

First World War (1914-1918): Causes and Consequences

First World War (World War I) is considered as one of the largest wars in history. The world's great powers assembled in two opposing alliances: the **Allies** (British Empire, France and the Russian Empire) versus the **Central Powers** (Germany and Austria-Hungary). WWI lasted from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918.

The Two Groups: Allies vs Central Powers

Causes of the First World War

In the background there were many conflicts between European nations. Nations grouped among themselves to form military alliances as there were tension and suspicion among them. The causes of the First World War were:

(1) Conflict between Imperialist countries: Ambition of Germany

- Conflict between old imperialist countries (Eg: Britain and France) vs new imperialist countries (Eg: Germany).
- Germany ship – Imperator.
- German railway line – from Berlin to Baghdad.

(2) Ultra Nationalism

- Pan Slav movement – Russian, Polish, Czech, Serb, Bulgaria and Greek.
- Pan German movement.

(3) Military Alliance

- **Triple Alliance or Central Powers (1882)** – Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary.
- **Triple Entente or Allies (1907)** – Britain, France, Russia.

Note: Although Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance alongside Germany and Austria-Hungary, it did not join the Central Powers, as Austria-Hungary had taken the offensive, against the terms of the alliance. These alliances were reorganised and expanded as more nations entered the war: Italy, Japan and the United States joined the Allies, while the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers.

(4) International Anarchy

- Secret agreement between Britain and France allowing Britain to control Egypt and France to take over Morocco. Germany opposed, but settled with a part of French Congo.
- Hague conference of 1882 and 1907 failed to emerge as an international organisation.

[Also read: The American Civil War \(1861-1865\): How Did Abraham Lincoln Change History?](#)

(5) Balkan Wars

- Many Balkan nations (Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and Montenegro) were under the control of Turkey. They defeated Turkey in the First Balkan War. The subsequent war was between the Balkan countries themselves – Eg: Serbia vs Bulgaria.
- Defeated countries like Turkey and Bulgaria sought German help.

(6) Alsace-Lorraine

- During German unification, Germany got Alsace-Lorraine from France. France wanted to capture Alsace-Lorraine back from Germany.

(7) Immediate Cause: assassination of Francis Ferdinand

Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian native (in Bosnia). Austria declared war on Serbia on 28th July, 1914. [Reason for assassination: Annexation by Austria the Bosnia-Herzegovina, against the congress of Berlin, 1878]

The Course of the War



WORLD WAR I

- **Group 1 (Allies):** Serbia, Russia, Britain, France, USA, Belgium, Portugal, Romania etc
- **Group 2 (Central Powers):** Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Bulgaria etc.
- War on Western Side: Battle of Marne.
- War on Eastern Side: Battle of Tennenberg (Russia was defeated).
- War on the Sea: Battle of Dogger Bank (Germany was defeated), Battle of Jutland (Germany retreated).
- USA entered in 1917.
- Russia withdrew in 1917 after October Revolution.

Treaty of Versailles, Paris

- Germany signed a treaty with Allies (Triple Entente) on 28th June 1919. It was signed at Versailles, near Paris. (14 points)

- **Leaders:** Clemenceau – France, Lloyd George – Britain, Woodrow Wilson – USA, Orlando – Italy.

Treaties after World War I

- Treaty of Paris – with Germany.
- Treaty of St.Germaine – with Austria.
- Treaty of Trianon- with Hungary.
- Treaty of Neuilly – with Bulgaria.
- Treaty of Sevres – with Turkey.

Consequences of First World War

1. Rule of King ended in Germany: Germany became a republic on November 1918. The German Emperor Kaiser William II fled to Holland.
2. Around 1 crore people were killed.
3. Unemployment and famine.
4. Epidemics.
5. The fall of Russian empire after October revolution (1917) which resulted in the formation of USSR (1922)
6. Emergence of USA as a super power.
7. Beginning of the end of European supremacy.
8. Japan became a powerful country in Asia.
9. Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia became new independent states.
10. Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – became independent.
11. Rule of Ottomans came to an end in Turkey.
12. New boundary lines were drawn for Austria, Germany and Turkey.
13. Strengthened independence movements in Asia and Africa.
14. League of Nations came into being.
15. Germany had to return Alsace-Lorraine to France.
16. German colonies were shared.
17. Germany gave up Saar coal field.
18. Germany gave up Polish corridor, and made city of Danzig independent.
19. Monarchy was abolished in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey and Russia.
20. The harsh clauses of the Treaty of Versailles finally resulted in the second world war.