

TO END ALL WARS

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Last year, the World marked the 100th anniversary of the Armistice ending the carnage of the Great War, labeled by H.G. Wells in 1914 as the one to “End all Wars”.

Yes, right, that one ... the one which caused the slaughter of one out of every three youths of Britain, France and Germany.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles formally ending the War. The War was bad enough, but why is it necessary to remind us of that Treaty and its mistakes?

For the Treaty, in the judgement of many, has caused in whole or in part, military actions in the Twentieth Century in the very countries impacted by the Treaty ... all-out wars in the Balkans and Syria, saber-rattling and a couple coup d'états in Iran, bombings, rockets and several wars in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, and ethnic cleansings in Turkey, Bosnia, Croatia, Russia, and others.

Perhaps surprising to some, even the Viet Nam colonial war against France followed by America's incursion both resulted from the failure of the Treaty's negotiators to provide a means to recognize the legitimate interests of self-determination in French Indochina.

And while the Great War killed and wounded about 7 million Germans, 14 years later the Treaty was used to propagandize the German people and persuade them to support Hitler's “do-over,” the one we labeled the Second World War which produced over double those casualties.

The impact of the Treaty was a tragedy. Ross Perot popularized the thought that the devil is always in the details ... and here are a few.

Reparations

Complicating Germany's situation after the War was the debilitating inflation and hyperinflation rendering the Mark valueless except as unattractive wallpaper exacerbated by the 1929 stock market collapse and the Great Depression.

For our purposes this evening, keep in mind that the original reparations bill Germany was to pay was equivalent to about \$30 + Billion dollars in 1921 dollars, or

over \$400 Billion dollars adjusted to today's dollars. Payments stopped in 1932, Germany having paid only \$ 4.5 billion.

Here's a factoid question sure to energize any lagging conversation:

“When did Germany make the last reparation payment?”

... stay tuned for the answer at the conclusion of this paper.

Military terms

Primarily at the vigorous steady urging of France, having suffered the humiliation of utter defeat in the 90-day Franco-Prussian War, over a million and a half dead this time around, France sought to destroy Germany's military in every possible way. Clemenceau, of France, wanted to turn Germany into a sylvan wheat field and forest and a buffer against revolutionary Bolshevik Russia.

Some details: Germany was forced to reduce its armed forces to 100,000. Artillery, machine guns, submarines, and mortars were to be destroyed. Chemical weapons, tanks and military aircraft were prohibited.

Other than limited naval assets, Germany's High Seas Fleet – grand battleships and all - was to be turned over to Great Britain at Britain's navy base at Scapa Flow. But Great Britain never took possession of the High Seas Fleet for while nearing the point of transfer, the German officers and sailors scuttled and sank the remaining 60 or 70 ships of the Fleet.

Little revenge was taken for apparently the French and Brits were going to destroy the Fleet anyway.

Maps redrawn

The maps of Eastern and Central Europe and the Middle East were redrawn, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires simply dismantled. Land was divvied-up in accordance with an arrogance of adherence to an outdated Nineteenth Century colonial mentality with almost no regard to any self-determination of the peoples affected and no regard to nationalities, spheres of influence, or religions or religious sects, tribal interests and cultural and historical patterns of fears, hatred, disunion or union.

Ultimately, maps would reflect new nations: Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Czechoslovakia, Austria,

Hungary, Rumania, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Yugoslavia and several areas of influence for France and Britain to administer.

Once the iron hand of Russia was removed which had kept these conflicting Central Europe interests in check, not surprisingly, the disparate religious and tribal groups raised their angry ancient hatreds resulting in outright wars and sickening ethnic cleansings.

Middle East Mess

The Middle East mess was created with regard to the presence of oil - "who gets it, who doesn't."

Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, among others, all ultimately also came into being without regard to the bitter long-standing hatred between the various Muslim and religious sects and tribal divisions. Essentially, nothing was decided about Israel.

A couple of words about the Jewish interests ...

In the late Nineteenth Century, the Zionist Federation had called for the creation of a country for Jews in and around Jerusalem. These ideas were not forgotten, but, sadly, the necessary key decisions weren't made.

Two agreements entered the scene during the War itself: In 1916, anticipating victory and anxious to quickly stake out claims in the Middle East (read "oil"), the French and Brits signed a secret agreement. The Sykes-Picot Agreement gave Britain the right to control a strip of land between the Mediterranean and what became southern Iraq. France got dibs on parts of Turkey, and what became northern Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

The second was the November 1917 Balfour Declaration, a letter from Britain's Foreign Secretary to Lord Rothschild, a strong proponent of Zionists' interests, stating that Britain favored the creation of a Jewish state, a "National Home." But one other sentence continues to cause problems: "Nothing shall be done which may prejudice civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine". The letter was to remain secret but was released at the time by Communist Russia.

Both agreements were looked upon by the indigenous people as attempts by others to exert colonial instincts in contravention of local self-determination, prejudices and tribal and religious hatreds.

French Indochina

Another part of the world affected by non-action was the area which became the countries of Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam.

Nguyen Ai Quoc (NOIN I WHOAT) was a leader of the Vietnamese people then seeking a national state to end its status as a French colony. He sought entry into the Paris negotiations to achieve this, but his voice was ignored. He also saw that in negotiating the Treaty, France and Great Britain were merely espousing the same-old worn-out Nineteenth Century's colonialists' views. Looking around for a more sympathetic ally, he decided the Communism teachings were more akin to his aims and decided to become a Communist ... and changed his name to Ho Chi Minh.

Of course, following World War Two and Japan's incursions into China, French Indochina became embroiled in a typical colonial war for independence, first against France, then against the United States which was seeking to stop Communist expansion.

Some final observations

Did the Treaty "cause" World War II?

The answer is “Yes.”

The world suffered the consequences of World War Two because Hitler used the Treaty and its harsh terms to whip the German populace into supporting his do-over aggressive military actions. Particularly an anathema to the Germans was the “War Guilt Clause” which placed the entire blame for starting the War on Germany, its inclusion at the very last minute almost causing Germany to refuse to sign.

Additionally, the amount of reparations itself which even Clemenceau acknowledged Germany wouldn’t be able to pay, caused turmoil in German political life, its nascent democracy, its populace and economy.

Another important contributing factor was the failure of America to become a member of the League of Nations, and since Britain and France had refused to utilize their armed forces to facedown Germany’s aggressions which started in 1933, the League of Nations couldn’t or wouldn’t act to confront Hitler’s blatant wrongful conduct.

Wilson

Poor President Wilson. He was treated shabbily in the discussions. True, the French populace saluted him as their savior but many also saw him as the latecomer entering the fray on his red, white and blue stallion, seemingly preaching to the Allies and lecturing how they should henceforth better deal with the complex European political and foreign policy interests. Clemenceau said Wilson “bored me” with his Fourteen Points ... “Why, God Almighty only had ten.” John Maynard Keynes a British representative, called Wilson “incompetent” and “ill informed” of European affairs.

Politically, because of his deep animosity toward Henry Cabot Lodge, he alienated the very Senate committee he had to persuade to approve both the Treaty and America’s membership in the League. And called by many a “major blunder,” he failed to bring to Paris a group of strong diplomatic experts and representatives of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This is surprising since he was in the habit of making frequent personal contacts with members of Congress so why he didn’t follow that practice in this case is unclear.

Even Wilson thought the terms harsh and in weak moments said the Treaty “ensured a new century of war”. He embarked on his nationwide railroad trip seeking public support for the Treaty but particularly the League, and near the end, of course, suffering paralyzing strokes in September and October 1919.

Had Wilson brought strong Senate committee members and staff to the negotiations, or stayed in the States and let more skilled and knowledgeable representatives do the talking and negotiating, he might have had enough support and hutzpah to have his way on a number of issues. He *had* the leverage ... for after all, it was the entry of over a million fresh United States Armed Forces into France at that time that sealed the fate of the Triple Alliance. And the cost of the War had weakened the economies of France and Britain probably more than they cared to admit.

Our entry into the War marked the emergence of the United States as a (*or the*) world power, ... maybe, just maybe, if only he had ... but, we'll never know ...

A last thought ...

What has always surprised me is that one extremely mentally disturbed man, was able to call on Germany to re-arm itself 14 years after the Great War's slaughter of a generation of German youth. He persuaded the populace to aggressively adhere to obscene, horrific social and amoral laws, to launch Germany's own versions of ethnic cleansings, and to seek outrageous and unattainable political and military objectives. His gambit ended only when Germany was *destroyed* and millions killed and wounded.

So, what say we of the Treaty? ... I say it should be called what it was: a tragedy, a failure of man's efforts to end war as the way to resolve legitimate disputes among nations and the cause of the 20th Century's seemingly endless rounds of madness of instability, out-right warfare and ethnic cleansings.

Does this year's call to remember the Treaty remind us not to repeat its mistakes? ... Perhaps ...maybe ... but ...

we shall have to wait and see ...

Thank ...

Oh, almost forgot: the final German payment toward the 1921 reparations obligation was made on

.....the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Reunification of Germany, October 3rd, 2010, a Brazilian blog is spreading a rumor that Germany agreed not to invade France for the fourth time. The payment was \$494 million.

Thank you.

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Literary Club

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