

## CHAPTER 28

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

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

**The War in Europe.** The war was fought on two major fronts. In the West, the Germans fought the French and British in France; in the East, Germany and Austria-Hungary fought the Russians. On the Western Front, advancements in weaponry combined with the mass production techniques of the Industrial Revolution to create enormous casualties and defensive tactics, most infamously trench warfare. After early gains, the Germans were stymied by the Allies. Both sides settled into wholesale slaughter of their men.

**The War in the East and in Italy.** In eastern Europe, most of the fighting was in western Russia and in the Balkans. The result was as devastating there as on the Western Front. Russia's early and successful offensive was stopped by Germany. Russian leadership, tactics, and weaponry were little match for the Germans, but a superior number of soldiers kept the tsar's forces from capitulating to the Central Powers. In northern Italy, the story was similar. Italian gains were quickly nullified by the Austrians. Support from England and France shored up weak Italian resistance, but not before hundreds of thousands were dead. The brutal realities of the war plunged both Russia and Italy into social and political turmoil.

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

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

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

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

**The Nationalist Assault on the European Colonial Order.** Four years of war disrupted European colonial domination and encouraged nationalist movements that began before World War I. To shore up power in the colonies, the British and French made promises of increased self-determination to local elites but then engendered resentment by renegeing on them after the war.

**India: The Makings of the Nationalist Challenge to the British Raj.** The Indian nationalist movement set the pattern of challenge to colonial authorities in Asia and Africa. Key themes emerged, such as leadership by Western-educated elites and charismatic figures and nonviolent forms of protest. The Indian Congress Party led its country's move toward independence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The Beginnings of the Liberation Struggle in Africa.** As in India and the Arab Middle East, most Western-educated Africans supported their British and French occupiers in World War I, most significantly by supplying soldiers induced by promises of nationhood after the war. When those promises went unfulfilled, protests ensued. Attempts to encourage pan-African unity alarmed the European powers and encouraged anticolonial sentiments. By the 1920s, pan-Africanism faded, replaced by the brand of nationalism seen in other colonies. The great age of African independence came after World War II.

**Global Connections: World War and Global Upheavals.** World War I set many templates for the 20th century. The decline of European hegemony, the emergence of the United States and Japan on the global stage, and communist rule in Russia were results of the war, as were nationalist surges in European colonies and increased political power of labor organizations and women.

## KEY TERMS

**The Great War:** Another name for World War I, used by Europeans until the advent of World War II.

**Kaiser Wilhelm II:** German emperor in World War I; his aggressive foreign policy is often blamed for starting the war.

**Triple Alliance:** Military and political alliance formed before World War I to counter moves by potential rivals England, France, and Russia; consisted of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

**Triple Entente:** Military and political alliance formed before World War I by England, France, and Russia; created to challenge moves made by the Triple Alliance.

**The Great Powers:** The industrialized, colonizing nations of Europe before World War I; includes England, France, Germany, Russia, and Italy; their rivalries led to the war.

**Allied Forces:** Name used by countries fighting the Central Powers; major members were Britain, France, Russia, and Italy; later in the war, the United States and Japan joined their cause.

**Central Powers:** Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire were the chief powers at war with the Allies.

**Jingoism:** Warlike nationalist sentiment spread to and among the middle and working classes in Europe before the war.

**Dreadnought:** Class of modern battleship launched by Britain before the war; triggered naval rivalry, especially with Germany.

**Gavriel Princip:** Serbian nationalist, assassin of Archduke Ferdinand.

**Archduke Ferdinand:** Heir to Austro-Hungarian throne; his assassination precipitated the events that developed into World War I.

**Sarajevo:** Capital of the Bosnian province in Austria-Hungary; site of Ferdinand's assassination.

**Blank check:** Promise of support from Germany to Austria-Hungary after Ferdinand's assassination; Austria-Hungary sought reprisals against Serbia; one of many events that cascaded into global war.

**White dominions:** Britain's territories consisting of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand who sent soldiers into World War I.

**Western Front:** War zone that ran from Belgium to Switzerland during World War I; featured trench warfare and massive casualties among the combatants, including Britain, France, Russia, and Belgium; later included the United States.

**Marne River:** Site near Paris, France, where Germany's early offensive was halted and thrown back; set the stage for four years of trench warfare on the Western Front.

**Eastern Front:** War zone that ran from the Baltic to the Balkans where Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Balkan nations fought.

**Tsar Nicholas II:** Last emperor of Russia whose poor military and political decisions led to his downfall and Russia's loss in the war; he and Kaiser Wilhelm II made many moves that led to the start of the war.

**Propaganda:** Government-sponsored media coverage of the war designed to disseminate one-sided versions of "friendly" and enemy conduct; used to gin up support for the war among its citizenry.

**Bolsheviks:** Socialists in Russia who promoted overthrow of the tsar and the establishment of a socialist state; means "majority" in Russian.

**New women:** Term used to describe career-oriented women in western Europe and the United States in the 1920s; they sought increased social and political rights.

**Jutland:** Site of the war's major sea battle between Germany and Britain off Denmark's coast; German sea prowess was limited after this encounter.

**Gallipoli:** Australian soldiers in support of the British were decimated by Turkish and German soldiers at this battle near the Dardanelles.

**German East Africa:** Fighting occurred in Africa between British-led Indian and South African troops on one side, and German-trained east African troops on the other; today's Tanzania.

**Treaty of Versailles:** Wide-ranging postwar conference that promoted much of Wilson's idealistic plan for peace but at the same time blamed and punished Germany for starting the war; included creation of a League of Nations, an international organization designed to prevent further war.

**Woodrow Wilson:** American president who initially claimed neutrality in the war but later joined the Allied cause; his Fourteen Points and American fighting forces hastened an Allied victory; one of the Big Four at Versailles.

**Georges Clemenceau:** French premier at Versailles peace conference who insisted on punishing Germany after the war; one of the Big Four.

**David Lloyd George:** British prime minister at Versailles who attempted to mediate between Wilson's "peace without victory" stand and Clemenceau's, but with only partial success.

**Armistice:** All sides agreed to lay down their weapons without declaring victory; promoted by Woodrow Wilson to end the fighting; concept later rejected by France and Britain.

**Stab in the back:** Myth promoted in Germany after the war that, on the brink of victory, socialists and Jewish politicians conspired to surrender to the Allies; used by Nazis as part of their drive to power in the 1920s.

**Self-determination:** Wilson called for national independence from colonial rule before Versailles; this encouraged colonial subjects in Asia and Africa until they discovered Wilson intended his rhetoric only for Europe.

**Ho Chi Minh:** Young nationalist from Vietnam seeking self-determination for his country at Versailles; was ignored, like many representatives from Asian and African colonies who were there.

**Indian Congress Party:** Nationalist group in India that called for independence from Britain; led by Western-educated Indian elites; led India in the early postcolonial era.

**B. G. Tilak:** Nationalist leader who promoted a reactionary sort of Hinduism to gain independence for India; influence faded after Britain exiled him.

**Morely-Minto reforms:** In 1909, British colonial authorities expanded political opportunities for educated Indians.

**Mohandas Gandhi:** Successful leader of the Indian nationalist movement who combined religious, social, and political know-how into a massive nonviolent campaign.

**Satyagraha:** "Truth force," a term used by Gandhi to describe peaceful boycotts, strikes, noncooperation, and mass demonstrations to promote Indian independence.

**Lord Cromer:** British High Commissioner of Egypt at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries; implemented many, but apparently not enough, social and economic reforms.

**Effendi:** Prosperous Egyptian families who made up the middle class; leaders of the Egyptian nationalist movement came largely from this group.

**Dinshawai:** Egyptian village where British violence came to represent the heavy-handed nature of colonial rule and united nationalists in their cause.

**Mandates:** The Treaty of Versailles established British or French control over territories formerly held by Germany and the Ottoman Empire; especially important in regard to Arab areas after the war.

**Ataturk (a.k.a. Mustafa Kemal):** Postwar leader of Turkey who launched sweeping reforms, including women's suffrage and a Latin-based alphabet.

**Hussein, Sherif of Morocco:** Convinced Arab leaders to support the French and British during the war because of their pledges of Arab independence.

**Zionists:** Supporters of Jewish nationalism, especially a creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

**Lord Balfour:** British foreign secretary who pledged in a declaration the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which encouraged Jewish nationalists and angered Arabs.

**Pogroms:** Violent assaults against Jewish communities, especially in Russia and Romania in the latter half of the 19th century.

**Theodor Herzl:** Prominent journalist who led the cause of Zionism in the late 19th century.

**Alfred Dreyfus:** French officer and Jew who was falsely accused of spying for Germany in the late 19th century; his mistreatment spurred Herzl and other Zionists to increase their call for a Jewish homeland.

**World Zionist Organization:** Formed by Herzl and other prominent European Jewish leaders to promote Jewish migration to Palestine in advance of the creation of a Zionist state in Palestine.

**Sa'd Zaghlul:** Energetic leader of the nationalist-leaning Wafd Party in Egypt.

**Liberal Constitutionalist Party; Labor Party:** Rivals to Egypt's Wafd Party; once in control of their own government, these three parties did little to help the peasantry.

**Gamal Abdel Nasser:** Led a military coup in Egypt in 1952; ruled until 1970; established himself as a major Arab force in the Middle East.

**Lord Lugard:** Influential British colonial administrator who predicted the rise of African nationalism.

**Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois:** Americans who promoted African nationalism and unity.

**Pan-Africanism:** Movement begun in the 1920s to promote African nationalism and unity; did much to arouse anticolonial sentiment.

**Negritude:** Literary movement in France that argued precolonial African societies were superior in many ways to European colonial societies in Africa; writers included L.S. Senghor, Leon Damas, and Aime Cesaire.

**National Congress of British West Africa:** Regionalized version of the pan-African movement.

**Armenian genocide:** Assault carried out by mainly Turkish military forces against Armenian population in Anatolia in 1915; over a million Armenians perished and thousands fled to Russia and the Middle East.

**Adolf Hitler:** Nazi leader of fascist Germany from 1933 to his suicide in 1945; created a strongly centralized state in Germany; eliminated all rivals; launched Germany on aggressive foreign policy leading to World War II; responsible for attempted genocide of European Jews.

**League of Nations:** International diplomatic and peace organization created with the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I; one of the chief goals of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States in the peace negotiations; the United States was never a member.

**Montagu-Chelmsford reforms:** Increased the powers of Indian legislators at the all-India level and placed much of the provincial administration of India under local ministries controlled by legislative bodies with substantial numbers of elected Indians; passed in 1919.

**Rowlatt Act:** Placed restrictions on key Indian civil rights such as freedom of the press; acted to offset the concessions granted under Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919.

**Hussein:** Sherif of Mecca from 1908 to 1917; used British promise of independence to convince Arabs to support Britain against the Turks in World War I; angered by Britain's failure to keep promise; died 1931.

**Leon Pinsker:** (1821 – 1891) European Zionist who believed that Jewish assimilation into Christian European nations was impossible; argued for return to Middle Eastern Holy Land.

**Wafd party:** Egyptian nationalist party that emerged after an Egyptian delegation was refused a hearing at the Versailles treaty negotiations following World War I; led by Sa'd Zaghlul; negotiations eventually led to limited Egyptian independence beginning in 1922.

**Leópolo Sédar Senghor:** (1906 – 2001) One of the post-World War I writers of the negritude literary movement that urged pride in African values; president of Senegal from 1960 to 1980.

## LESSON SUGGESTIONS

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