empire. Farther west, India made significant contributions in men, horses, and supplies to the Allied war effort. Why was Britain more prepared than Germany to fight a global war on a global scale?



had been overrun. New Zealand troops occupied Samoa without resistance on August 29, and on September 15 the Australians accepted the surrender of all of German New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where the Germans were led by an artillery captain who had no guns and an equestrian instructor who had no horses. Obviously Germany had never intended to defend the region vigorously. German defenses were no better in the Caroline Islands, the Marshall Islands, the Mariana Islands, and the island of Palau, all of which fell to the Japanese on October 6. Japan's entry into the Great War thereby allowed it to conquer territories which could form an outer defense perimeter for the Japanese Empire in the event of a future conflict with a Pacific power such as the United States.

India's small participation in the siege of Qingdao proved to be only the beginning of a major military commitment made by Britain's most valuable imperial possession. No fighting took place on the subcontinent, but 850 thousand Indian soldiers fought beside the British in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Nearly 50 thousand died in those actions. India also contributed 150 thousand horses and mules, 11 thousand camels, 75 thousand tons of timber, and 550 million rounds of ammunition. The extent of this assistance made Britain's refusal to grant meaningful autonomy to India after 1918 very difficult for Indians to accept.

**DEVASTATION IN AFRICA.** Germany's African colonies were not particularly valuable in themselves; they were table scraps left to the Germans after the British and French Empires had eaten their fill. But they could serve as staging areas for attacks on British and French interests, and their six important wireless stations could relay messages from Germany to its ships around the world. Britain and France wasted no time in attacking Germany in Africa.

The easiest Allied victory came in the West African territory of Togo (Map 31.4). Surrounded by the British Gold Coast and French West Africa, it fell to a joint invasion on August 27, 1914. The West Central African colony of Kamerun proved harder for the Allies. A combination of skillful German resistance, difficult topography, and the impossibility of fighting during the five-month season of torrential rains delayed Allied victory into 1916. By that time German Southwest Africa had already surrendered, in July 1915, to a joint force of 60 thousand Britons and Boers.

That left German East Africa, a sprawling colony as large as France, with a defense force of fewer than three thousand men commanded by Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, a veteran of the Boxer Rebellion who had no intention of surrendering to the British or to anyone else. Lettow launched raids into British East Africa (Kenya) and Uganda in 1914, raising the German flag beneath Mount Kilimanjaro and causing an uproar among Britain's colonists. His forces repelled a joint British-Indian offensive that November, after which he confined his efforts to guerrilla warfare, fighting and quickly withdrawing. After German resistance collapsed in Southwest Africa, experienced troops from that conflict arrived in East Africa and embarked on a 1916 campaign under the command of General Jan Christiaan Smuts, a master of unconventional warfare who had repeatedly frustrated the British in the Boer War.

Smuts launched a multinational offensive from four different colonies at once, using British forces from Kenya and Nyasaland, Belgian troops from the Congo, and Portuguese soldiers from Mozambique, hoping to encircle Lettow and end the fighting in



An ammunition factory in India.

India makes an enormous contribution to the Allied war effort



### Map 31.4 The Great War in Africa, 1914–1918

Germany's African colonies were lightly defended and could never have affected the fighting in Europe, but each of them contained at least one wireless station that could relay communications from Germany to German ships around the world. The Allies wanted to destroy these stations, and also to remove these colonies from German control. Observe that the stiffest fighting occurred in German East Africa, where forces under Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck remained in the field until after the armistice was signed in 1918. Why would the Allies have had such difficulty overcoming German resistance in East Africa?



Africa. Lettow, however, now commanded more than 16 thousand men, most of them native Africans who had enlisted in his cause and knew the terrain better than Smuts. Lettow divided his German-African forces, broke out southward into Mozambique, moved northward again around Lake Nyasa, and ended up in northern Rhodesia, where he finally surrendered his command on November 25, 1918. His bloodied but undefeated troops had fought the British as recently as November 12, one day after the Armistice had been signed in France.

The battles over Germany's colonies devastated much of Africa. Campaigning in Kamerun lasted two years and wrecked much of the countryside. East Africa was ravaged by the constant fighting between Germany and Britain, which resulted in burned villages, loss of crops and stored food, and the drafting of more than 100 thousand Africans to serve as soldiers and porters. Nearly 10 percent of Africans drafted died, mostly from malnutrition and disease. To make matters worse, the global influenza pandemic of 1918 killed over 3 percent of the entire population of east, west, and central Africa. To Europeans, Africa was a sideshow to the main war, but to Africans, it was everything they had. By 1918 they responded to the Allied victory with little more than exhaustion and relief.

The Great War creates chaos in Africa

### Civilian Life During the Great War

War's hardship lay heaviest on the soldiers, but noncombatants suffered too, although in different ways. By the end of 1916, the war had disrupted civilian life in all warring nations. Food, clothing, and critical raw materials were distributed on a priority basis, with military needs taking precedence. Inevitable shortages at home were handled through rationing, which restricted each person or family to a fixed quantity of each item per month or year. Many families lost members to military service, while those remaining at home were often required to work up to 72 hours a week in war plants.

Since Britain was not invaded, its people suffered least, but their lives were not easy. Britain imported much of its food, and U-Boat raids jeopardized both agricultural and industrial imports. The British avoided malnutrition through strict rationing, and Germany's inability to sink the entire British merchant marine allowed imports to reach England, but the island nation's birth weights declined, and vitamin deficiencies afflicted many children. British soldiers were probably the war's best-fed troops, but at the expense of provisions for people at home.

In France, the huge casualty lists of 1914 led to the drafting of most able-bodied men and their replacement in factories and on farms by women. France lost a higher percentage of men aged 18 to 25 than any other warring nation, leaving many women without spouses and depressing the birthrate for the next two decades. German occupation of northeastern France cost that nation 80 percent of its prewar industry. New factories were established farther south, but the French people suffered severe shortages of manufactured consumer goods for the duration of the war.

Germany suffered tremendously, largely because of the slow strangulation imposed by the British blockade. Having counted on swift victory, the Kaiser's regime had no plans for allocating resources or feeding people at home in a lengthy war. Resource allotment was eventually handled by a central government agency, as the German economy shifted all production priorities to the war effort. More than a million women joined the



Women workers in a British shipyard.

France uses women in factories and on farms

The British blockade causes malnutrition in Germany

industrial workforce, leaving children in the care of grandparents or aunts and necessitating rapid overhauling of workplaces—for example, through installation of women’s lavatories on factory floors. Long hours of wartime work ruined the health of many malnourished women, unaccustomed to strenuous physical labor.

Malnutrition was the principal challenge facing the German home front. Germany in 1913 imported one-third of its food supply. The British blockade cut off food imports, and the harvests of 1916 and 1917 were unusually poor due to fertilizer shortages and terrible weather. In the “turnip winter” of 1916–1917, turnips and other vegetables usually fed to livestock became main dishes on German dinner tables. Bread was made from one part flour and two parts sawdust, occasionally mixed with powdered limestone. Rations declined to one thousand calories per day, although 2,280 is the average required for adult health. About 750 thousand Germans died of malnutrition between 1914 and 1918, while many others fell to disease, their immune systems weakened by lack of food, the rationing of soap to one small bar per month, and the rationing of coal, which lowered household temperatures to levels dangerous in Germany’s chilly climate.

In Russia, the government encouraged wartime sacrifice by banning the sale of vodka. At first the results were beneficial: criminal cases in Russia’s capital declined 80 percent, and the incidence of poverty dropped by 75 percent as savings deposits grew. But consumption of tea and sugar increased tremendously, and by 1916 vodka-starved Russians had begun drinking varnish and cologne. Russian farmers kept pace with food demand, but soldiers at the front were fed first. Russia’s railway system eventually proved unable to supply both soldiers and cities in a country partially occupied by enemy forces, triggering cataclysmic revolutions in 1917.

## Year of Revolution, 1917

The year 1917 proved pivotal for both sides. The Allies gained a long-term advantage with the entry on their side of the United States. But mutinies in France and revolutions in Russia hurt the Allied cause in the short run, giving the Germans an apparent edge going into 1918.

## The United States Enters the War

The United States tries to remain neutral

Woodrow Wilson, president of the neutral United States, tried to end the war late in 1916 by asking both sides to state the terms they needed to ensure their future security. The request was modest, but results were disappointing: each alliance presented uncompromising demands that were mutually exclusive. Reelected in November 1916 on the slogan “He kept us out of war,” Wilson watched uneasily, fearing that unless the conflict ended soon, he would be unable to keep America out much longer.

On January 31, 1917, Wilson’s apprehensions grew stronger. The Germans, faced with continuing military stalemate and starving from Britain’s blockade, resumed unrestricted submarine warfare. The Kaiser’s advisors argued that U-Boats could strangle Britain and end the war quickly; they minimized the consequences of a break with the United States, whose small army would need months of expansion and training, and whose soldiers would have to be ferried to Europe in troop ships that U-Boats could

sink. Their argument was desperate rather than logical, but the longer the stalemate lasted, the weaker the Central Powers became and the more willing they were to grasp at any possible solution.

America's reaction to Germany's unleashing of its U-Boats startled Berlin. On February 26, 1917, Wilson asked Congress for permission to arm merchant ships. Three days later the U.S. government published the **Zimmermann Note**, an intercepted effort by German diplomat Arthur Zimmermann to bribe Mexico into an alliance against the United States by offering to return Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, lost in the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848, in the event of German victory. Public outrage over this offer and persistent U-Boat attacks against American shipping led Wilson to ask Congress for a declaration of war on April 2, 1917. Congress complied four days later, but not until 1918 did large numbers of U.S. soldiers, transported across the Atlantic by naval convoys for protection against German U-Boats, arrive in France. When they did, however, they brought new energy that helped defeat the Germans.

### Mutinies in the French Army

In the meantime, however, widespread mutinies rocked France's war-weary armies. Following the failure of an April 1917 offensive, nearly half the units in the French army refused to participate in further attacks.

The French government took the mutinies seriously because they were national in scope, involving civilian as well as military discontent. French soldiers lived in terrible conditions, ate inadequate food, and received almost no leave time. Their families endured high prices, long workweeks, and grinding anxiety over loved ones at the front. Both soldiers and families suffered from the stress of an apparently endless war. The government responded by suppressing strikes at home, naming the controversial, passionately anti-German, 76-year-old Georges Clemenceau (*klā-mahn-SŌ*) as prime minister, and appointing as army chief General Pétain, hero of Verdun. Pétain improved the food, granted regular leaves, and punished thousands of mutinous soldiers. Most important, he suggested that future attacks would be mounted only if they had legitimate prospects of success. Building on his reputation as a general who never asked men to sacrifice their lives needlessly, he gradually restored discipline and ended the crisis.

The French mutinies were a lost opportunity for the Germans. Unaware of the French protests, German commanders Hindenburg and Ludendorff, having reoriented German strategy eastward after replacing Falkenhayn in 1916, concentrated on the Eastern Front throughout 1917. That shift may have saved the French army.

### The Russian Revolutions

Nothing, however, could save the Russian monarchy, battered by German advances and by the breakdown of Russia's wartime food supply system. In March 1917, food shortage sparked a spontaneous revolt that overthrew the tsarist regime. For the next eight months, an ineffective transitional regime sought vainly to restore order and maintain the war effort, but it was overthrown in November by Marxist revolutionaries, committed to removing Russia from the war and establishing a socialist society.

Germany's U-Boat warfare brings the United States into the war



Anti-German propaganda.

France limits the impact of mutinies



**STRESSES AND STRAINS OF THE GREAT WAR.** The Great War was disastrous for Russia from the outset. In the war's first month, as Germany invaded France, the Russians had rushed to relieve their French allies by attacking Germany from the East. By prompting the Germans to divert troops from France, this assault helped the French hold on. But the unprepared and poorly led Russians were badly defeated by the Germans and never fully recovered.

Russia staggers under the war's burdens

As the war continued and supplies of rifles, munitions, and food ran low, Russia's situation went from bad to worse. Russian forces fought well against Austria, but they were no match for the Germans, whose 1915 offensive pushed deep into the tsarist empire. Huge numbers of refugees, fleeing the German advance on foot, overwhelmed Russian roads and towns, undermining morale and further slowing the flow of supplies.

In August of that year, faced with a series of defeats, Tsar Nicholas II made a fateful decision: he assumed command of the Russian armies himself. His goals were to raise the soldiers' morale with his presence at the front, and to signal friends and foes that Russia would stay in the war despite its crippling setbacks. But the tsar's lack of military expertise soon made him a liability, and his absence from the capital left him reliant on his wife, Empress Alexandra, for governmental administration. And she was distracted and increasingly discredited by her connections with a dissolute Siberian "holy man" called Rasputin, who was apparently able to heal her son Alexis, heir to the Russian throne.

**THE FALL OF THE RUSSIAN MONARCHY.** Alexis had hemophilia, a congenital condition that kept his blood from clotting, so even the slightest cut or bruise could cause him to bleed to death. But Rasputin, apparently through prayer, seemed to be able to stop the bleeding. Seeing him as a savior sent by God, Alexandra came to trust him fully and rely on his advice.

Rasputin and Alexandra prove unable to lead Russia effectively

Unfortunately for the monarchy's public image, Rasputin also led a life of public drunkenness and debauchery. Moreover, Alexandra herself was originally from Germany, the hated enemies' homeland. And to protect her son, his condition was kept secret, so the public did not know why Rasputin enjoyed her favor. As she systematically replaced effective ministers with unscrupulous incompetents favored by Rasputin, Russia's internal order disintegrated. The result was scandal: while the tsar was at the front, it seemed, a treacherous German woman and her depraved friend were ruining Russia.

As the situation deteriorated, even loyal monarchists lost faith in the regime. Despite all efforts, the Duma could overcome neither the blunders of Russian officials nor the skills of German armies. Finally, in December 1916, a reactionary Duma deputy and two relatives of the royal family decided to murder Rasputin. First they fed him wine and pastries laced with cyanide poison. Then, when he remained unfazed, they shot him, clubbed him till he was unconscious, and drowned him in a canal.

The murder, of course, changed little. The Germans were still advancing, the inept ministers were still in office, internal order was still breaking down, and the distraught empress continued to hold power. Even as she conducted seances to communicate with her departed advisor, patriotic Russians and dedicated Duma deputies began to look for ways to replace their failing leaders with a more capable regime.

Meanwhile a far deeper and broader revolt was taking shape among the Russian masses. By this time runaway inflation, sparked by the printing of excess currency to pay

for the war effort, had eroded people's meager incomes, while the hardships of continued conflict had pushed them to the breaking point. In the villages, from which most able men had long since been sent to the front, the remaining overstrained peasants refused to sell their grain in return for the worthless currency. Cities started running out of bread, and as work hours increased to meet war demands while purchasing power fell, large numbers of urban workers went out on strike. At the front, where millions of Russian troops had been killed, wounded, or captured, soldiers began questioning both the war and their orders. Pushed beyond all patience, the masses were beginning to move.

Early in 1917 tensions exploded in Russia's capital, renamed Petrograd (Peter's city) during the war because Petersburg sounded too German. On March 8, International Women's Day, exasperated female textile workers started a mass demonstration. They were joined by throngs of women who were waiting in long lines for bread and by striking men from the city's other industries. By the next day the whole city was on strike, and rioters controlled the streets. Away at the warfront, Nicholas responded by closing down the Duma, which he somehow blamed for the uproar, and by ordering local troops to disperse the demonstrators. On March 11 they did so, shooting into the rioting crowds and effectively clearing the streets. But that night the tormented troops, upset at being ordered to shoot their own people, resolved not to do it again, and some started to mutiny. On March 12 the rioting resumed, but when soldiers were ordered to fire at the crowds they shot their officers instead.

The tsar's authority had evaporated. On March 15, pressed by several Duma deputies and army officers, he renounced the throne for himself and his sickly son. Nicholas's brother, next in line, wisely refused to accept it. The imperial Russian monarchy silently ceased to exist.

**DUAL POWER AND THE BOLSHEVIK CHALLENGE.** In the midst of the revolution, two important bodies emerged to dominate developments for the next eight months. One was the **Provisional Government**, a temporary cabinet composed largely of Duma leaders, which assumed power until a new constitution could be enacted. Another was the **Petrograd Soviet**, made up of deputies elected by workers and soldiers, modeled on the soviet of 1905.

The Provisional Government, led by liberals, proclaimed democratic rights and freedoms for all, and promised to hold elections for a constituent assembly that would decide the future form of rule. But it alienated peasants by postponing major land reforms. It failed to fully restore internal order, or to solve Russia's economic problems. Most disastrously, it kept Russia in the war, determined to press on to victory despite the suffering of the people.

The Petrograd Soviet, led by socialists who believed Russia too economically primitive for a socialist regime, agreed to let the Provisional Government manage matters for the time being. Backed by strong popular support, however, the Soviet sought to shape policy, creating an ambiguous situation that Russians called "dual power." As the Petrograd Soviet called for broad reforms and peace "without annexations or indemnities," local soviets, elected by workers, soldiers, and peasants, sprang up all over Russia.

Following these events from afar was Vladimir Ilich Ulianov (*ool-YAH-noff*), better known as Lenin. Fifteen years earlier, as a rising socialist leader, he had challenged the orthodox Marxist view that industrial workers would eventually unite and create a

The Russian monarchy breaks under the strain of war



Burying the fallen, Petrograd, March 1917.

Dual centers of power cause chaos in Russia



Lenin.

socialist revolution. The workers, he argued, would not do this on their own: they would merely form unions and settle for better wages and working conditions. Revolution, he asserted, must instead be made by a dedicated group of professional revolutionaries, acting as the workers' "vanguard." His views had split Russian Marxists into two factions: his supporters, who called themselves **Bolsheviks** ("those in the majority"), and their opponents, called **Mensheviks** ("those in the minority"). Having fled Russia to avoid arrest by tsarist police, Lenin had been attending a conference of European socialists in Switzerland when the Great War broke out. Switzerland was neutral in the conflict, and as part of its neutrality, it prohibited political leaders and men of military age who were citizens of the nations at war from leaving the country. Lenin was trapped in Switzerland along with other Russians in exile.

Now, suddenly, Russia was in revolution, and Lenin could not be part of it. His frustration grew as he learned that Soviet leaders, including some of his Bolsheviks, had let the Provisional Government take power rather than launching a socialist rebellion. In a sealed train provided by the Germans, who helped him return in hopes that his presence would weaken Russia's war effort, Lenin made his way to Petrograd in April. Once there, he stunned his socialist colleagues by demanding an immediate end to the "imperialist war" and the overthrow of the Provisional Government. He also called for the **nationalization** of all Russian land—the forced transfer of private property to state control. Later he simplified his views into slogans appealing to the Russian masses: "Peace!" "Land!" "Bread!" and "All power to the Soviets!"

Although Soviet leaders considered Lenin's ideas too radical, the workers found them attractive, and support for the Bolsheviks began to grow. So did their upper ranks. In May, Leon Trotsky, a brilliant Marxist orator and organizer who had helped lead the soviet of 1905, returned from exile in New York. Though a longtime political opponent of Lenin, he now joined him in pushing for immediate revolution, adding immensely to the energy and effectiveness of the Bolshevik leadership.

Confusion followed. In July radical workers and sailors, inspired by Lenin's ideas and angered at the Soviet's refusal to take power, rose in rebellion in Petrograd. Lenin at first tried to stop the uprising, believing that the Bolsheviks were not yet ready to take power, and then reluctantly gave it his support. But the "July Days" revolt failed when Soviet leaders rejected its demands, and forces loyal to the Provisional Government, influenced by rumors that Lenin was a German agent, disarmed the rebels and arrested some Bolshevik leaders. When Lenin himself fled to Finland, it appeared that the Bolshevik movement would collapse.

**THE BOLSHEVIK TRIUMPH.** In September, however, the Bolsheviks were rescued by actions of Russian conservatives. Eager to strengthen the Provisional Government and shut down the Soviet, General Lavr Kornilov (*kor-NĒ-loff*), the army's commander-in-chief, began sending troops toward Petrograd. But Russia's Prime Minister, Alexander Kerensky, fearing a right-wing coup, fired the general and called on the people to "save the revolution." Bolshevik leaders, including Trotsky, were released from prison and quickly took charge of the resistance, in which Bolshevik sailors and railway workers defeated the "Kornilov mutiny."

Suddenly the Bolsheviks were heroes. As their support among workers grew, they gained a majority in the Petrograd Soviet and elected Trotsky as its chair. Lenin returned in October, and together they planned a new revolution, timed to coincide with an All-Russian

Lenin's Bolsheviks appeal to ordinary Russians

The Bolsheviks take power in Russia

Congress of Soviets, convening in the capital on November 7, 1917. Early that morning, Bolshevik Red Guards seized the city's railway stations and other strategic locations. By afternoon, most of Petrograd was in their hands. That evening, with 390 of the 650 delegates, the Bolsheviks took control of the Congress of Soviets. When Mensheviks and others walked out in protest, Trotsky rhetorically relegated them to the "dustbin of history." The next day the Bolsheviks completed their coup by storming the headquarters of the Provisional Government.

Moving quickly to implement their program, the Bolsheviks formed a Soviet government, with Lenin at its head. They issued a Decree on Peace, declaring an end to the war, and a Decree on Land, authorizing peasants to divide up nobles' estates. They nationalized banking and foreign trade, and urged workers to take control of factories. After several weeks of fighting, they defeated the remnants of the Provisional Government, took charge of Moscow, and spread their power to other Russian cities. In November they permitted previously planned elections for the constituent assembly, but when it became clear they could not control the assembly, they shut it down in January 1918 after it met for only one day. They also adopted the Western calendar, moved the capital to Moscow, began to repress the Orthodox church, and officially started calling themselves Communists.

Further actions by the new regime underscored its radical nature. It declared equal status for all Soviet citizens, without regard to social class or gender, making Soviet Russia the first major country to provide legal equality and full voting rights to all women. It also proclaimed equality for Russia's many ethnic minorities, some of whom, including Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Poles, gained independence at the end of the Great War. And, determined to get Russia out of the war and fulfill their Decree on Peace, Russia's new rulers began seeking a separate peace with Germany.

The Bolsheviks move to fulfill their promises



Bolshevik poster ex-tolling the revolution.

## Year of Decision, 1918

As 1918 began, the Soviet decision to seek peace appeared to give Germany the advantage in the Great War. The Allies, it is true, stood to gain eventually from the arrival of fresh American troops, but few had arrived thus far. In the meantime, by making peace with Russia, the Germans could move half a million battle-tested troops from the Eastern to the Western Front, giving them a huge advantage in northern France. It seemed that they might break the stalemate and win the war before the Americans could make much difference.

Barely noticed in all the upheaval was the use at the Battle of Cambrai in northern France, in November–December 1917, of a new technology that might favor the Allies. The British sent three hundred ungainly machines into combat and won a limited but highly significant victory. The perplexed Germans called these machines "power-driven mechanized vehicles on treads that destroy trenches." The more succinct British called them "tanks."

## Russian Withdrawal from the War

On March 3, 1918, German and Soviet officials signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ending Russia's participation in the Great War. In a calculated risk of dazzling magnitude, the Bolsheviks gave Germany two-thirds of Russia west of the Ural Mountains in return



for peace. Lacking an army capable of stopping the Germans, and anxious to maintain worker support by keeping his 1917 promises, Lenin explained that the Bolsheviks needed peace to consolidate their power.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk enables Germany to fight on one front

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk gave the Germans access to huge supplies of timber, oil, and grain from western Russia, but more important, it freed fifty combat-ready divisions for immediate transfer to the Western Front. There Ludendorff and Hindenburg were preparing a Great March Offensive, designed to batter the Allies into submission. The Americans were starting to arrive in force: 300 thousand had debarked by March, and 1.3 million would land in France by August. But these raw recruits were not as militarily valuable as the 500 thousand battle-toughened Germans transferred from east to west. If the war lasted until 1919, the influx of fresh Americans would eventually alter the balance in favor of the Allies, but no such alteration seemed possible in 1918.

### The Great March Offensive and Influenza Pandemic

The Great March Offensive began well for the Germans: 76 German divisions overran 28 British divisions, pushing them back toward Paris. Desperate to avoid catastrophe, the British agreed to serve under the French General Ferdinand Foch (*FŌSH*), whose appointment as overall commander of Allied forces on April 3, 1918, saved the situation by giving one man unconditional authority to allocate reserves.

Foch's efforts to stiffen Allied resistance were aided by Americans and by the flu. By late May, German forces stood only 56 miles from Paris, but there they were blocked by inexperienced American troops at Belleau Wood. This unexpected U.S. victory startled the Germans. Driven to the limits of their endurance, they soon fell victim to one of history's deadliest afflictions: the great influenza pandemic of 1918.

A pandemic of influenza kills many millions throughout the world

This disease, which incapacitated half a million German soldiers in June, was much more deadly than the varieties of flu that today kill more than 36 thousand Americans each winter. Sweeping the globe in 1918, it struck down young and old, healthy and infirm, killing perhaps as many as 50 million people. Infected with catastrophic fevers and severe respiratory infections, many sufferers literally drowned in their own blood and fluids. Advancing German troops, exposed to the elements in an unusually wet spring and malnourished because of the British blockade, proved far more susceptible than well-fed Allies quartered in trenches, houses, and barns.

Unity of command enabled the Allies to exploit the German plight. On July 18, Foch committed Allied reserves to a surprising counteroffensive. The German lines shuddered and fell back. After four years of brutal war, they lacked the manpower reserves to blunt the Allied assault, and in technological development they had fallen fatally behind. Technology, which in 1914 had favored the defensive, now provided the attacker with the tank as a means of destroying trenches. The Allies had produced more than a thousand quality tanks, while the Germans had built about fifty inferior ones.

Bulgaria's surrender dooms the Central Powers

Ludendorff tried unsuccessfully to stabilize his front, but German forces were demoralized by defeat, weakened by disease, terrified by Allied tanks, and disheartened by the prospect of continuing American arrivals. Foch threw everything he had into a broad-front assault on September 26; two days later Ludendorff's nerve cracked, and he decided to ask the Kaiser to seek an armistice. One day after that, Germany's ally Bulgaria asked for an armistice on the Balkan Front. With Bulgaria out of the war, Allied forces

could drive northwest from the Balkans into Austria-Hungary, defenseless there since it had committed all its troops to the Italian Front. Austria's collapse would open a "back door" into Germany, which lacked sufficient reserves to defend a new front. Bulgaria's surrender was the final blow. The war in Europe was nearly over.

### Decision in Southwest Asia

In Southwest Asia, the Great War was ending as well. In entering the war on the side of the Central Powers, the Ottoman Empire had committed itself to more than its limited infrastructure and industrial base could support. An Ottoman attack on Russia through the Caucasus Mountains in December 1914 proved decidedly ill advised, as more than 30 thousand Turks died of frostbite and the Russians counterattacked successfully. The campaign was disastrous not only for the Ottomans but for their Armenian subjects.

The Russian army's counteroffensive included a division of Christian Armenians, who reportedly massacred the inhabitants of several Turkish villages. This alleged atrocity, coupled with the April 1915 declaration of a secessionist Armenian government backed by the Russians, caused many Turks to doubt the loyalty of people of Armenian descent. Between 1915 and 1918, according to many historians, half a million Armenians were deported to Mesopotamia, while more than a million were murdered outright or died of disease and starvation during forced marches across desert regions. The scholarly and political disputes over how many were killed and whether or not these actions constituted **genocide**, the deliberate and systematic destruction of an entire race or ethnic group, pale beside the immensity of the human tragedy that befell the Armenians.

The Turkish victory at Gallipoli in 1915 did not cure the vulnerability of the Empire. Continuing warfare in the Caucasus brought many casualties and little gain. In 1916 Hussein ibn Ali, Sherif of Mecca, protector of the Holy Places of Islam, placed himself at the head of an Arab revolt that immediately threatened Ottoman control of Palestine and Arabia. A British liaison officer, Colonel T. E. Lawrence, offered tactical advice to the Arabs and rode into history as "Lawrence of Arabia." But the heavy fighting against the Ottomans was done by an army of Britons, Australians, and New Zealanders based in Egypt, and an army of Indians fighting in Mesopotamia.

Indian and British forces in Mesopotamia took Baghdad in 1917 and Mosul the following year, threatening Ottoman petroleum resources (Map 31.5). In Palestine, the Egyptian-based army of General Allenby took Jerusalem in December 1917 and by September 1918 was confronting Turkish forces at Megiddo, the "Armageddon" referred to in the Bible. Allenby's forces won the battle at Megiddo, broke through Turkish lines, and forced the Ottoman Empire to sign an armistice on October 30. Together with Bulgaria's surrender in September, this left Germany and Austria-Hungary isolated and desperate.

### The Path to the Armistice

Ending the war formally took until early November. The Kaiser decided to ask for a truce on the basis of the Fourteen Points, a plan for a just peace outlined by Wilson in January 1918 (see "Woodrow Wilson: The Fourteen Points"). But for Wilson, who had



An Ottoman grenade with a fuse made from rope.

The Ottoman Empire collapses

### Map 31.5 The Great War in Southwest Asia, 1917–1918

The Ottoman Empire, attacked from three sides, finally cracked under the strain in 1918. Note that Indian and British troops, moving up the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, conquered Mesopotamia and compromised Ottoman petroleum supplies. An Arab army in Palestine and Syria weakened the southern flank and helped British forces, moving north from Egypt, to break through at Megiddo and force the Ottomans to capitulate on October 30, 1918. Why did the Ottoman Empire, known for a century as the “Sick Man of Europe,” succeed in holding out for so long?



led America into the war “to make the world safe for democracy,” no government led by an emperor could be sufficiently democratic. On October 16 he issued conditions that implied that the Kaiser should abdicate. William II, outraged, resisted until November 9. By then Austria-Hungary had also surrendered, and Germany’s army continued to retreat toward its own frontier.

Now the weakening of German morale proved decisive. Sailors of Germany’s High Seas Fleet mutinied when admirals asked them to put to sea to fight the British Grand Fleet and go down with honor. Faced with desertion and civil war, the German High Command informed the Kaiser that the army would no longer defend his regime. Disbelieving to the last, William went into exile in neutral Holland, where he lived quietly until 1941, dying a year after Nazi Germany invaded and subjugated the country that had welcomed him.

Armistice talks were proceeding as William left. Having appealed for a truce on the basis of the Fourteen Points, the German government was appalled at the severity

## Document 31.2 Woodrow Wilson, The Fourteen Points

In January 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson outlined what he hoped would be viewed as the foundation upon which a just and lasting peace might be established. His outline became known as the Fourteen Points.

- I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
- II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war . . .
- III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.
- IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety . . .
- VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations . . .
- VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted . . .
- IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.

XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel among historically established lines of allegiance and nationality . . .

XII. The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

of the terms actually offered. Germany was required to evacuate all occupied territory, abandon German territory west of the Rhine River, repudiate the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, surrender all its ships and massive amounts of military equipment, and agree to **reparations**, payments to compensate the Allies for war damages. These terms were imposed on a nation devastated by the influenza pandemic and literally starving from the effects of the British blockade, a continuing act of war for which no ending date was set.



The Great War is ended by an armistice

That condition transformed the truce into an outright surrender. An **armistice** is a temporary cessation of hostilities between warring powers; but the continuing blockade, weakening Germany's ability to resist with each passing day, effectively made it impossible for Germany to resume fighting. When bells rang throughout Europe and America at 11:00 a.m. Greenwich Mean Time on November 11—the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918—they tolled not merely an armistice, but the actual end of the Great War.

## Chapter Review

### Putting It in Perspective

With the end of the Great War, later called World War I, Europe's long nightmare seemed over. The conflict's crushing impact had fallen mostly on Europe, which at the close of 1918 lay demoralized, devastated, and in many ways transformed. The royal houses of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia had been overthrown, and the Ottoman Sultan would soon follow. Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire had broken apart, the former into small national states, the latter into a Turkish national state and regions that became virtual colonies of Britain and France. Marxism had come to power in Russia, frightening capitalist nations everywhere and heightening postwar anxieties. The war had toppled dynasties and changed the way in which Europe was organized.

For more than nine million people, the organization of Europe was irrelevant: they were dead. The casualty lists dwarfed even those of the Napoleonic Wars. But for many who had not served at the front, the death toll was less devastating than the living human wreckage. Men without limbs and without faces haunted the cities of Europe, surviving hideous wounds that in earlier wars would have killed them on the battlefield. Tens of thousands suffered from shell-shock, a debilitating psychological condition stemming from prolonged exposure to artillery bombardment. Civilians, particularly in Germany, had suffered terribly from malnutrition and exposure, factors that fed the enormous death tolls in the influenza pandemic. The result was a demographic void, an absence of healthy young men between the ages of 18 and 35 that would scar Europe for two generations.

The physical destruction of land and property was unprecedented. Trench warfare wrecked vast areas of northeastern France. Unexploded shells and munitions lay in fields across Europe, maiming curious children into the 1960s. Livestock had been blown to bits or butchered for food in colossal numbers; replacing them would take decades. The task of rebuilding was daunting.

Finally, the prospect of another such war altered the perspectives of traumatized Europeans. Nearly everyone agreed that such a catastrophe must never be allowed to happen again, but how could it be prevented? Could the nations of Europe bury their hatreds along with their dead and learn to work together for stability and peace? The answers to these questions were not immediately apparent, and in the silence created by their absence, the nightmare lived on.

### Reviewing Key Material

#### KEY CONCEPTS

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## ASK YOURSELF

1. How was the European balance of power transformed by the Diplomatic Revolution of 1890–1907?
2. Why wasn't the Crisis of July 1914 resolved peacefully, as so many earlier crises had been?
3. Why was the Great War so much more protracted than earlier wars in the nineteenth century? Why was it so much more deadly?
4. How did the strains of modernization and war weaken the Russian monarchy? Why did the Bolsheviks triumph in Russia in 1917?
5. Why did the Allies eventually win the Great War?

## GOING FURTHER

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## Key Dates and Developments

**1890–1907** The Diplomatic Revolution

**1894–1917** Reign of Nicholas II in Russia

**1904** Anglo-French Entente

**1904–1905** Russo-Japanese War

**1905** Russian Revolution of 1905

**1907** Anglo-Russian Entente

**1908–1914** European crises

**1914** The Great War begins  
 Deadlock develops on Western Front

**1915** Italy enters the War  
 Sinking of the *Lusitania*  
 Landing at Gallipoli

**1916** Battle of Verdun  
 The Somme Offensive  
 The Brusilov Offensive

**1917** Fall of the Russian monarchy (March)  
 United States enters the war  
 Mutinies in the French army  
 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (November)

**1918** Treaty of Brest-Litovsk  
 Great March Offensive  
 Global influenza pandemic  
 Armistice (November 11)