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47 See J. Remak, '1914– the Third Balkan war: origins reconsidered', in Koch, *Origins*.

48 See F. Fellner, 'Austria-Hungary', in K .M. Wilson (ed.), *1914: decisions for war*, London, 1995.

49 See Wilson (ed.), *1914*.

50 Lowe, *Great powers*, p. 235.

51 V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*, 1916.

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3 The origins of the Second World War: 1 War and the fragile peace, 1914–33

A full understanding of the origins of the Second World War requires a detailed examination of the evolution of international relations before 1933. During this period, the international system underwent enormous changes. One of the most important was the development of a popular mood against the horrors of war. In 1931, for example, a leading statesman told the League of Nations Assembly: 'There has scarcely been a period in the world's history when war seemed less likely than it does at present.'[1] Anti-war films, poetry, novels and plays enjoyed widespread popularity. In 1932, the major world powers converged on Geneva for the World Disarmament Conference. However, a close examination of the period from 1914 to 1933 reveals that the popular mood against war, which developed after 1918, did not alter the selfish desires of nation states.

The ordeal of war, 1914–18

Every country was affected in some way by the First World War, and its legacy hung like a shadow over international relations during the inter-war period. Over 60 million Europeans fought in the war, 7 million died, and 21 million were disabled or seriously wounded. Over 4 million women lost husbands, and 8 million children lost fathers. One estimate puts the total loss of property at £30,000 million; in France, 250,000 buildings were destroyed, 500,000 damaged, and 6,000 square miles of territory devastated. The total estimated cost of the war has been put at £260,000 million.

Early predictions of a swift victory for the Triple Entente allies (Britain, France and Russia) or for the Central powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) were overoptimistic. The German attack on France was halted at the Battle of Marne in September 1914. Soldiers then set about digging a line of trenches, separated by a barbed-wire-fenced 'no man's land', that stretched from the Swiss border to the English Channel. For most of the time, 'all was quiet on the Western Front', except for several attempts to break the deadlock, most notably at the battles of Verdun (1916), the Somme (1916) and Passchendaele (1917), which all produced enormous casualties but no decisive victory.

The high death toll placed strain on all the major powers. Events on the battlefield were directly felt by families on the 'home front'. The stalemate placed a high premium on the economy, and on the organisational abilities of

national governments. European arms expenditure rose from 4 per cent of national income in 1914 to a staggering 25 per cent in 1916. Many factories were completely turned over to munitions' production. To keep up morale, each government introduced strict censorship. To pay for the war, Britain and France raised taxes and borrowed money – especially from the USA. The German government escalated its national debt to staggering proportions. However, great strain was placed on those nations which lacked modern industry, most notably Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy. It was the modern industrial economies of Europe – Germany, Britain and France – which rose to the challenge of war much better than the old, pre-industrial societies.

As the war dragged on and the death toll mounted, each side looked for a new way in which to achieve a breakthrough. The Entente powers used a naval blockade in order to starve the Central powers of vital food and raw materials. Germany responded with submarine warfare to damage trade to Britain, France and Russia. However, the Allied naval blockade worked very slowly, and unrestricted submarine warfare proved counter-productive, as it inflamed neutral powers. New weapons were also tried out, including poison gas, airships and aircraft. The British also introduced the tank into warfare for the first time. Of all these weapons, only the tank made a significant impact, but only at the very end of the war.

A search for new allies was another method used to break the stalemate. The Entente attracted more powerful allies. Japan joined the war in August 1914 and seized German colonies in China and the Pacific. Italy opted for neutrality in 1914, but, after protracted negotiations and a promise of territorial gains, decided to join the Entente powers in 1915. Romania (1915) and Greece (1917) also joined the war on the side of the Entente powers. The allies who joined the Central powers, on the other hand, tended to be small, most notably Turkey (1914) and Bulgaria (1915).

The most significant new entrant to the war was the USA, which joined as an 'associate' of the Allies in April 1917, because Germany refused to end its unrestricted submarine attacks on US shipping. Yet even the entry of the USA made no immediate military impact. In 1917, the US army of 130,000 men was very small, but in the long run US finance and military support did prove vital. The entry of the USA was also important in helping the Allies to define clear war aims. Woodrow Wilson, the US president, insisted that the Allies were fighting for two clear aims – to uphold democratic principles, and to defend the right of small nations to govern themselves. On 8 January 1918, Wilson laid down his 'Fourteen Points', the clearest statement of Allied war aims. Among Wilson's major recommendations were demands for a future 'new world order', to be based on open diplomacy, freedom of trade, disarmament, and the rights of national self-determination for small states. A proposed 'league of nations' would provide a safeguard against the possibility of a future war.

By comparison, German war aims were fairly old-fashioned. The 'September Programme', drawn up by the German chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, in 1914, outlined four unashamedly expansionist objectives:

1 The 'weakening of France' to such an extent as to make its revival as a great power 'impossible for all time'.
2 To break Russian dominance in eastern Europe by bringing non-Russian areas under German domination. In 1917 these aims were supplemented by a desire to annex large areas of the Balkans and Poland.
3 To achieve German economic dominance in central Europe (*Mitteleuropa*) through the creation of a vast customs union.
4 To establish a large central African German empire.

The first opportunity for the Germans to put their war aims into effect came on the Eastern Front. The strain of fighting a 'total war' proved too much for the tsarist monarchy. At the beginning of 1917, 3.6 million Russian troops were dead or seriously wounded, and 2.1 million had been taken prisoner. These strains led to price rises, strikes in major cities and mutiny in the ranks of the army, and gave impetus to revolutionary groups, most notably the Bolsheviks led by V. I. Lenin. In February 1917, the tsarist regime was replaced by a parliamentary provisional government, dominated by moderate social democrats who decided to continue with the war. In July 1917, when a major Russian offensive failed, the popularity of the Provisional Government sank, and mutiny again spread through the army. In November 1917, the Bolshevik Party seized power and created the first Marxist-inspired revolutionary government of the Soviet Union, which immediately repudiated all foreign debts, outlawed private property, and opened peace negotiations with the Central powers at Brest-Litovsk. The terms imposed by Germany on Russia under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) were extraordinarily harsh: the new Bolshevik government was forced to concede virtually all its non-Russian territory, 64 per cent of pig-iron production, 40 per cent of coal and 24 per cent of steel. In May 1918, even Romania was able to take advantage of Soviet weakness and annexed Bessarabia.

On the Eastern Front, the Central powers had comprehensively won the war, with a little help from the Russian Revolution. It seemed that Germany was now well placed to make a decisive breakthrough on the Western Front. However, the strain of war was producing economic problems and political unrest in Germany. Food was in very short supply, strikes had broken out in key industries, and the Independent Social Democratic Party was formed, a revolutionary party which agitated for an end to the war. In July 1917, many Reichstag deputies also called for a negotiated peace. Bethmann Hollweg became the scapegoat for all this internal unrest, and was forced to resign. In January 1918, a wave of strikes broke out in Berlin, calling for an end to the war. The German army ignored this opposition at home, and went ahead with plans for the largest German offensive of the war.

In March 1918, Germany launched a make-or-break offensive on the Western Front. By July 1918, the German attack had ground to a halt and, under the overall command of Marshal Foch, the French commander, and refreshed by the arrival of US troops, the Allies mounted a major counter-attack which finally proved decisive. In September 1918, von Ludendorff and

von Hindenburg, the leading German generals, decided that the best course for Germany to follow was for a new democratic government, not the army, to negotiate the peace terms. This decision helped to feed a powerful myth that Germany's army was not defeated in battle, but was 'stabbed in the back' by socialists and democrats at home. The Kaiser abdicated and fled into exile in The Netherlands. A new German democratic government was formed. At exactly 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918, the armistice was signed, and the First World War ended with a comprehensive German defeat.[2]

The Paris Peace Settlement and its consequences

On 12 January 1919, at the Palace of Versailles, the first session of the Paris Peace Conference began. Leaders from 32 nations were present to discuss the terms to be imposed on the defeated Central powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey). All the major decisions of the conference were made by the 'Council of Four', represented by the respective Allied leaders – David Lloyd George (Britain), Woodrow Wilson (the USA), Georges Clemenceau (France) and Vittorio Orlando (Italy). Representatives of 28 other Allied nations were also present, but the Soviet Union, now in diplomatic isolation, was not invited. The two major aims of the peacemakers were to bring political order to European politics, and to prevent such a catastrophe ever happening again.[3]

Europe in ruins

A number of very difficult problems confronted the peacemakers. The old European balance of power was in ruins. Four great, monarchical empires – imperial Germany (ruled by the Hohenzollern dynasty), Austria-Hungary (Habsburg), Turkey (Ottoman) and Russia (Romanov) – lay shattered, and a bewildering range of diverse nationalities in central and eastern Europe demanded national self-determination. The Russian Revolution caused deep anxieties amongst the peacemakers concerning the possibility of a communist revolution spreading throughout Europe.

Deep economic problems, most notably a collapse of world trade, unstable currencies, unemployment, agricultural depression and mounting debts, also aroused concern. Britain, France and Italy owed enormous sums in war debts alone. The material damage – devastated towns, blown-up railways and roads, destroyed houses, farms and livestock, and the merchant ships at the bottom of the sea – was equally devastating. Only two nations – the USA and Japan – profited from the war economically: the USA had become the world's major financial creditor, and Japanese industry was rapidly growing. To make matters worse, Europe's export market had virtually collapsed, and inflation was rising everywhere. In Germany, prices were five times higher than in 1914, in Austria-Hungary they were 14,000 times higher, and in Russia 4,000 million times higher. Industrial production in Europe in 1919 was 30 per cent below the pre-war level.

Psychological wounds also required healing. Coping with war on this scale proved to be extremely difficult. A total of 13 million people were killed, severely wounded or permanently disabled. This led to two types of reaction: popular demands by many in the victorious countries to 'make Germany pay'; and in Germany movements of former soldiers calling for vengeance. The popular press in Britain screeched the headlines 'Squeeze the German lemon till the pips squeak' and 'Hang the Kaiser'. This atmosphere made a lenient settlement much less likely.

The aims of the Allies

The four major victorious powers came to Paris with no agreed agenda, apart from Wilson's famous 'Fourteen Points'. The US president believed that the outbreak of the war was due to three central causes: the secretive and selfish nature of European diplomacy; the tendency of larger powers to deny ethnic minorities self-determination; and autocratic regimes which ignored the wishes of the people. Remove these three impediments to peace, he believed, and a new order of international relations could be created, based on principles of open diplomacy, national self-determination and democracy. Such high moral principles seemed idealistic when compared to old-fashioned European diplomacy. However, Wilson proved less than completely faithful to his principles. There was very little democracy about the decision-making process at Versailles. The 'Council of Four' took all the decisions in closed sessions.

Clemenceau is often regarded as being the chief architect of a harsh settlement with regard to Germany. The French obsession with security at the conference was due to three factors: the long French frontier with Germany; the loss of Russia as a balance to German power in eastern Europe; and the alarming differences between France and Germany's population and industrial potential. In fact, Clemenceau believed that the gravest mistake that the peacemakers could make would be to make 'excessive demands' on Germany. The French desired two guarantees of future security against a possible German revival: first, the demilitarisation of the region sandwiched between the German–French border known as the Rhineland; second, severe restrictions on German military power. In addition, the French sought financial assistance to rebuild its shattered territory. However, the French only pushed for a high reparations settlement when their own demand for a cancellation of war debts was rejected by the US and Britain. 'Every effort must be made to be just towards the Germans', said Clemenceau, 'but when it comes to persuading them that we are just towards them, that is another matter.'[4]

Lloyd George was primarily concerned about achieving a peace settlement which both reconstructed Europe and ensured that any future British involvement in European affairs would be limited. The defeat of Germany had achieved all of Britain's war aims: the German naval threat was destroyed, the German military threat was apparently defeated, and the German colonial threat was over. This allowed Lloyd George to revert to the old idea of Britain

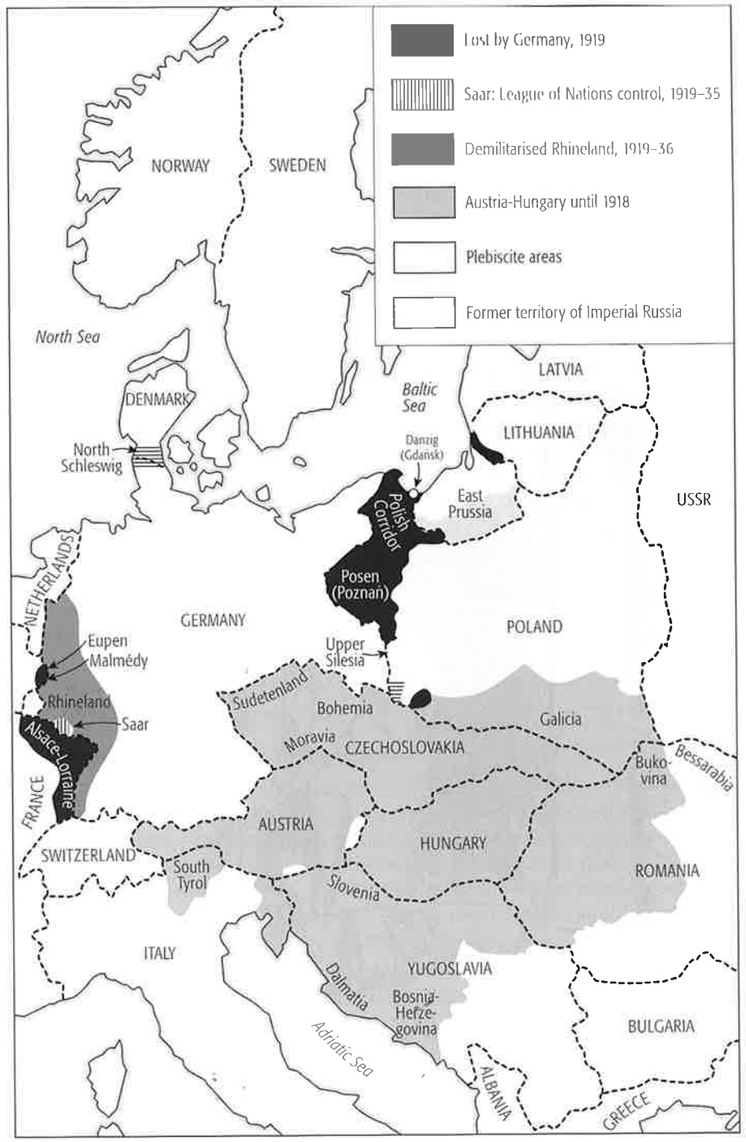
taking a middle position within the European balance of power. As France was now the dominant military power, this meant taking a conciliatory attitude towards Germany. As a result, the British delegation wanted military restrictions placed on Germany, some limited financial compensation, but not a totally punitive settlement. Many economic experts in the British delegation, including John Maynard Keynes, the brilliant young economist, saw German economic revival as vital for the recovery of Britain's European export trade, and argued against a harsh reparations settlement.

Orlando, the Italian premier, was largely ignored by the three major powers, and proved ineffective. The Italian delegation wanted to gain territory as compensation for entering the war on the Allied side in 1915 and suffering heavy losses. However, Orlando was unable to gain the port of Fiume, Italy's prime territorial objective. The row over Fiume resulted in the Italian delegation walking out of the conference, and led to the fall of Orlando's government. The denial of Fiume became a passionate nationalist issue in Italian politics. In 1919, Gabriele d'Annunzio, an Italian poet, formed a legion of nationalist agitators who seized the port and declared it a 'free city'. With problems at home and abroad, the Italian democratic government became deeply unpopular. It was eventually overthrown by Benito Mussolini, leader of the deeply nationalist Fascist Party, in 1922. During the inter-war period, fascism became a popular and despotic alternative to weak democratic governments in a state of deep economic and political crisis.

The Treaty of Versailles

Five separate treaties made up the final Paris Peace Settlement, but the Treaty of Versailles, signed by Germany in the historic Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles on 28 June 1919, was the most significant and controversial. German military power, the chief cause of the war, was the dominant issue at the peace conference. Germany had come very close to victory, and most of its industry had remained untouched. Unless the peacemakers took adequate precautions, there was every prospect of a German military revival. To prevent this, a number of arms limitations were implemented. The German army was limited to 100,000 men, conscription was abolished, and tanks and aircraft were prohibited. The navy was slimmed down to a coastal force of 36 vessels, and the building of battleships and submarines was outlawed. By these measures, the German army was reduced to the level of that of Greece, and the German navy was left on a par with Argentina's fleet.

Germany lost 13 per cent of its territory, including Alsace-Lorraine, Eupen, Malmédy, North Schleswig, West Prussia and Posen (Poznań). The loss of territory in eastern Europe was particularly bitterly criticised by the German government. Danzig (Gdańsk) became a 'free city', linked by a customs union to the new Polish state, which also gained Upper Silesia, a major industrial area. The Poles were additionally given a 'corridor' of land to the sea, which cut off East Prussia from the rest of Germany. In western Europe, the French got what they wanted: they gained Alsace-Lorraine; the Rhineland was made



Map 4. Europe after the Paris Peace Settlement, 1919.

a demilitarised zone; and the Saar, a key coal-mining region, was placed under the new League of Nations' control. In addition, all German colonies became mandates (territories under the trusteeship of the League of Nations), and the Allies insisted that the German government agree to uphold a democratic constitution and allow free elections in its own country.

The Germans were also required to pay substantial financial compensation. The final figure, decided by the Reparations Committee in 1921, was set at £6,600 million, and all the foreign currency and assets of Germany abroad were seized. Not surprisingly, the German government thought the figure too high. To justify reparations, the Allies inserted Article 231 into the treaty ('the war-guilt clause'), which obliged Germany to accept full responsibility for the

A cartoon produced in 1919 by Will Dyson for the *Daily Herald* shows the leaders of Britain, Italy, France and the USA leaving the Versailles peace conference. ('The Tiger' is Georges Clemenceau, the French Premier.) Is this cartoon a fair and accurate commentary on the Versailles treaty?

outbreak of the war. Every German greeted the terms of the Treaty of Versailles with varying degrees of anger, horror and disgust. The German leaders who signed the treaty were branded by nationalists as 'the criminals of 1919'.

It is easy to understand the harsh reaction in Germany to the Treaty of Versailles. Most Germans had little idea of the size of the German defeat, and believed that because Germany had requested an armistice, a lenient settlement would follow. As a result, the Treaty of Versailles came as an enormous shock to them. However, the loss of 13 per cent of German territory was much less harsh than France had suffered at the Congress of Vienna between 1814 and 1815, and was far less punitive than the division of Germany would be after the Second World War; it was certainly mild when compared to terms imposed on Russia by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. It is also possible to suggest that the reparations were affordable, if only the German government had really been prepared to reduce German citizens' living standards. In fact, the underlying economic and military potential of Germany remained favourable. Germany was surrounded by a number of weak powers in eastern Europe, and faced no strong military alliance. Its industry was modern, with a high level of skill in areas useful for armaments production. The German army was reduced, but its key strategists remained in office. Germany therefore appeared in an excellent position to pose a threat to Europe again.[5] However, the psychological impact of the Treaty of Versailles on Germany was a much more important factor in subsequent events than such objective assessments. Quite clearly, all Germans considered the treaty to be harsh and blamed it for the social, economic and political ills of the Weimar Republic, which replaced the empire. It is hard to deny that the Treaty of Versailles, whether lenient or otherwise, proved a very crucial rallying point for the revival of German nationalism, while the belief in its harshness also encouraged the British government to follow a policy of appeasement during the inter-war years.

The eastern European and Turkish settlements

The other major treaties decided at Paris, which dealt with the other four defeated Central powers – Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey – also aroused criticism. The settlement of the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire was the most complex problem that the peacemakers faced. The promise to ensure that principles of national self-determination were applied to the widely diverse ethnic and national groups in central and eastern Europe proved extremely difficult to implement, and few ethnic groups were ever satisfied with the settlement in eastern Europe. The Treaty of Trianon (1920) concerned Hungary, and was arguably even harsher than the Treaty of Versailles. Hungary lost 66 per cent of its territory and 40 per cent of the ethnically diverse population of its former empire. Most former Hungarian territory went to Romania, the new republic of Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. The Treaty of St Germain (1919) dealt with Austria. All the former territory of the Habsburg Empire outside Austria was shared between Czechoslovakia, which gained Bohemia and Moravia (including, the

Sudetenland, with a population of 3.5 million German speakers); Italy, which gained South Tyrol; Yugoslavia, which received Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia; Poland, which gained Galicia; and Romania, which was awarded Bukovina. The desire of Austria to unite with Germany was strictly forbidden. Under the Treaty of Neuilly (1919), Bulgaria lost territory to Yugoslavia and Greece.

To further the principle of national self-determination, the peacemakers created two completely new states: Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The historic state of Poland, carved out of German, Austrian and Russian territory, was also restored, but soon became a virtual military dictatorship. Yugoslavia, formed from Serbia, with the addition of territory from Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria, was bitterly divided between the dominant Serbs and their Croat rivals, and also lurched towards the right politically. Czechoslovakia, fashioned out of Austrian, Hungarian, Russian, Romanian and Polish territory, was the only fully functioning democracy in eastern Europe during the inter-war years. Even so, minority groups in Czechoslovakia claimed that each of the republic's coalition governments was so dominated by the Czechs, who made up 65 per cent of the population, as to render the principle of national self-determination virtually meaningless.[6]

The noble idea of national self-determination did not end traditional ethnic rivalries and disagreements. Eastern Europe was arguably more unstable and divided after the First World War than ever before, and a political vacuum now existed. The successor states of the former Habsburg Empire were weak, politically divided, and in a poor economic condition, with little industry, weak currencies, inefficient agriculture, high debts and low investment. Falling world agricultural prices during the inter-war years ensured that eastern Europe remained impoverished. The trading relations of each eastern European government were stormy, due to the continued use of protective tariffs.

What is more, parliamentary democracy never took root in eastern Europe. Hungary was deeply unstable, and developed its own brand of fascist dictatorship during the 1930s. Austria was a political battleground between right and left until parliamentary government gave way to right-wing dictatorship. Bulgaria and Romania also developed right-wing dictatorships, led by their respective kings. Even among the three new states of eastern Europe – Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland – democracy was not in the ascendancy.

The foreign relations of these eastern European states were also tense. The Hungarian government disliked Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia; the latter three powers responded by forming a close alliance in 1921 – known as the 'Little Entente'. Polish–Czech relations were also hostile, and Yugoslavia and Romania disliked each other intensely. To add to the tension, the Soviet Union was locked in bitter territorial disputes with Poland and Romania, and the German government refused to accept the settlement of its former territory in eastern Europe. The only country in Europe which actively supported the new successor states was France, which signed treaties of mutual assistance

with Poland (1921), Czechoslovakia (1924), Romania (1926) and Yugoslavia (1927). The French government hoped that this group of eastern European powers, all of which were committed to upholding the peace settlement in eastern Europe, might provide stability in the region. Yet these states, with their divided loyalties, and discontented ethnic minorities, were no compensation to France for the loss of the Franco-Russian alliance.[7]

The settlement of the territory of the former Ottoman Empire also produced tension and uncertainty. The Treaty of Sèvres (1920) divided Turkey into British, French and Italian spheres of influence, and placed all former Ottoman possessions under British and French administration. However, a Turkish nationalist group (the 'Young Turks') gained power and chose to fight rather than to accept the peace terms. The matter was only finally resolved, after further haggling and small-scale military engagements, by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), under which Turkey accepted its loss of colonies in return for a guarantee of territorial integrity.

The non-European settlement

The way in which the peacemakers dealt with the settlement of non-European problems left a great deal to be desired. A demand by Japan to have a clause proclaiming a commitment to 'racial equality' placed in the covenant of the League of Nations was rejected. National groups who demanded the right to self-determination in the Middle East, Africa and India were politely informed that the principle would not apply to them. In fact, imperial rule was actually expanded at the Paris Peace Conference. All former Turkish and German colonies were termed 'mandated territories' and placed under the supervision of the victorious powers. The British Empire assumed control of the former Ottoman territories of Palestine, Iraq and Transjordan, as well as the former German African colonies of Togoland and the Cameroons. The French gained control over Syria and Libya, and were allowed access to oil in Mosul. The fig leaf of a League of Nations mandate hid old-fashioned imperial gains; British and French officials claimed that they were marching the mandated territories towards independence, but nationalist groups doubted if such a day would ever arrive.

The disposal of the former German colonies in the Asian–Pacific region served only to inflame relations between China and Japan still further. China had entered the war on the side of the Allies in 1917, and as a result expected to regain control of former German colonies on the principle of national self-determination. However, Japan, an ally of Britain since 1902, had seized these areas in 1914, and now expected to retain them. The peacemakers decided that Japan would keep its trading rights in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, but would not gain political control of these areas. It was also decided that Japan should supervise the administration of Shantung, provided that it promised to return the area to China at a future date. This settlement satisfied neither Japan nor China, and laid the basis for a long-running and bitter dispute between the two nations, which eventually led to full-scale war in 1937.

The League of Nations and the limits of international co-operation, 1919–33

As well as working out a post-war settlement, the Paris Peace Conference also gave birth to the League of Nations, which was designed to create a completely new framework of international relations. The league had an agreed constitution, outlined in its covenant, which pledged to 'respect and preserve against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the league', and to 'take action against any member regarded as an aggressor' through economic sanctions, and if these failed, through 'collective military action'. The organisation consisted of an assembly, which met annually; a council, which had regular meetings and four permanent seats (held by Britain, Italy, France, Japan), raised to five with the addition of Germany in 1926, and four temporary seats, elected by the assembly, raised to six in 1926, and to nine in 1929. It was in the council that the real power lay, but as each member had a veto, there was not much real power to exercise. The day-to-day administration of the league was carried out by the secretariat. The Permanent Court of International Justice was also established at The Hague, to offer 'advisory opinions' on questions referred to it by the assembly or the council.

The League of Nations was a loose and flexible organisation, whose members pledged to uphold an agreed set of principles set out in the covenant. It faced a number of problems in establishing its authority. Defeated powers were denied entry until they proved a willingness to abide by the treaties imposed upon them. The original members were the 32 Allied powers and 12 additional neutral states. 'A victors' club' was how the league was viewed in Germany; 'a capitalist club' was how the Soviet Union, also denied entry, described the new organisation. But the biggest blow of all to the early credibility of the league was the decision of the US Senate, driven by internal political motivations, to block US entry. This deprived the league of both one of its key architects, and of the most powerful non-European power. In reality, the league was largely a European club, dominated by the victorious powers. Very few European diplomats thought that the League of Nations would replace the self-interests of each nation state.

During the 1920s, the league enjoyed mixed success as an effective peacekeeper. On the one hand, a number of minor disputes were settled by the league, most notably the withdrawal of Yugoslavian troops from Albania, and the resolution of a territorial dispute over the Åland Islands between Finland and Sweden. Successful arbitration was achieved in disputes between Germany and Poland over Upper Silesia; between Britain and Turkey over the administration of oilfields in Mosul; and between Greece and Bulgaria over disputed territory in the Balkans. On the other hand, the league could not prevent Poland from annexing Vilna in 1922, Italy from occupying Corfu in 1923, or stop the war between Bolivia and Paraguay in the early 1930s. An even more worrying development was its complete failure to implement the

Geneva Protocol, which had been designed to commit all league members to engagement in collective military action in the event of acts of unprovoked aggression. France was a keen supporter of the idea, but it was vetoed by Austen Chamberlain, the British foreign secretary, in March 1925. The British believed that the Geneva Protocol would turn the league into a 'policeman of the world', and would involve Britain in all manner of minor and major disputes.

However, the League of Nations did promote a greater level of international co-operation than had ever existed before. This climate encouraged the signing by Britain, Japan, France and the USA of the Washington Naval Agreement in 1922, which agreed to limits on naval shipbuilding, and the 1930 London Naval Agreement, signed by Britain, Japan, Italy and the USA, which set limits on submarines and provided for the scrapping of some warships. This same spirit encouraged the signing by 15 major powers in August 1928 of the Kellogg–Briand Pact, which pledged all its signatories to reject 'war as an instrument of national policy', and promised to settle disputes between nations by 'pacific means'. By 1933, 60 nations had made this pledge, very much in the spirit of the covenant of the League of Nations.

The World Disarmament Conference

The biggest disappointment of the league during this period was its total failure to achieve a reduction in armaments on land. The World Disarmament Conference, organised by the league, opened in 1932, and was attended by 61 nations and five non-members, including the USA and the Soviet Union. The chief aim was to set agreed limits on army, air-force and naval weapons. A French idea for a League of Nations army was rejected. A second proposal by the British government to place limits on 'offensive' weapons, including tanks, bomber aircraft, submarines, poison gas and chemical weapons, also floundered. More alarmingly, the German and Soviet delegations refused to accept a resolution passed by 41 votes to prohibit air attacks, the use of tanks and chemical weapons. The German delegation constantly argued for 'equality of rights', and demanded either that the other powers disarm to the German level imposed at Versailles, or that they should allow Germany to rearm to the level of the other major powers. Frustrated, in 1932 the German delegation walked out of the conference and agreed only to return if Germany was given equal treatment.[8] In October 1933, Germany would also leave the League of Nations.

The 'German problem' during the 1920s

The political climate of the Weimar Republic

The dominant issue during the 1920s remained the 'German problem'. Every European statesman agreed that peace could only really be secured if Germany could be reconciled to accepting the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, Germany, though still potentially a great power, emerged from the

First World War in a deeply unstable condition. The Weimar Republic (named after the town where its new constitution was agreed), was born in a climate of defeat, national humiliation, chaos, revolution and disorder. Its constitution contained deep flaws: Article 48 gave the president the power to rule without parliamentary support in an emergency; the voting system was organised on the basis of proportional representation, which both encouraged the growth of unstable coalition governments, and allowed all manner of cranks a voice in the Reichstag. Most coalitions depended on the Social Democratic Party (SPD), representing moderate labour interests; the Catholic Centre Party (*Zentrum*), a religious-interest party; and the *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP), the representative of industry. Many political parties opposed democracy, including the Communist Party (KPD) and the Independent Social Democrats (USPD), both of whom agitated for a Marxist revolution. On the extreme right were a plethora of nationalist and ultra-right-wing groups, which desired an overthrow of the republic and its replacement by a military dictatorship.[9]

Political instability, with no party ever commanding an overall majority in the Reichstag, was a feature of the precarious political life of the new republic. The infant republic's survival depended greatly on the loyalty of the army, which prevented several attempts to overthrow the government in its early years, including the left-wing Spartacist revolt in 1919 and the Kapp Putsch, led by nationalists in the army in 1920. Out on the mean streets of Weimar Germany, every night was all right for fighting. Left- and right-wing paramilitary groups engaged in pitched street battles, often resulting in many deaths and hundreds injured. This added to the prevailing feeling of instability and gloom.

The 'great inflation' and reparations

In such deeply unstable conditions, any economic upheaval was bound to create problems. Severe financial crises, which most Germans blamed on Allied demands for reparations, were another fact of life during the Weimar years. In recent times, historians have shown that the immediate post-war economic crisis in Germany was largely the result of extensive government borrowing during the war, undertaken on the assumption that Germany would win the war, and that its enemies would pay off its loans. From 1918 to 1923 the German mark went into free fall, and inflation rose into the stratosphere. In 1920, the mark was worth 10 per cent of its 1914 value; by 1922, a mere 1 per cent; and in January 1923, one pre-1914 gold mark would have been worth 2,500 paper marks. It is difficult to ignore the possibility that the German government quite deliberately engineered the 'great inflation', or, at the very least, was not unhappy with its consequences. After all, the eventual collapse of the mark solved the problem of Germany's war and industrial debts, and gave the German government a convincing reason not to pay reparations. The image of ordinary Germans taking wheelbarrows full of money along to their local shop to buy a loaf of bread provoked sympathy around the world. For ordinary Germans, with savings and pensions, however, the 'great inflation'

was a disaster which heated a simmering cauldron of discontent among the normally stolid German middle classes (*Mittelstand*).

The German government was able to blame the 'great inflation' on the demand by the Allies for reparations, which, in 1921, were finally set at the seemingly astronomical figure of £6,600 million. Germany's battle over the payment of reparations was undoubtedly the most dominant issue of international affairs during the 1920s.[10] Germans saw the reparations bill as a symbol of everything they hated about the Versailles Treaty, while the French saw reparations as being vital to their own economic recovery; the British government increasingly adopted a central position. The hard approach of France, and the soft approach of Britain, towards the German problem put great strain on Anglo-French relations during the early 1920s.

The German government was able to exploit these Anglo-French divisions in order to win concessions. For example, as inflation rose in Germany from 1921 onwards, the British urged France to agree to a temporary postponement of reparations. However, Raymond Poincaré, who became French prime minister in January 1922, ignored this advice, and, when Germany defaulted on payments in November 1922, he decided to occupy the Ruhr (a major German industrial region) and Belgium, which French troops did in January 1923. This action annoyed the British government, which refused to support it; in response to the occupation of the Ruhr, the German government supported a programme of 'passive resistance'. The occupation of the Ruhr was a major political blunder by Poincaré, who was replaced as prime minister by Edouard Herriot, who adopted a more conciliatory line. The whole episode showed that France alone, acting without British support, could never hope to force Germany to pay reparations. Equally, the German government realised that a policy of continual non-payment was unlikely to produce any meaningful concessions. In these circumstances, the USA was called upon to act as a mediator between Germany and France over the reparations problem. In 1924, an Allied committee, chaired by Charles G. Dawes and Owen D. Young, two leading American bankers, examined Germany's ability to pay reparations, and produced a set of measures designed to aid the German economic recovery. This new atmosphere resulted in the end of the French occupation of the Ruhr. A new German mark, guaranteed by German land and industry, ended the era of hyperinflation, and stimulated recovery.

The Dawes Plan and the Treaty of Locarno

Greatly influenced by Gustav Stresemann, German chancellor between 1923 and 1924 and foreign secretary between 1924 and 1929, the German government accepted that the best way in which to revise the Versailles Treaty during a period of German military weakness was to co-operate with the Allies.[11] This conciliatory approach quickly produced results. In April 1924, the Dawes Committee submitted its proposals, which were agreed at the London Reparations Conference of July–August 1924. Under the Dawes Plan, Germany agreed to make regular annual payments in return for a substantial loan raised

in the USA, and the French promised never again to use force to gain payment. The greatest symbol of Stresemann's conciliatory approach during the mid-1920s was the Treaty of Locarno. Under this agreement, signed in 1925 by Britain, France, Germany and Italy, Germany agreed to accept the terms regarding its western frontiers that had been decided at Versailles, including the permanent demilitarisation of the Rhineland. In return, Germany won an immediate end to the Allied military occupation of the Rhineland city of Cologne, a promise of an early end to the occupation of the Rhineland (this took place in 1930), and the end of Allied inspection of the German military. Germany also agreed to join the League of Nations. In recognition of their efforts to make peace, Stresemann, Briand (the French foreign minister) and Austen Chamberlain were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

It seemed that the Treaty of Locarno had laid the basis for a real and lasting solution to the 'German problem'. Germany seemed to be on a path of peace and reconciliation with the rest of Europe. However, this was perhaps an overoptimistic assessment. The German government may have accepted Germany's western frontiers, but it offered no similar commitments to respect its eastern frontiers. In fact, Stresemann and leading officials of the German foreign office saw Locarno, along with the Dawes Plan, as being key stages on the road to a complete revision of the Treaty of Versailles. The Dawes Plan gave Germany important access to US loans with which to pay reparations, and a pool of new investment for German industry. Germany received far more in US loans from 1924 to 1929 than it ever paid in reparations. In 1929, the Young Plan revised the German reparations bill to a quarter of its original total.

It is also important to assess the underlying aims of Stresemann's conciliatory approach to foreign policy during the late 1920s. Stresemann privately believed that the great tasks of future German policy were threefold: to end reparations completely; to liberate Germany from all occupying forces; and in future to gain the 'readjustment of our eastern frontiers'.[12] This would involve the *Anschluss* (the union of Germany and Austria), the recovery of Danzig, the 'Polish Corridor' (the land which divided Germany and East Prussia), and a correction of the frontier of Upper Silesia. Thus, it would appear that Stresemann's foreign policy was double-edged – he seemed to be a peacemaker and a 'good European' in public, but in private he was a German nationalist who cherished the long-term objectives of recovering German territory in eastern Europe. This is not to suggest that Stresemann was a 'Nazi in a pin-striped suit', but it does illustrate how deeply the desire for a wholesale revision of the Treaty of Versailles ran through all sections of German society. On the other hand, Stresemann can be viewed as wanting international respectability for Germany, and its restoration to equal status amongst the great powers, rather than as setting in motion plans for vast territorial expansion along the lines of imperial Germany.

The threat to German democracy: Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party

The period from 1924 to 1929 is often portrayed as the 'golden age' of the Weimar Republic. German democracy seemed secure, the economy was showing promising signs of recovery, and reparations were no longer causing Franco-German antagonism. However, trouble was bubbling under the surface: the German economic recovery was dependent on US loans; bitterness between the political left and right continued; and many members of the middle class still harboured deep anger over the economic losses that they had suffered during the 'great inflation'. Another worrying sign for the future political stability of the Weimar Republic was the election of Paul von Hindenburg, a hero of Kaiser Wilhelm's army, as president in 1925.[13] Democracy in Germany was now dependent on an unstable coalition between the SPD, the Centre Party and the DVP, and on an ageing and reactionary president who had little love for democracy.

An even bigger potential danger to Weimar democracy was also lurking in the undergrowth. His name was Adolf Hitler, and his personality and objectives are so crucial in understanding the origins of the Second World War that they must be examined in some detail.[14] Hitler was born on 20 April 1889 in Braunau-am-Inn, Austria, near the Austrian–German border. His father was a relatively affluent customs official, his mother a 'traditional housewife'. The family soon moved to Linz, where the young Adolf attended private, fee-paying schools. After the death of both his parents, and an inglorious school career, Hitler moved to Vienna in 1907, where he hoped to become 'a great artist' and tried unsuccessfully to gain entry to the prestigious Academy of Arts. Contrary to popular myth, Hitler was never really down-and-out in Vienna, but he was certainly going nowhere. He was unemployed – by choice – and lived for nearly three years on a substantial legacy, left to him in his mother's will, until it ran out. He visited the opera regularly, and mostly hung out in local cafés, eating chocolate cake, drinking endless cups of coffee, and voicing his exceedingly large number of prejudices and hates to anyone who would listen. From 1910 to 1913 he lived in a hostel for the homeless and, by 1912, he was earning some money selling his drawings and paintings. In 1913, Hitler fled across the border into Germany to avoid being conscripted into the Austrian army. When the First World War began, Hitler was in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, where he volunteered to join the German army. Hitler had found his two great loves – the army and war. He served with distinction, being twice awarded the Iron Cross for bravery, and being promoted to the rank of lance corporal. For most of the time, he was a motorcycle messenger between the Western Front and the headquarters of the German army.

On the day that news came of the German defeat, Hitler was in hospital, recovering from a poison-gas attack. He was utterly devastated and could not believe it. In July 1919, when Hitler heard the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, he decided to enter politics. His dream was to build a 'new Germany' under his own leadership, to overturn the Treaty of Versailles, and to establish Germany

as the major European power. In 1919, Hitler joined the German Workers' Party (DAP), a right-wing nationalist party full of former soldiers drifting aimlessly under the leadership of Anton Drexler, a Munich locksmith. However, it was soon clear that Hitler had the gift of the gab and, among this bunch of cranks and misfits, definite leadership qualities. In February 1920, the DAP became the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, or Nazi Party), and Hitler soon emerged as its leading figure.

The early programme of the NSDAP called for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles, and aimed to replace democracy in Germany with a military dictatorship. To this end, Hitler organised a coup designed to take control of Bavaria, but the now famous Munich 'Beer Hall' Putsch of November 1923 was a bungled failure, foiled by the loyalty of the German army and the local police force to the authorities. Hitler was jailed for five years on a charge of high treason, but served only thirteen months in the comfortable surroundings of Landsberg prison. At this point, his career seemed to be over. However, Hitler used his time in prison to define a new strategy for the Nazi Party. This involved setting out his ideas in a book, which he hoped would become a bible for his followers, and making plans to organise the Nazi Party nationally, which would seek power in democratic elections and then destroy democracy legally from within.[15]

The book that Hitler started to write in Landsberg prison was *Mein Kampf* ('My struggle'), and despite being badly written and extremely difficult and unpleasant to read, it proved enormously significant in light of the subsequent course of events. For in *Mein Kampf* Hitler lays out four key foreign-policy aims, which were later carried out when he came to power.

1 The destruction of the Treaty of Versailles. This would allow Germany to rearm and to recover lost territory.
2 To gain territory ('living space' or *Lebensraum*) for Germany in eastern Europe. This would involve a war in order to defeat Soviet Bolshevism.
3 To include all German-speaking people in his proposed 'Third Reich', especially those living in Austria, the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia, and Danzig.
4 To create a 'racially pure' German state that would be the most dominant power in Europe.

The two really new dimensions of Hitler's policy were a desire to create a 'racially pure' German people, and a virulent obsession with the Jews. However, few German people at the time realised that these twin aims would eventually lead to the extermination of European Jews in death camps.

In fact, few Germans thought that Hitler would ever be given the opportunity to gain power. From 1925 to 1929 he was a fairly well-known figure, whose party had made no significant breakthrough in democratic elections. In the German election of 1928, for example, the NSDAP gained only 2 per cent of the popular vote. Nazi support was heavily concentrated in small Protestant and rural towns in north-western Germany.[16] It required something quite spectacular to transform the fortunes of the Nazi Party.

The Great Depression and its consequences

The Wall Street Crash

In October 1929, a deeply significant event was to shatter the volatile political and economic structure of Weimar democracy. The Wall Street stock market in the USA, on which all German hopes of economic recovery were pinned, suddenly collapsed. The most severe and far-reaching world economic depression of the whole of the twentieth century had begun. The causes and consequences of the 'Great Depression' are still the subject of controversy.[17] The First World War greatly disrupted the international economy and created many unresolved economic problems, including instability in world currency, high government debts, a breakdown of trade, a severe lack of investment capital, as well as unemployment and high inflation. Recovery in the mid-1920s only papered over these economic cracks. The real problem for the world economy was its dependence on the stability of the US economy. Economic uncertainty in Europe encouraged large amounts of investment capital to move into US stocks and shares, which consequently became overvalued. A stock-market boom, out of all proportion to the actual strength of US industry, gathered pace during what Americans called the 'Roaring Twenties', and eventually led to an economic collapse.

The first consequence of the US stock-market crash was the ending of US loans to Europe, which had been crucial for its financial stability. During the Depression, nations turned away from international co-operation and became obsessed with domestic problems. In the USA, unemployment reached 13 million, and President Roosevelt introduced the 'New Deal' programme of legislation, designed to tackle poverty. In Britain, unemployment rose so high that it triggered a financial crisis and the formation of the so-called 'National Government', which abandoned free trade and introduced protectionism for the first time. However, the most damaging economic and political effects of the Depression were felt in Japan, and especially in Germany.

The Manchurian Crisis

The Depression hit the Japanese economy very hard. Unemployment rose, farm prices crashed, and exports shrank. The slump was blamed on the pro-Western policies of the Japanese democratic governments during the 1920s. In 1930, at the height of the Depression, a political crisis gripped Japan, which resulted in the growth of the influence of military factions and the collapse of parliamentary democracy. The Japanese army became a state within a state, which the civilian government had difficulty controlling. The pro-Western Japanese democratic leaders who had influenced foreign policy during the 1920s were replaced – or in many cases assassinated – by anti-Western factions, who supported a rapid growth in military spending.

In September 1931, the Japanese army occupied Manchuria, a province of China. The Manchurian Crisis was the culmination of a long-standing territorial dispute between China and Japan over the region, but its timing was

influenced by the Depression. Political instability in China threatened Japanese trading interests in the region and, when coupled with the Depression, these two factors prompted the army to opt for formal Japanese rule of Manchuria. On 18 September 1931, an explosion on the railway line of the South Manchurian Railway, near Mukden, took place. This was instigated by Japanese army officers, but was blamed on Chinese nationalists, and provided an ideal excuse for Japan to justify its occupation of Manchuria.

China called on the League of Nations for help, but the league did not consider imposing either economic or military sanctions on Japan. The British government, which had substantial imperial interests in the region, was too preoccupied with its own economic problems to press for military action. The US government offered mild words of protest, but took no action. It was actually the Japanese government which requested the League of Nations to examine the facts of the case. A League of Nations commission, headed by Lord Lytton, concluded that Japanese claims to the region were convincing, but rebuked Japan for using force in support of them. Japan ignored this mild scolding, stayed in Manchuria, and left the League of Nations in 1933.[18] The failure of the League of Nations to act effectively during the Manchurian Crisis is often viewed as the beginning of the slide towards international anarchy during the 1930s, but there is little contemporary evidence to confirm this view. The Manchurian Crisis was greeted with a great deal of indifference, and cannot be convincingly linked to later events in Europe, even though the Sino-Japanese dispute over Manchuria remained a key source of instability in the Asian-Pacific region.

Hitler's rise to power

It is generally agreed that the most acute effects of the Great Depression were felt in Germany. From 1925 to 1929, Germany paid £5,000 million in reparations, but received £9,000 million in US loans. As soon as these loans dried up, the German economy collapsed. Unemployment stood at 1.4 million in 1928, but had soared to 6 million by 1932. Industrial production fell by 42 per cent, and agricultural prices collapsed. The political effects were equally catastrophic: the fragile centre coalition of the SDP, DVP and the Centre Party fell from power in March 1930. From March 1930 until January 1933, when Hitler came to power, Germany was in effect under a veiled dictatorship, with each chancellor ruling with the consent of President von Hindenburg, under Article 48 of the constitution, and with no majority in the Reichstag.

In March 1930, von Hindenburg appointed Heinrich Brüning, a member of the Centre Party, chancellor of a so-called 'national' government, which introduced a bleak set of deflationary policies, including tax increases, pay reductions, redundancies, and harsh public-expenditure cuts. This pushed the Germany economy further into decline, and increased unemployment. In a desperate attempt to win his regime some popular legitimacy, Brüning called a general election in September 1930. At the election, Hitler's Nazi Party benefited from a remarkable surge of popular support, increasing its seats in

the Reichstag from 12 to 107, raising its votes from 810,000 to 6.5 million, and emerging as the second-largest party, behind the SPD.

The German election of 1930 provided Hitler with an ideal opportunity to play on the anxiety of German voters in the midst of the Depression. Hitler regarded the political and economic chaos of Weimar Germany with the 'greatest glee', and believed that 'the eyes of the German people have been finally opened to the unimaginable lies, trickeries and deceits of the Marxist traitors of the nation'. On 13 October 1930, the 107 Nazi deputies (members of the Reichstag), dressed in their brown shirts, entered the Reichstag. Toni Sender, a socialist member, later described what he saw that day: 'I looked at their faces carefully. The more I studied them, the more I was terrified by what I saw: so many with the faces of criminals and degenerates. What a degradation to sit in the same place with such a gang.'[19]

The election had been a total failure for Brüning, who went on ruling by emergency decree, and searched for a foreign-policy success with which to divert the public's attention from the worsening state of the German economy. In March 1931, Brüning proposed an 'economic *Anschluss*' with Austria, through the formation of a customs union. The French government protested, and the International Court of International Justice at The Hague declared the proposal illegal. French bankers withdrew money from the Austrian Credit Anstalt Bank, which collapsed, followed by two major German banks. Under such financial pressure, the humiliated Brüning was forced to withdraw his proposal. Brüning's next high-handed move in foreign affairs was unilaterally to stop German reparations payments in 1932, but this move was accepted by the Allies (who finally ended the programme of reparations at Lausanne in 1932).

Throughout 1932, Germany was gripped by the fear of either a Nazi or a communist dictatorship, or a return to high inflation. Speculation was rife in the German press that Hitler would shortly come to power. Many doubted this would happen: for example, the communist Ernst Thälmann, the KPD leader, told a friend on the day before Hitler actually came to power: 'The bourgeoisie won't let Hitler anywhere near power. Let's go to Lichtenberg and play skittles.'[20] On 13 March 1932, Hitler challenged von Hindenburg in the presidential election. In order to obstruct Hitler's campaign, Brüning banned his paramilitary storm-troopers (the SA), while the SPD, the Centre Party and liberals urged voters to support von Hindenburg. To everyone's relief, von Hindenburg defeated Hitler by 19 to 13 million votes. Even so, the election established Hitler as the second most popular leader in Germany, and sealed the fate of Brüning, whose ban of the SA was opposed by the army. It now seemed that either a military dictatorship, led by an army figure, or a 'Hitler cabinet' were the only two options left to von Hindenburg. He finally decided to appoint the relatively unknown Franz von Papen, a wealthy Catholic aristocrat from Prussia, chancellor of a 'cabinet of barons' with clear authoritarian policies. Von Papen immediately declared a state of emergency, suspended the Prussian parliament (the last stronghold of the SPD), lifted the ban on Hitler's SA, and called a national election.

In the election of 31 July 1932, the Nazis enjoyed another sharp surge of support. They won 230 seats and 37.4 per cent of the popular vote. This made the Nazi Party the largest parliamentary group ever to sit in the Reichstag. The pressure was now mounting on von Hindenburg to invite Hitler to form a government by presidential decree. In 1932, the Nazi Party had united the conservative and nationalist right-wing factions of German politics, and dominated rural and small-town Germany, while also making gains in certain affluent, middle-class districts. On the whole, the increase in support for Hitler from 1930 to 1932 came from groups which had been hit by the Depression – white-collar workers, small shopkeepers, old-age pensioners, self-employed workers, civil servants, teachers, skilled artisans working in small businesses, and young university students. Despite all the subsequent research on the subject, it is probably still correct to view the rise of Nazism as a revolt of the German middle class who had been hit by the Depression.

Although the von Papen regime had no majority in the Reichstag, it remained in power, primarily because von Hindenburg wanted to exhaust all the other right-wing possibilities before turning to Hitler. After the election, von Papen said that 'the system of parliamentary democracy has broken down and is incapable of resurrection'.[21] He openly acted like a 'Nazi in a pin-striped suit' by raising tariffs on British goods by 300 per cent; informing the World Disarmament Conference of Germany's intention to rearm; demanding the return of German colonies and the Saar; and staging a military parade of 180,000 war veterans in a clear throwback to Germany's imperial days. All this did nothing to improve his precarious political position. In October 1932, a vote of no confidence in his government in the Reichstag was passed by 512 votes to 42.

This triggered yet another election on 6 November 1932, in which Nazi support surprisingly dropped from 230 to 196 seats, and fell by 2 million votes. The election revealed that Nazi support was on the wane, but it also showed that popular support for von Papen was non-existent, and he was forced to resign. Rumours now spread about what type of regime would replace von Papen's. It was clear that von Hindenburg wanted some sort of right-wing, authoritarian regime, but no one was quite sure if this meant a return of the Kaiser, now in exile, an army dictatorship, or a right-wing coalition led by Hitler. Von Hindenburg finally decided on an army dictatorship led by General von Schleicher, who became chancellor in December 1932, but he lasted a mere 57 days. On 30 January 1933, von Hindenburg abruptly dismissed him, and finally decided to appoint Hitler chancellor in a right-wing coalition government which contained only three Nazis. Von Hindenburg was persuaded by von Papen to give Hitler the post of German chancellor in the hope that this might restrain the Nazi leader. However, the appointment of Hitler as German chancellor abruptly ended all the illusions that the 'German problem' had been solved.

Document case study

The Paris Peace Settlement

3.1 Clemenceau outlines the French position towards Germany at the Paris Peace Conference

Report of the 'Council of Four' meeting, 27 March 1919

I said yesterday that I entirely agreed with Mr David Lloyd George and President Wilson on how Germany should be treated; we cannot take unfair advantage of our victory; we must deal tolerably with peoples for fear of provoking a surge of national feeling . . . Mr Lloyd George has excessive fears of possible German resistance and refusal to sign the treaty . . . They will dispute on every point, they will threaten to refuse to sign . . . they will contest or refuse everything that can be refused . . . President Wilson warns us against giving the Germans a sense of injustice. Agreed, but what we regard as just here in this room will not necessarily be accepted as such by the Germans . . . Shortly before he died Napoleon said: 'Nothing permanent is founded on force.' I am not so sure; a glance at the great nations of Europe is enough to give one pause. What is true, is that force cannot establish anything unless it is in the service of justice. Every effort must be made to be just towards the Germans; but when it comes to persuading them that we are just to them, that is another matter. We can, I believe, save the world from German aggression; but the German spirit is not going to change so fast.

Source: A. Adamthwaite, *The lost peace: international relations in Europe, 1918–39*, London, 1980, pp. 24–27

3.2 Hitler's view of the Versailles Treaty

Written in Mein Kampf

When in the year 1919 the German people was burdened with the peace treaty, we should have been justified in hoping that precisely through this instrument of boundless repression the cry for German freedom would have been immensely promoted. Peace treaties whose demands are a scourge to nations not seldom strike the first roll of drums for the uprising to come . . . We had to form a front against this treaty and engrave ourselves forever in the minds of men as an enemy of this treaty, so that later, when the harsh reality of this treacherous frippery would be revealed in its naked hate, the recollection of our attitude at that time would win us confidence.

Source: A. Hitler, 'The diktat of Versailles', in I. Lederer (ed.), *The Versailles settlement: was it foredoomed to failure? The truth about the treaty*, London, 1960, pp. 86–90

3.3 The economic consequences of the peace: a British view

John Maynard Keynes' view

The treaty is no treaty, because it is now generally recognised that in truth it settles nothing . . . If you pledge a man to perform the impossible, you are no nearer a decision as to what in fact he has to do: for his pledge is, necessarily a dead letter. The reparations clauses of this treaty are its most important economic feature. But being composed of foolish, idle words, having no relation to real facts, they are without

practical effect, and they leave the prospects of the future undetermined . . . This treaty ignores the economic solidarity of Europe, and by aiming at the economic life of Germany it threatens the health and prosperity of the Allies themselves . . . by making demands the execution of which is in the literal sense impossible, it stultifies itself and leaves Europe more unsettled than it found it.

Source: J. M. Keynes, *The economic consequences of the peace*, London, 1920

3.4 Reparations against Germany: an American view

The opinion of an American delegate at the Paris Peace Conference

The magnitude of the reparations demanded of Germany under the treaty . . . placed great strain upon credit. Largely on this account there was a widespread collapse of the entire pre-war system of goods and services and investments. The pre-war gold system has collapsed and a large part of the world functions in terms of closed international dealings restricted to barter . . . The reparations clauses contributed largely toward a German psychology which has changed the political complexion of much of the world.

Source: J. F. Dulles, 'Foreword', in P. Burnett, *Reparations at the Paris Peace Conference*, New York, 1940

3.5 The Paris Peace Settlement: a communist view

From a contemporary communist pamphlet

The imperialist war of 1914 demonstrated with the greatest clarity to all enslaved nations and oppressed classes of the entire world the falseness of bourgeois-democratic phraseology. Both sides used the phrases of national liberation and the right of national self-determination to make good their case, but the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest on one side, and the treaties of Versailles and St Germain on the other, showed that the victorious bourgeoisie quite ruthlessly determine 'national' frontiers in accordance with their economic interests . . . The so-called League of Nations is nothing but the insurance contract by which the victors of war mutually guarantee each other's spoils . . . The League of Nations and the entire post-war policy of the imperialist states discloses this truth even more sharply and clearly, everywhere intensifying the struggle of the proletariat of the advanced countries and of the labouring classes in the colonies, accelerating the destruction of petty-bourgeois national illusions about the possibility of peaceful coexistence and of the equality of nations under capitalism.

Source: A. Adamthwaite, *The lost peace: international relations in Europe, 1918–39*, London, 1980, pp. 39–41

3.6 The Paris Peace Settlement: a British assessment

The view of a British delegate at the Paris Peace Conference

The historian, with every justification, will come to the conclusion that we were very stupid men. I think we were . . . We came to Paris confident that the new world order was about to be established; we left it convinced the new order had fouled the old . . . We arrived determined that a peace of justice and wisdom should be negotiated: we left it conscious that the treaties imposed were neither just nor wise . . . It is impossible to

read German criticism without deriving the impression that the Paris Peace Conference was guilty of disguising an imperialist peace under the surface of Wilsonism . . . Hypocrisy was the predominant and inescapable result . . . We had accepted a system for others which, when it came to practice, we should refuse to apply to ourselves.

Source: H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, New York, 1939

Document case-study questions

1. Identify the major criticisms made of the Treaty of Versailles by John Maynard Keynes in 3.3.
2. What does 3.2 tell us about Hitler's reaction to the treaty?
3. How far did the Treaty of Versailles reflect Clemenceau's views as outlined in 3.1?
4. Comment on the way in which the League of Nations is dealt with in 3.5.
5. According to 3.4, what is the major weakness of the Treaty of Versailles?
6. To what extent does Nicolson's assessment in 3.6 conform to your own view of the peace settlement?
7. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of all the above documents as historical sources.

Notes and references

1 Quoted in A. Adamthwaite, *The making of the Second World War*, London, 1977, p. 36.

2 J. Joll, *Europe since 1870*, London, 1973, pp. 196–238; P. M. Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the great powers*, London, 1988, pp. 330–54.

3 There is extensive literature on the Paris Peace Settlement. Historians whose works take a sympathetic view include A. Adamthwaite, *The lost peace: international relations, 1918–39*, London, 1980; R. Henig, *Versailles and after, 1919–33*, London, 1984; G. Ross, *The great powers and the decline of the European states system, 1914–45*, London, 1983; and M. Trachtenberg, 'Versailles after sixty years', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 16 (1982). For critical accounts, see E. H. Carr, *International relations between the wars, 1919–39*, London, 1948; S. Marks, *The illusion of peace: international relations in Europe, 1918–33*, London, 1979; and A. J. P. Taylor, *The origins of the Second World War*, London, 1961.

4 P. Mantoux, *Paris Peace Conference, 1919: proceedings of the Council of Four*, Geneva, 1964, pp. 24–29.

5 A. Lentin, *The Versailles Peace Conference: peacemaking with Germany*, London, 1991.

6 For details of the treaties, see J. Grenville (ed.), *The major international treaties, 1914–73*, London, 1974.

7 A. Polonsky, *The little dictators: the history of eastern Europe since 1918*, London, 1975.

8 See R. Henig (ed.), *The League of Nations*, Edinburgh, 1973.

9 There is a vast body of literature on the Weimar Republic. The following studies are useful: R. Bessel and E. J. Feuchtwanger (eds.), *Social change and political development in Weimar Germany*, London, 1981; E. Eyck, *A history of the Weimar Republic*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1962, 1964; and I. Kershaw (ed.), *Weimar: why did German democracy fail?*, London, 1990.