

# The First World War

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The First World War which began in 1914 was different from all the other previous wars. It was fought by several nations and affected almost all countries. New methods of defence and destruction were used in it. Because of the extent of the spread of the war, damages caused by it and the total impact of the war was till now unprecedented in history, it came to be known as the First World War.

### Causes of the First World War

#### Aggressive and Militant Nationalism

- Aggressive nationalism means to love one's country to such an extent that it results in the hatred of other countries. Militant nationalism was the consequence of the aggressive nationalism which included the building of a huge army and appointing of a powerful class of military and naval officers. For example, France wanted the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine back from Germany and Serbia wanted all the Balkan states to unite. This created tensions among the other nations.
- Aggressive nationalism also led to the development of expansionist policies. France and Britain built large colonial empires in Asia and Africa. Many other nations such as Germany, Italy and Japan competed with other powers to establish their colonies. Building of colonies became essential at this time as they not only provided raw materials and minerals for industries but also had great potential to become markets for European manufactured goods.
- Colonies also added to the power and prestige of the European nations. This led to a clash of interests among these countries. This filled the political atmosphere of Europe with hatred and fear.

#### Race for Armament

- Because of aggressive nationalism and in the name of self-defence, almost every European nation began to pile arms and ammunitions.
- Germany began to build a powerful navy to protect her colonies in Asia and Africa. She built one of the largest ships, 'The Emperor', in 1912. Britain and France were suspicious of the growing military strength of Germany.
- Stockpiling of arms gave rise to stiff competition among the European nations which resulted in the outbreak of the First World War.

#### Division of Europe into Two Hostile Camps

- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were basically two kinds of states in Europe. While some were single nation states such as Britain and France, others were imperial states such as Austria and Hungary. The latter had Hungarian, Serbian, Bosnian and Croats who spoke different languages and cultural traditions.
- To secure their interests, nations entered various alliances. Germany formed an alliance with Austria and Hungary which was later joined by Italy in 1882. The alliance came to be known as the **Triple Alliance**.
- France, England and Russia formed the Triple Entente in 1907 to counter the effects of the formation of the Triple Alliance. It was later joined by Japan. Formation of these alliances divided Europe into two hostile camps.

## Murder of Archduke Francis Ferdinand (Immediate Cause)

- Archduke Francis Ferdinand was the heir to the throne of Austria and Hungary. He was assassinated at the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo on 28 June 1914.
- The assassination was planned by a secret society named 'Black Hand' which aimed at uniting all Serbians into a single Serbian state.
- After his assassination, Austria served an ultimatum to Serbia making eleven demands. Serbia accepted most demands but refused some.
- As a result, Austria declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. Russia supported Serbia and started making preparations for war. On 1 August 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. On 4 August, Britain declared war on Germany.
- Soon afterwards, many other countries joined the war. Japan declared war on Germany with an aim of conquering German territories in the Far East. Turkey and Bulgaria joined the war on the side of Germany. Italy remained neutral for some time and then declared war on Germany (broke the Triple Alliance).
- While Britain, France, Russia and their allies came to be known as the **Allied Powers**, Germany, Austria–Hungary and their allies came to be known as the **Central Powers**.



The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand was an immediate cause of the war.

## Events of the War

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### War on the Western Front

- Battle of Marne was an important battle which was fought on the Western front. It was fought between France and Britain on one side and Germany on the other side.
- The victories secured by France and Britain against Germany in the Battle of Marne proved to be a decisive point in the war.

### Trench Warfare

- Machine guns and heavy artillery made the life above ground very dangerous. The opposing armies dug trenches to defend themselves from the enemy's attacks and to launch attacks.
- It was not easy to live in trenches. Rats, lice, gas, cold, rain and snow were problems faced by the soldiers in trenches.



Trenches were dug during the war by the soldiers to save themselves from the direct attacks of the enemies.

### War on the Eastern Front

- Initially, Austria–Hungary and Germany were able to invade some territories of the Russian empire. They were also successful against Romania, Serbia and Italy.
- Outside Europe, the Allied Powers led campaigns against the Ottoman Empire. While Japan occupied German possessions in East Asia, Britain and France captured many German colonies in Africa.

### Policy of Blockade

- One of the tactics employed in the war was the blocking of enemy lines to cut off the supplies of food, war material and raw materials.
- In 1916, Germany sunk many British warships, but she was defeated in the Battle of Verdun. The English blocked the German coast to cut supplies to her. Germany was also defeated in the Battle of Dogger Bank.

## War against Turkey

- Turkey had joined the war on the side of the Central Powers. Germany was thus controlling the Baltic Sea and Black Sea. This made Russia isolated as she was not able to get any help from the Entente Powers.
- Thus, Turkey was attacked by the British Indian army and the former surrendered on 30 October 1918.

## Entry of USA in the War

- In 1915, the German U Boats sunk a British passenger ship called 'Lusitania'. Among 1153 passengers who were killed. 128 were Americans. This aroused anti-German feelings in the USA.
- The Allied Powers had raised huge sums of money in the USA to pay for the war goods and materials. Thus, the USA feared that if Allied Powers lost the war, she would not be able to recover the money. Moreover, Germany would also become a possible rival of the USA.
- Thus, USA declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917.

## Russia's Withdrawal from the War

- One of the major events of the war was the withdrawal of Russia from the First World War. She retreated from the war because of the Russian Revolution.
- Russians had suffered heavy damages during the war and over 600,000 Russian soldiers were killed.
- After taking over the leadership of Russia, Lenin proposed to end the war.
- Russia signed a peace treaty called the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany.

## End of the War

- By 1918, Germany and her allies began to be routed by the combined forces of Britain, France and USA.
- This gave rise to political discontent in Austria and Hungary. While Bulgaria withdrew from the war, Turkey surrendered to the Allies in 1918.
- While the emperor of Austria–Hungary surrendered on 3 November 1918. A revolution broke out in Germany and he became a republic. The German emperor Kaiser William II fled to Holland. The new German government signed an armistice on 11 November 1918 and the war came to an end.
- About 53 to 70 million people fought in the war and about nine million people were either wounded or killed during the war. Besides, civilians were also killed because of air raids, epidemics and famines during the war.
- The economy of the countries participating in the war was shattered. The Great Economic Depression of 1929–30 is mainly attributed to the war.

## Results of the War

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Main results of the First World War:

### The Signing of the Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919)

- The treaty of Versailles was signed at Versailles in France. It was signed by the victorious nations. Main terms of the Treaty were
  - Germany was held guilty of aggression.
  - He was also required to pay huge war reparations of 33 billion dollars for the losses of the victorious nations.
  - The Rhine Valley in Germany was to be demilitarised, and German territory to the west of Rhine was to be occupied by the Allied troops for 15 years.
  - Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine to France and Schleswig to Denmark.
  - Coal mines in Saar, Germany, were given to France for 15 years.
  - Germany lost all her colonies to the victorious nations.



Signing of the historic Treaty of Versailles

- The size of the German army and navy was restricted, and its air force and submarines were banned.

### **Territorial Rearrangements**

- The war marked the end of three ruling dynasties in Europe—the Romanov in Russia, the Hohenzollern in Germany and Hapsburg in Austria–Hungary.
- The rule of the Ottoman Empire came to an end in Italy. Austria and Hungary became two separate states. Thus, monarchy in many countries collapsed.
- Many independent states emerged during the war. Some of these were Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Yugoslavia.

### **Formation of the League of Nations**

- The League of Nations was created after the end of the War. The fourteen-point programme of President Wilson included the creation of a world organisation to prevent any future wars.
- Aims and objectives of the League:
  - All nations were prohibited from entering any secret treaties and alliances.
  - All nations had to respect each other's independence.
  - Nations should solve disputes among each other by referring the disputes to the League.
  - Member nations had to take steps against the aggressive country which tried to disturb world peace.
  - The League was supposed to promote cultural, social and economic cooperation among the member nations.
- The League however had some limitations too. Germany and the Soviet Union were not made the members of the League. USA also did not join the League.
- The rise of dictatorship in Germany and Italy weakened the League, which ultimately came to an end with the beginning of the Second World War.