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An Armistice without Peace? The 'Failed' Versailles Settlement in Europe, 1919–23

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Abstract

Ein Waffenstillstand ohne Frieden? Das „gescheiterte" Versailler Vertragswerk in Europa 1919–23 – Im allgemeinen Verständnis werden der Versailler Vertrag von 1919 und die Gründung des Völkerbundes als Gründe für den unausweichlichen Aufstieg der Nationalsozialisten in Deutschland gesehen. Ferner sollen sie Japan und Italien in ihrer aggressiven Expansionspolitik ermutigt haben, weshalb die „Peacemakers" von Paris größtenteils für den Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges verantwortlich zu machen seien. Diese Vereinfachung von historisch komplexen Zusammenhängen, die sich bis heute noch immer stark in den Medien fortsetzt, wird jedoch seit fünfzig Jahren systematisch in der Forschung revidiert. Auf Grund des allgemeinen Hungers im Nachkriegseuropa, der revolutionären Unruhen und der Gesetzlosigkeit in Ost- und Mitteleuropa, standen die Staatsmänner in Paris unter enormem Zeitdruck. Obschon das Vertragswerk durch mehrere Unvollkommenheiten gekennzeichnet war, und der Völkerbund durch die Weigerung der Vereinigten Staaten, diesem beizutreten, in seiner Geburtsstunde entscheidend geschwächt wurde, können die Diplomaten und Politiker des Versailler Friedenskongresses nicht für das Scheitern der internationalen Staatspolitik der 1930er Jahre verantwortlich gemacht werden. Sobald das Vertragswerk in einen breiteren historischen Rahmen gesetzt und den starken wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Strömungen der unmittelbaren Nachkriegsjahre Rechnung getragen wird, erscheinen die Entscheidungen der Staatsmänner in Paris in einem wesentlich besseren Licht als in der Beurteilung der 1920er und 1940er Jahre.

The Versailles Treaty of 1919 was without doubt one of the most important international treaties in modern history. Its consequences are still felt today in current challenges to international security, despite the foundation of the United Nations after the Second World War. Versailles confirmed the rise of the United States of America as a world power in the twentieth century. Numerous current conflicts in the Middle East can certainly be, at least in part, traced back to decisions reached in Paris in 1919. As Eckart Conze put it recently: "The world of Versailles is not a completed, rather an ever-present past, because this world extends well into the beginning of the twenty-first century in its consequences."[1]

From the perspective of the contemporary observers and participants at the time, the negotiations in Paris represented something entirely new in world politics. They did have three historical examples as reference points in their minds: the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the Congress of Vienna (1815), and the Congress of Berlin (1878).[2] Paris had also been the scene in the past of several other treaty signings. Nonetheless, there was a feeling at the beginning of the conference in January 1919 that historical models would only be of limited assistance in placing the tasks of the peace negotiations within a familiar conceptual framework. While the Congress of Vienna could certainly be understood as the most important point of reference, as a British journalist observed in January 1919, there was an obvious link with the Congress of Berlin, "the last great Peace Congress", at which the borders which were agreed upon no longer existed, "and most of its provisions have been scandalously broken." But while the previous conferences had convened primarily to regulate European matters, the journalist continued, this time it was a question of the attempt to create a peace settlement for the entire world.[3]

The armistice on 11 November 1918 was at first limited to thirty-six days. The peace negotiations began on 18 January 1919 in the Hall of Mirrors at the Versailles Palace, a symbolic act clearly intended to awaken memories of the French defeat in 1871. The intention of the French to seek redress for the painful past appeared blindingly obvious.[4] One of

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[1] Eckart Conze, Die Grosse Illusion: Versailles 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt (München, 2018), p. 36. The original German reads: "Die Welt von Versailles ist keine abgeschlossene, sondern eine gegenwärtige Vergangenheit, weil diese Welt in ihren Wirkungen bis in das beginnende 21. Jahrhundert hineinragt."

[2] On these conferences: Christoph Kampmann, Friedensnorm und Sicherheitspolitik: Grundprobleme frühneuzeitlicher Friedensstiftung am Beispiel des Westfälischen Friedens, Historisches Jahrbuch, 139 (2019), pp. 11–30; Reinhard Stauber, Die Friedensordnung von 1814/15: Strukturen und Probleme "Europäischer Innenpolitik", Historisches Jahrbuch, 139 (2019), pp. 97–118; idem, Der Wiener Kongress (Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2014); Wolfram Pyta, Konzert der Mächte und kollektives Sicherheitssytem: Neue Wege zwischenstaatlicher Friedenswahrung in Europa nach dem Wiener Kongreß 1815, Jahrbuch des Historischen Kollegs 1996 (München 1997), pp. 133–173; Harold Nicolson, The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity 1812–1822 (London, 1946); Günther Kronenbitter, Konflikt und Konsens: Der Balkan und die Friedensordnung des Berliner Kongresses 1878, Historisches Jahrbuch, 139 (2019), pp. 119–130.

[3] Some Peace Conferences of the Past, Manchester Guardian, 20 January 1919. It is worth noting that diplomats in Paris did draw comparisons with the Congress of Vienna. According to Lord Robert Cecil in his diary, following a passage in which he recounted a conversation about annexations, he noted, "we are practically again in the atmosphere of the Congress of Vienna." British Library (BL), Add. Mss. 51131, Lord Robert Cecil Papers, Lord Robert Cecil's Diary of the British Delegation, entry, 28 January 1919.

[4] For this point in broader historical context, see Friedemann Pestel, Memory that gov-

the most glaring contradictions was the central role played by three statesmen, David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson,[5] compared to the actual number of delegates. In all, 52 separate commissions discussed numerous subjects, with delegates from 27 victorious nations taking part, supported by thousands of experts, civil servants and secretaries, and with 32 nations in total participating in proceedings which lasted until 10 August 1920. At the opening of the conference, the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference (subsequently referred to as the Council of Ten) consisted of the prime ministers and foreign ministers of the United States, Britain, France, Italy and two Japanese representatives, while later much of the work was undertaken by the Council of Four (Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson, and the Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando).[6]

In the research conducted over the last seven decades on the question of the Versailles Conference, multiple perspectives and numerous subtopics have been examined. Yet, for many years, Versailles has stood as a simplistic explanation for much that occurred in the 1930s: the failures of the League of Nations, the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the rise of the National Socialists and Hitler's Germany, the end of collective security and, ultimately, the outbreak of the Second World War. Although the historiography has long since departed from national myths, clichés and reductionist interpretations, it is still worth revisiting the subject so that easy explanations for the "causes of failure" can be emphatically dispelled. In this survey, it will be argued that the challenges facing the "peacemakers" have often be significantly underestimated. It will also be suggested that chaos theory can be usefully applied to the international situation between 1919 and 1923 in order that the dilemmas facing the Great Powers in Versailles be considered within their proper historical context.

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erns by itself? Appropriations of Versailles Memory, European Review of History, 24 (4) (2017), pp. 527–551.

[5] Three colourful descriptions of these statesmen can be found in Margaret MacMillan, Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War (London, 2002), pp. 11–24 (Wilson), 34–42 (Clemenceau), and 43–57 (Lloyd George).

[6] Nick Shepley, The Paris Peace Conference 1919 (Luton, 2015), p. 6; Alan Sharp, The Paris Peace Conference and its Consequences, 1914–1918 Online, DOI: 10.15463/ie/1418.10149. Much of the detailed work was undertaken in the Council of Five by the foreign ministers of Britain, France, the United States, Italy and Japan.

1.
The Course of the Negotiations in Paris As Reflected in the British Press

It is useful at this point to immerse ourselves, however briefly, in the atmosphere and concerns of the time, but not simply from the perspective of the principal decision-makers – which would, anyway, hardly be possible in a concise overview.[7] What were the phrases which were employed in the public debates to describe the goals of the Big Three? To what extent were those not involved aware of the challenges and dilemmas of the negotiations? As the proceedings drew to a close, were citizens in Europe more sceptical about the final outcome and its implications for securing peace than at the start? It is not possible to undertake a systematic analysis here, but it is helpful to transport ourselves back to the concerns of the first half of the year 1919 on the basis of the reporting in some British newspapers. A brief excursion into headlines and editorials can assist in drawing closer to the historical complexity and range of issues surrounding Versailles.

Shortly before the beginning of the conference, *The Observer* newspaper noted that one needed to be aware that it was not a question of "negotiations" in Paris, rather that the defeated enemies, Germans, Austrians and Turks, would now have to accept their deserved punishment for their deeds. Thereafter, the "criminal nations" could provide evidence of their remorse, so that they could later be accepted back into "the society of civilised peoples". Despite this, the author of the editorial was aware that the League of Nations could only be successful if all its members were convinced that it had been founded on the basis of legality. It needed to be added, however, that bitterness among the victors should not remain, providing a just peace was reached. Above all, the injustice of German rule over Alsace-Lorraine needed to be corrected. But the aim of the talks still had to be "security". The founding of the League of Nations would be the key to this and could not be postponed.[8]

Several days later, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that, once the first sessions were underway, the main question would be that of Russia.

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[7] For brief summaries of the negotiations and their consequences, see: Ruth Henig, Versailles and After 1919–1933 (London & New York, 1995); Carole Fink, The Peace Settlement, 1919–1939, in John Horne (ed.), Companion to World War I (Oxford, 2010), pp. 543–557; and David Stevenson, The First World War and International Politics (Oxford, 1988), pp. 236–307.

[8] The Eve of the Conference. "Security." The One Way of Peace, The Observer, 5 January 1919.

There could be no intervention in Russia as this would lead to severe domestic problems at home. But there was a warning that Central Europe needed to be protected from an epidemic of anarchy: the peoples of these countries had to be able to lead a normal life again. Those individuals who wanted to punish Germany were running the risk that parts of Europe could become half-Bolshevik.[9] Once the first consultations began to take place in advance of the formal negotiations, the American President sent a message to the US Congress in Washington DC: "Bolshevism is steadily advancing westward, poisoning Germany. It cannot be stopped by force, but it can be stopped by food."[10] Put another way: the problem of the threat of a new ideology was already a subject of public concern prior to the conference.

The contradictions associated with the Wilsonian attack on the secret diplomacy of the past emerged as early as the first week of the negotiations. The attempt to limit details of the consultations to joint official communiqués led to "energetic protests by the many British journalists in Paris to Lloyd George, and by the still more numerous American journalists to President Wilson." The decision of the Inter-Allied Conference was announced in French newspapers which, of course, increased the sense of frustration among journalists. The reaction of the American press was clear: to pursue such a policy would defeat the first of Woodrow Wilson's fourteen principles right at the start of the conference – the attempt to end secret diplomacy. In the light of the protests, the tactic adopted by the Allies was to bat the ball back to the journalists: they requested proposals from them as to how the activities of the press could be conducted without hindering the daily work of the negotiations.[11]

Once the peace negotiations had opened on Saturday, 18 January 1919, the press reported in detail, drawing an immediate contrast between the proclamation of the German Empire exactly forty-eight years previously, with its excessive pomp and ceremony, and the simplicity of the scene of the conference at which a new world was to be created. Monsieur Clemenceau opened the first session which concentrated on three issues: 1. the responsibility of the authors of the war; 2. the penalties for crimes com-

[9] Peace Conference and Bolshevism. Problem of Russia. The Risks of Starving Germany, Manchester Guardian, 9 January 1919. The general nervousness in the pages of the Guardian could be seen, for instance, through one journalist's fear that the attitudes of the war might be brought to the negotiating table. The Conference and the Peace, Manchester Guardian, 10 January 1919.

[10] Mr. Wilson on Bolshevik Peril. Conquerable by Food. Not Force. Immediate Steps to Stem the Tide, Manchester Guardian, 14 January 1919.

[11] Public and the Peace Conference. Protests against Press Restrictions. Governments and a Fresh Scheme, Manchester Guardian, 17 January 1919.

mitted during the war; 3. international legislation in regard to labour. Clemenceau further noted that a report was to be sent to the delegates on the criminal responsibility of the former German Kaiser. In the reporting in the *Guardian*, the "Special Correspondent" tried to paint the scene on the first day. His words seemed to communicate his foreboding as to the symbolic meaning of the tableaux at the *Quai d'Orsay*:

> There were not half a dozen uniforms round the table. Indeed this indifference to state was carried to excess, for, while one could admire the deliberate disregard of display, it was impossible not to regret that (owing to a mistake in the official programme supplied) the British Prime Minister's place at M. Poincaré's left hand was empty when the Conference opened, and the presence of officials and secretaries through the room gave a look almost of confusion to the scene.

It can also not be overlooked that the criminal proceedings against Kaiser Wilhelm II occupied more space in the report than the news that the League of Nations Committee would be appointed at the next plenary sitting.[12]

One of the reasons why it is useful – even if only briefly – to cast a glance back to the daily developments at the conference is that Woodrow Wilson was fully aware at the outset that his grand conception of the League of Nations could not be brought to a final conclusion in Paris. During the second public session he underscored the fact that many issues surrounding the new peace order could not be solved at the conference. It was nonetheless necessary that "some machinery" be established before the conclusion of the negotiations. His optimism and idealism shone through in the course of his eloquent speech.[13] Despite all apparent caution, by mid-February his "big idea" could no longer be contained. On 14 February 1919, the American President presented the draft of the League of Nations Covenant. An Executive Council, which would consist of representatives from the United States, the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan, would initially provide the basis for the League. The text of the draft Covenant was published that evening by the Press Office of the Conference.[14] With this step, the peace negotiations were hampered by two separate goals: on the one hand, they had to create a treaty which would bring the Great War to an end, while on the other they were sup-

[12] Peace Conference Opened. M. Clemenceau and Unity. First Questions: Punishment of Kaiser. Scenes at the Public Sitting, Manchester Guardian, 20 January 1919.

[13] Peace Conference. Mr. Wilson and the League of Nations. A Unanimous Resolve, Manchester Guardian, 27 January 1919.

[14] A Covenant for Nations. League Draft before Peace Conference. Pledges against War. Guarantees of Defence: No Secret Treaties. The Conditions of Future Admissions, Manchester Guardian, 15 February 1919.

posed to attempt to secure world peace through an entirely new organization.

The great hope which Wilson's idealism had awakened transformed Paris into something resembling a large, bustling, market-place. Delegates from the most varied non-state associations poured into the French capital, for instance, the "Inter-Allied Women's Suffrage Congress", which ran a form of parallel event at the Lyceum Club. Called by a French association with the same goals, delegates travelled from many countries and were able to conduct conversations with the leading statesmen at the Paris Conference, among them Woodrow Wilson.[15] Despite its long-term historical significance, the Pan-African Congress received rather more muted press coverage.[16] On the invitation of the *Ligue-Nationale contre l'Alcoolisme* delegates from several European countries arrived in Paris in April. The congress communicated its thanks to the Versailles Conference for the paragraph in the draft Convent of the League which addressed the traffic in alcohol with "native races". The delegates requested, furthermore, that the representatives at the Peace Conference, as well as the League of Nations Commission, recognize the principle that each nation should be free to deal with alcohol and also the problem of alcoholism in the way they saw fit.[17] Representatives of trade unions were also to be found in Paris. The tensions at the beginning of May, however, caused by the ban on a workers rally in Paris issued by the French government, led to Léon Jouhaux, the Secretary of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, to send a letter to Clemenceau announcing his withdrawal from the Peace Conference, of which he was a supplementary member.[18]

In the course of March and April there were a number of subjects which were at the centre of press attention. The general instability in Europe was still a huge worry in March. The future leader of the Labour

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[15] Women and the Peace Conference. A Good Reception in Paris, Manchester Guardian, 18 February 1919.

[16] Pan-African Charter, The Observer, 23 February 1919; Pan-African Congress. Negro Delegates in Paris, Manchester Guardian, 24 February 1919.

[17] The Nations and Alcohol. A Paris Conference. Lessons of the War, The Observer, 27 April 1919.

[18] The May Day Troubles in Paris. Labour Leader Withdraws from Peace Conference, Manchester Guardian, 5 May 1919. The reactions in the labour movement naturally also belonged to the coverage of the negotiations in Paris. It was reported at the beginning of June that the working class held stronger sympathies for the League of Nations than the representatives of the victorious nations. Labour and the Peace. Distrust of the Paris Terms. The World of the Future, The Observer, 8 June 1919. For details of attitudes in the British Labour Party towards Versailles, see John Callaghan, The Problem of War Aims and the Treaty of Versailles, in Lucy Bland and Richard Carr (eds.), Labour, British Radicalism and the First World War (Manchester, 2018), pp. 240–256.

Party and British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, wrote about Béla Kun's revolution in Hungary, noting as a result of this development that the Allied plan to isolate Russia had failed. His worry was that this could threaten Philipp Scheidemann's government in Germany.[19] Considerable disquiet was caused by the threat of the Italians to leave the Conference over the issue of Fiume. Questions were raised about the lack of information about the negotiations, the reparations that Germany would have to pay, meetings with German representatives about Danzig, while the guilt of the Kaiser was a constant theme in the British press coverage. In their reports on these issues, journalists showed their impatience over the delays which had crept into the discussions, even if they were prepared to accept that this was not the fault of Lloyd George.[20]

The German delegation in Paris was presented with a draft treaty on 7 May 1919 which was, unsurprisingly, the subject of several articles in the press that day. But it was only one news item among several major events occurring around that time: the Italians had now returned to Paris; Great Britain had recognized Finnish independence; the organization committee of the League of Nations had held its first meeting at the Hotel Crillon; the Chinese delegation had directed an appeal to Wilson because they and other powers had not been admitted to the delivery of the peace conditions to the German representatives. Indeed, before the presentation of the Allied conditions, it had already become known that the German representatives had already written their counter-proposals.[21]

The Allies presented a new version of the peace treaty on 16 June, with a few alterations. They let the German delegation know that a second refusal to sign would lead to an invasion of their country. On 20 June 1919, the Minister President Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) tendered his resignation. Given the hopeless position in which the new republic found itself, the parliament in Weimar decided by 237 to 138 votes to accept the Versailles Treaty. The Foreign Minister Hermann Müller (SPD) and the Transport Minister Johannes Bell *(Zentrumspartei)* signed the treaty on

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[19] J. Ramsay MacDonald, Hungary's Revolution. Its Lesson to the Peace Conference, Manchester Guardian, 26 March 1919.

[20] Serious News from Paris. Italy Threatens to Leave Conference. Demand for the Cession of Fiume. Claims That Have Grown with Victory, Manchester Guardian, 22 March 1919; Towards Peace Settlement. Expected Arrangement on Danzig Landing, Manchester Guardian, 2 April 1919; A Prime Minister's Pledge, Sunday Times, 6 April 1919; Important Peace Decision. Allied Agreement on Reparation. Danzig Difficulty Overcome. Mr. Lloyd George Explains Conference Delays, Manchester Guardian, 7 April 1919; Peace Forecast. Europe's New Map. One Conciliatory Statesman. The Wilson Crises, Sunday Times, 13 April 1919.

[21] To-day's Peace Meeting. 22 Powers to Confront Germans. Treaty Terms Passed by Conference. Earnest Protest by Marshal Foch, Manchester Guardian, 7 May 1919.

28 June 1919, albeit under protest. As one of the defeated nations in the first total war, the Weimar Republic had quite simply no other choice.[22]

This final phase of the negotiations was discussed in detail in the press. Before the signatures of the German representatives had even been provided, one journalist wrote in the *Sunday Times* that everyone in Germany knew that the treaty had to be signed. A return to hostilities might, however, be of domestic political advantage to some figures since a decision to sign the treaty would be a form of political suicide for each member of the cabinet. Although matters were extremely confusing, the real danger lay in the fact that reactionaries could create political capital out of the situation if they could generate symbolic resistance for a short period of time.[23] Once the treaty was finally signed on 28 June 1919, the ratification document, signed on 9 July, was subjected to scrutiny in the *Sunday Times*. Particular attention was given to Friedrich Ebert's signature, since he had signed as the "President of the German Empire". With an eye for this type of detail, it was not surprising that in the same issue of the newspaper a longer article appeared with the arguments for and against a trial of the Kaiser.[24]

The *Manchester Guardian* noted on 13 July that the numerous diplomats and experts who had gathered in Paris had suddenly discovered that "peace making is a tiresome kind of work". Once the treaty had received the German signatures, delegates began to leave Paris. As the newspaper put it: "The great Paris of the Peace Conference is already half dead." There was, though, just as much work to be done: the Council of Five was even more occupied than it had been before.[25] For this reason the reporting from the French capital did not cease abruptly since there were many weighty subjects which still had to be dealt with by delegates, such as: the recognition of the Austrian Republic; the problem of Syria; and, the continuing threat of Bolshevism.[26]

The conditions of peace for the German Empire, officially agreed to on 28 June 1919, came into effect on 10 January 1920. Thereafter, further

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[22] For a detailed assessment of Germany's negotiating strategy in relation to the signing of the Versailles Treaty, see Klaus Schwabe, Deutsche Revolution und Wilson-Frieden (Düsseldorf, 1971), pp. 521–651.

[23] Arthur H. Pollen, If Germany Won't Sign. Armistice Ends. First Moves in New War, Sunday Times, 22 June 1919; Ratifying the Treaty, Sunday Times, 13 July 1919.

[24] Ratifying the Treaty, and also Spenser Wilkinson, Trial of the Kaiser. The Pros and Cons, Sunday Times, 13 July 1919. There were numerous reports on the "Trial of the Kaiser", such as, Charging the Ex-Kaiser, Manchester Guardian, 21 June 1919.

[25] Philippe Millet, The New Conference. Work Still to Be Done in Paris. Dangers of the Near East, Manchester Guardian, 13 July 1919.

[26] The Peace Conference. Austrian Republic Recognised, Manchester Guardian, 13 August 1919; Future of Peace Conference. Premier in Paris. Grappling with Syrian Issue.

treaties followed: the Republic of German-Austria[27] signed on 10 September 1919 at Saint-Germain-en-Laye (the treaty came into effect on 30 June 1920), Bulgaria on 27 September 1919 in Neuilly (the treaty came into effect on 9 August 1920), with Hungary signing in Trianon on 4 June 1920 (the treaty came into effect on 31 July 1921), and Turkey on 10 August 1920 in Sèvres (this treaty was, however, never ratified, so it took until 24 July 1923 and the Treaty of Lausanne until a final agreement was reached with Turkey).[28] The problem around these treaties, compared to earlier European peace settlements, lay in the fact that they could not be seen as part of a comprehensive European treaty because the Soviet Union had not been represented in Paris. She had signed a separate peace treaty with the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria on 3 March 1918, the infamous "Peace of Brest-Litovsk".[29]

As early as the end of 1919, however, the moralizing tone of the reporting in the British press on issues surrounding the peace had largely evaporated: a degree of resignation and tiredness could hardly have been missed by the different newspapers' readers. It did not take long before the press in Britain declared that it had already become evident that the work on the treaties was incomplete and improvements would be necessary. In an editorial in March 1921, *The Observer* suggested that within three to five years a new conference would have to be held. The short autopsy of failure argued that the strong personalities at the negotiating table in Paris were well suited to wartime conditions, but not to the busi-

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Lord Curzon as Delegate, The Observer, 14 September 1919; Esthonia's Dilemma. Distrust of Bolshevik Intentions. A Peace Conference Interrupted, Manchester Guardian, 19 December 1919.

[27] The Republic of German-Austria *(Republik Deutschösterreich)* was founded on 12 November 1918 as part of an attempt to unify the German-speaking areas of the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire. But with the ratification of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the National Assembly in Vienna changed the new state's name to the Republic of Austria on 21 October 1919.

[28] The "follow-on treaties" have received far less attention in the historiography than the Treaty of Versailles. An overview of these treaties is offered in Alan Sharp, The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919 (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 130–184. See also: Arnold Suppan, The Imperialist Peace Order in Central Europe: Saint Germain and Trianon, 1919–1920 (Vienna, 2019); Paul C. Helmreich, From Paris to Sèvres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919–1920 (Columbus, OH, 1974); Ignác Romsics, The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920 (New York, 2002); and, Stefan Marinov Minkov, Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1914–1918 Online, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11055.

[29] On this see: Conze (see n. 1), pp. 92–116; Z. A. B. Zeman, A Diplomatic History of the First World War (London, 1971), pp. 243–286. A number of interesting thoughts can be found in Winfried Baumgart, Brest-Litovsk und Versailles. Ein Vergleich zweier Friedensschlüsse, Historische Zeitschrift, 210 (1970), pp. 583–619.

ness of peace negotiations. If the goal had been the enactment of punishments, one could have been satisfied with the treaty. Yet the aim was another – the completion of a legal document. The reason for the failure had been straightforward: the treaty was not produced in an objective and sober fashion.[30] The broad condemnation of the Treaty of Versailles in Britain, in part due to the negativity of politicians, did without doubt have an effect on the early attempts to place the treaty in some form of historical context.

2. Versailles 1919: Key Historiographical Trends

When one attempts to survey the historical research on the Versailles Treaty conducted over the last hundred years, four approximate phases can be identified. In the initial phase, which can only be touched on briefly here, one discovers a number of critics of the treaty. These attacks began with John Maynard Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published at the end of 1919, in other words, even before the conclusion of all the negotiations. Following the appearance of this work, many other memoirs and polemical pamphlets by participants, which also did not hold back in their disapproval of the treaty, started to appear, such as works by David Lloyd George, or the director of the American Press Bureau in Paris in 1919, Ray Stannard Baker.[31] Among these publications was a flood of German texts with a diverse range of tones of rejection and outrage, which after a few years started to include incendiary National Socialist propaganda pamphlets.[32] But the majority of these publications belong more to primary sources on the historical question of the Versailles Treaty rather than secondary literature.[33] Hence, it seems more

[30] Personality in the Versailles Treaty, The Observer, 13 March 1921.

[31] John Maynard Keynes, The Economic Consequences of the Peace (London, 1919); Roy Stannard Baker, What Wilson Did At Paris (New York, 1919); idem, The Versailles Treaty and After, Current History, 9 (January 1924), pp. 547–549; David Lloyd George, The Truth about the Peace Treaties (London, 1932).

[32] A typical example of the National Socialist view of the Versailles Treaty is Werner Beumelburg, Deutschland in Ketten: Von Versailles bis zum Youngplan (Oldenburg i. O., 1933). Even after the outbreak of war, National Socialist publications were still ranting about "the disgrace of Versailles". See Karl Baumböck, Die Friedenspolitik des Dritten Reiches: 7 Jahre nationalsozialistischer Staatsführung, Nationalpolitische Aufklärungsschriften Heft 13 (Berlin, 1942), pp. 3–9.

[33] However, it cannot escape attention that an important foundation stone for later research was published between 1920 and 1924, Temperley's complete history of the subject,

appropriate to consider the historical research on Versailles as consisting of three phases rather than four.

In the first genuine phase of the historiography, one can see a form of continuation of the critiques of Versailles which had started in the interwar years, although by now with a greater concern for the employment of source material. This phase can be located principally in the 1950s and 1960s. Opinions on the Versailles Treaty were, however, most frequently to be found in the form of brief comments in broad surveys of European history. A typical example here is David Thomson's *Europe since Napoleon*, first published in 1957. According to the author, the Paris Conference suffered from a tension between idealism and realism. Although an agreement for Europe had been achieved, the results fell between two stools. On the one hand, the defeated nations were so alienated that they could not accept a new peace order laid down by the victors, on the other hand they were left strong enough to be able to pull the new order apart later. For Thomson, "the Paris Conference must stand in history as a conspicuous failure; but it was an over-all failure of human intelligence and wisdom, and in part a failure of organization and method." The problem was not excessive realism or idealism, but a "misapplication" of both.[34] In the chapter on Versailles in the *New Cambridge Modern History*, while acknowledging that the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires had created a power vacuum, it was noted that the treaty was compromised at the beginning, politically, "by errors of judgement which the peacemakers made at times in framing a very complex whole".[35] Judgements like this, which were widespread at the time, implied naturally – sometimes more, sometimes less – that the miscalculations made in Paris led inexorably to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Other negative interpretations can be found in the historiography. In his history of the interwar period, Hermann Graml saw the main problem afflicting the League of Nations as the absence of the United States. He phrased it as follows: "the defeat which the idea of the League of Nations suffered back then in the United States belongs not only to the strangest and most bitter, but also to the most consequential events in the history of

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which also reproduced numerous documents. H. W. V. Temperley (ed.), A History of the Peace Conference of Paris, 6 vols. (London, 1920–1924). This study was the result of an initiative by the Chatham House Institute of International Affairs which had the intention of drawing lessons from Versailles and its "follow-on treaties". The project was conducted under the direction of an Anglo-American committee.

[34] David Thomson, Europe since Napoleon (London, rev. edn. 1966), pp. 621–622.

[35] Rohan Butler, The Peace Settlement of Versailles 1918–1933, in C. L. Mowat (ed.), The New Cambridge Modern History, Vol. XII: The Shifting Balance of World Forces 1898–1945 (Cambridge, 1968), p. 241.

our century."[36] From a German perspective, two decades after the founding of the Federal Republic, this was without doubt an entirely understandable position. In the same year, one finds a negative assessment from a British standpoint in Max Beloff's study of British "imperial decline". He argued that the problems within the Empire were not solved by the Great War, rather the tensions were actually exacerbated by the new peace settlement. His main thesis accepted that the challenges facing David Lloyd George in Paris in 1919 had been great, yet the Prime Minister was a victim of his tendency to place too much trust in his personal diplomatic skills and powers of persuasion. Instead, it had been necessary to undertake a fundamental assessment of British strategic problems. The country should have followed a policy of consolidation of the Empire and not one of expanding its areas of influence.[37]

In this first phase of the serious historical research on the Paris peace treaties, there is one work which should be seen as significant in terms of its scholarly precision and emphasis of the Russian Revolution as a major factor in the negotiations: Arno J. Mayer's *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*. Mayer analyzes how the threat of Bolshevism played a central role in Paris, not to mention the Allies' fear that a wave of revolutionary fervour in the workers' movement in Germany might spread to other European countries.[38] It appears on the basis of the relevant sources that this worry was not unjustified, even if the danger gradually dissipated. Although Mayer's emphasis on Bolshevism as the central factor in the calculations of the Allies in Paris is now considered as somewhat exaggerated, his monograph is still viewed as a milestone in the historical research on Versailles, not least of all as he successfully wove domestic political and foreign policy factors together in a comprehensive analysis.

In the second wave of the research – which stretched across the 1970s and 1980s, and into the early 1990s – numerous studies were published which assessed the work of the "peacemakers" in a more sympathetic

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[36] Hermann Graml, Europa zwischen den Kriegen (Lausanne, 1969), p. 26. The original text reads: "die Niederlage die der Völkerbundsgedanke damals in den Vereinigten Staaten erlitt, gehört nicht nur zu den seltsamsten und bittersten, sondern auch zu den folgenreichsten Ereignissen der Geschichte unseres Jahrhunderts." Other historians emphasized other aspects of the negotiations. A British historian saw the "dominant factor" following the conference to be the French conviction that they had been betrayed by their allies and, therefore, would have to undertake anything in order to prevent future German aggression. F. S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain among the Great Powers 1916–1939 (London, 1966), p. 160.

[37] Max Beloff, Imperial Sunset. Volume 1: Britain's Liberal Empire 1897–1921 (London, 1969), pp. 344–361.

[38] Arno J. Mayer, Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919 (New York, 1967), pp. 753–812.

fashion. At the start of the 1970s, Howard Elcock provided a scholarly overview of the negotiations in Paris. According to his conclusions, there were two main reasons as to why the new security system failed: first, the rejection of the treaty in the United States Senate; and, second, the Great Depression of 1929–31. These two reasons were supplemented by Wilson's hatred of Germany.[39] In the course of this second phase, a new trend in the historiography could also be observed, namely, a growing number of monographs and journal articles which examined specific aspects of the treaty, in particular studies of individual dimensions to the foreign policies of the Western Allies.[40]

The most striking of these "second wave" works was by Marc Trachtenberg, who published a highly influential book on the question of reparations. He argued against the idea that Clemenceau and the French delegation sought a settlement driven by a desire for revenge, while also claiming that the Americans were moderate in their demands. According to Trachtenberg, the reparations demands on Germany were only a subsidiary priority for the French and Americans in the postwar world. It was, in fact, the British who had called for continually higher payments from Germany. He claimed that the tendency to view the conference as a straight-forward battle between realism and idealism was an interpretation which did not accord with the available sources. The Paris Conference was rather more complex than it has been portrayed in many studies, so the different areas of the negotiations needed to be analyzed separately from one another, whether reparations, war crimes, disarmament, the League of Nations, or the determination of borders.[41]

Trachtenberg's challenge to the existing orthodoxy was important because it enabled historians to break free from some of the previous, well-established, interpretations. Instead of the traditional line of declaring the strategies pursued by the Council of Four to have been "failures", more nuanced theses were now possible. Erik Goldstein's study of British dip-

[39] Howard Elcock, Portrait of a Decision: The Council of Four and the Treaty of Versailles (London, 1972), pp. 298–324.

[40] Among the notable articles: R. C. Snelling, Peacemaking, 1919: Australia, New Zealand and the British Empire Delegation at Versailles, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 4 (1) (1975), pp. 15–28; Paul Gordon Lauren, Human Rights in History: Diplomacy and Racial Equality at the Paris Peace Conference, Diplomatic History 2 (3) (1978), pp. 257–278; and, Andrew J. Crozier, The Establishment of the Mandates System 1919–1925: Some Problems Created by the Paris Peace Conference, Journal of Contemporary History, 14 (3) (1979), pp. 483–513.

[41] Marc Trachtenberg, Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916–1923, (New York, 1980); idem, Reparation at the Paris Peace Conference, Journal of Modern History, 51 (March 1979), pp. 24–85; idem, Versailles after Sixty Years, Journal of Contemporary History, 17 (July 1982), pp. 487–506.

lomatic strategy, for example, attempted to highlight the positive role of British experts. Contradicting the dissatisfaction expressed by the selfsame experts in the early 1920s with the final results of the negotiations, Goldstein argued that, given what was possible for the British delegation in Paris, they did achieve some clear successes. In a similar fashion to Trachtenberg, Goldstein was of the opinion that individual aspects of the negotiations needed to be analyzed, instead of pursuing broad conclusions. In terms of Great Britain's diplomatic strategy, so Goldstein, Versailles had to be considered a success and not dismissed as a failure on the basis of future events.[42]

The third wave in the historiography can be identified as beginning at the end of the 1990s; it has been characterized by more nuanced and balanced studies, so can be seen as a period of a reappraisal of previous assumptions. Among the most important publications was without doubt Margaret MacMillan's highly detailed book, *Peacemakers*. Written in a narrative style, she presented an overview of a vast range of themes which were discussed during the negotiations, employing an impressive selection of primary sources and secondary literature. It cannot escape attention, however, that what she offered in literary quality she was unable to match in analytical incisiveness.[43] What should be emphasized, though, is that in this third phase a considerable number of edited collections were published which addressed a range of more specific topics in relation to the treaty.[44]

Although the research on Versailles has been dominated by British, American and French historians,[45] one can also identify in this third phase new subtleties of interpretation in the research of German historians.[46]

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[42] Erik Goldstein, Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916–1920 (Oxford, 1991), esp. pp. 279–286, and also: idem, British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question: The Political Intelligence Department and the Eastern Committee, 1918, Middle Eastern Studies, 23 (4) (1987), pp. 419–436; idem, The Foreign Office and Political Intelligence, 1917–20, Review of International Studies, 14 (4) (1988), pp. 275–88; idem, Great Britain and Greater Greece, 1917–20, Historical Journal, 32 (3) (1989), pp. 339–356.

[43] MacMillan (see n. 5).

[44] See, for example: Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser (eds.), The Treaty of Versailles. A Reassessment after 75 Years (Cambridge, 1998); Gerd Krumeich (ed.), Versailles 1919. Ziele – Wirkung – Wahrnehmung (Essen, 2001); and, Michael Dockrill and John Fisher (eds.), The Paris Peace Conference 1919. Peace without Victory? (Basingstoke, 2001).

[45] A good overview of the French historiography since the mid-1960s can be found in David Stevenson, French War Aims and Peace Planning, in Boemeke (see n. 44), pp. 87–109.

[46] Among the key works in the third phase, especially noteworthy are: Peter Krüger, Versailles – Deutsche Außenpolitik zwischen Revisionismus und Friedenssicherung

Representative for these new viewpoints are the pointed remarks by Horst Möller in his history of the interwar period. According to Möller, Germany and also Austria had failed to recognize that the way in which they had conducted the war, in addition to their ambitious war aims, would provoke a reaction on the part of their opponents. The pursuit of a policy of strength had led to the "Peace Treaty" of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. Only as a result of their defeat were the Germans then prepared to support Wilson's Fourteen Points.[47] This interpretation, which implies strong condemnation of the German war policies toward Russia, with all the consequences they led to at the Versailles Conference, is now no longer disputed by the vast majority of German historians.[48]

In keeping with the revisionist trend of the second wave of research, Alan Sharp offered some interesting remarks in 2011, emphasizing the considerable challenges which faced the Council of Four, above all, how could they have been expected to include Russia in peace negotiations? The country was in the throes of a civil war, while at the same time France, Great Britain and the United States had sent their own troops into the chaos. Pressure of time was, furthermore, a key factor which hindered the Allies in the creation of a coherent treaty document within the space of two months. Once the negotiations had opened, speed appeared to be crucial, otherwise "Bolshevism" could have advanced still further. Moreover, as the German representatives were not allowed to participate in Paris, a patchwork quilt of more aggressive demands were made to Germany than had originally been envisaged. Several representatives of the Council of Four assumed that the treaty would have to be modified at a later date. Sharp has also argued against the claim that the Versailles treaty documents made the Second World War unavoidable, since the peacemakers could not be held responsible for the mistakes made by statesmen in the 1930s.[49] He suggests, moreover, that if Versailles is placed against the background of the year 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the civil war in Yugoslavia, then it can be seen in a very different light, a position more or less shared by Conze.[50]

(München, 1986); Eberhard Kolb, Der Frieden von Versailles (München, 2005); Hans-Christof Kraus, Versailles und die Folgen: Außenpolitik zwischen Revisionismus und Verständigung 1919–1933 (Berlin, 2013); Jörn Leonhard, Der überforderte Frieden: Versailles und die Welt 1918–1923 (München, 2018).

[47] Horst Möller, Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen (München, 1998), p. 23.

[48] See Conze (see n. 1), pp. 103–113.

[49] Alan Sharp, The Versailles Settlement: The Start of the Road to the Second World War, in Frank McDonough (ed.), The Origins of the Second World War: An International Perspective (London & New York, 2011), pp. 15–33.

[50] Sharp (see n. 49), p. 17, as well as Conze (see n. 1), pp. 24, 36. Other interesting long-

In summary, it can thus be asserted that the research on the Versailles Treaty has run through, in broad terms, three phases. Any overview of these phases must come to the conclusion that it took considerable distance between the negotiations in 1919 and its historians before a less jaundiced view could be taken of its place in history. Instead of claims that the treaty was the ultimate cause of the outbreak of the Second World War, today the errors of the statesmen and their advisers in Paris can be analyzed not only with greater precision, but also the scale of the challenges facing them at that time. Finally, as has been noted by a number of historians, it is unfortunately the case that the new historical interpretations have barely been noticed by the wider public. The broad readership of popular historical works in Europe is still convinced of the validity of the thesis of Versailles as the "cause" of the Second World War.[51]

3.
The Multiple Problems of the Negotiations

With the range of historical interpretations covering decades of research, how can one reach a judgement on Versailles given its complexities? At this point it is worth taking the arguments of Alan Sharp as a point of departure,[52] not least of all as the actual conditions surrounding the negotiations in Paris need to be included in any assessment. Instead of making each of the statesmen from the Council of Four responsible for all the negative developments in later years, we need to remind ourselves of the political pressure which was mounting on all sides during the negotiations. To understand better the challenges facing the negotiators in Paris, the diverse problems can be divided into three broad categories. In the first instance, we can identify the "macrofactors" which severely complicated the negotiations. Second, there were "general factors" influencing the conference, such as time pressure, public opinion, and the more mundane, practical problems of diplomacy. Third, the "overlapping responsibilities" of different Allied commissions in the practical implementation of the treaty provisions require some consideration.

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range perspectives can also be found in Ronald Steel, Prologue: 1919 – 1945 – 1989, in Boemeke (see n. 44), pp. 21–34.

[51] Further, long-lasting clichés are analyzed in Willian R. Keylor, Versailles and International Diplomacy, in Boemeke (see n. 44), pp. 469–505.

[52] Sharp (see n. 49), passim.

What, then, were the "macrofactors" in the huge challenges faced by the peacemakers which stood in the way of a peace settlement and a new international order? Which macrofactors contributed significantly to the collapse of global security? Four macrofactors can, in fact, be seen to have played a central role and need to be taken into account in any final assessment of the negotiations in Paris.

The first macrofactor was the sheer scale of the geopolitical task facing the diplomats in Paris, not least of all because the Great War was the first truly global conflict.[53] Within the context of the founding of the League of Nations, as well as the formal ending of the war, the challenges of the peace talks can be viewed as revolving around five geographical areas:

1. Germany: The country was regarded as too large and economically powerful to escape some form of punishment. It was to lose some territories and pay reparations. But the consequences for its internal political stability presented one of the greatest challenges.
2. Austria-Hungary: The defeated empire was to be turned into a number of new national states. As a result, however, several ethnic minorities found themselves located in Poland, Czechoslovakia, not to mention the Croats, Serbs and Slovaks in southern Europe, and also minorities in Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania in the East.
3. Ottoman Empire: The collapse of the "sick man of Europe" saw another area which presented problems which were difficult to solve, including the non-Turkish territories in the near East, above all the British and French zones of interest in Arab lands. The continuing conflict between Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as between Greece and Turkey, likewise belonged to this geographical area.
4. Asia: The decision to hand to Japan German concessions in China, most notably in Shangdong Province, encouraged Japanese ambitions in East Asia, while at the same time provoking a wave of public outrage in China.
5. Africa: German colonies in Africa fell to Great Britain at the end of the war, despite the efforts of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, so that the status of some British dominions in international law became an important subject during the Versailles negotiations.

Particularly problematic was that the peace treaties covered Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, whereas the questions which affected Asia and Africa were the concern principally of Great Britain,

[53] An interesting overview of the war from this angle is Daniel Marc Segesser, Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive (Wiesbaden, 2010), and also Hew Strachan, The First World War as a Global War, First World War Studies, 1 (1) (2010), pp. 3–14.

France and Japan. Put another way: right at the moment of the establishment of the new world order, the contradiction between the expectations of three Great Powers and those of a new international organization became obvious to the world. The competing demands of several colonial powers, among them Portugal, Belgium and Italy, aggravated the already difficult tasks of the diplomats and state representatives.[54]

The second macrofactor at play during the peace negotiations was the challenge that Russia, an important member of the Entente during the war, did not sign the League of Nations Treaty. Here was a problem of immense significance.[55] While the victorious nations met in Paris, the situation in Russia was difficult to assess. In January 1919, the outcome of the Russian Civil War was by no means certain. As a result, the situation in the territory of the old Russian Empire presented the statesmen of Western Europe with an insoluble dilemma. The Soviet Union was not as yet a stable territorial state, so was unable to appear as a credible negotiating partner. Furthermore, "Bolshevism" was one of the greatest threats which hung over the conference in Paris. Although for German politicians this appeared to be a useful card to play, the threat itself was by no means an exaggeration. On the 21 March 1919, Béla Kun proclaimed the founding of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The popular support he received was without doubt the result of the territorial losses which threatened to overtake Hungary. While this revolution lasted only a short time, it was interpreted in Paris as a warning of the real threat posed by potential Bolshevik revolutions.[56]

The "Bolshevik threat" limited the Allies' room for diplomatic manoeuvre in Paris because so many problems were intertwined with one another. Following the first appeal for assistance in January to the Western Allies from the White Russian armies, General Anton Denikin and Admiral Alexander Kolchak were supported with military aid to fight Trotsky's Red Army; at the same time, they had to take into account the sensi-

[54] For the role of these three powers at the Peace Conference: José Medeiros Ferreira, Portugal na Conferência da Paz, Paris, 1919 (Lisbon, 1992); Sally Marks, Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981); and, James Burgwyn, Legend of the Mutilated Victory: Italy, the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference, 1915–1919 (Westport, CT, 1993).

[55] While Russia was not officially recognized at the conference, Russian diplomats were present in Paris in 1919. Representatives of the Provisional Government's diplomatic missions had organized a Conference of Ambassadors in Paris in the absence of the recognition of the Bolshevik Government and the White forces. This became the Russian Political Conference, an attempt to create an international, anti-Bolshevik front. This group largely feigned a liberal attitude, but nonetheless did have some contact with Allied representatives. Mayer (see n. 38), pp. 288–292, 432–4, 483–7.

[56] Considerable detail on this is provided in Mayer (see n. 38), pp. 521–603, 716–812.

tivities of the Poles and the Rumanians, who were afraid of the position of power held by Denikin; this challenge was still a concern at the end of 1919.[57] In October 1919, the situation for the Russian North West Army was assessed as "critical" by the British Foreign Office as the Baltic states had entered into peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks.[58] During the negotiations in the Council of Four as to how Germany should be handled, the danger of rising sympathy for Communism was a factor in many of the meetings. Lord Robert Cecil supported the argument for an early entry of Germany into the League of Nations with the claim that it would be popular with the neutral states in Europe and would be a blow against the Bolsheviks.[59] The close connection between the events in Russia with the negotiations in Paris led to mounting pressure to conclude the treaty with Germany.

A third macrofactor was the fact that the United States found itself outside the Versailles system once the US Senate refused to support Wilson's League of Nations. The President had pursued three goals: in the first instance, his "Fourteen Points" was a response to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917; he also wished to break the old culture of secret diplomacy, which he saw as the main reason for the outbreak of the war; at the same time, he wished to breathe new life into world trade. But there also appears to be little doubt that Wilson had underestimated the number of challenges he would have to face in the domestic political arena. There were some warning signs that the American public felt little enthusiasm for the League. When Wilson returned to Washington in June 1919, he did not take the advice to meet the Senate in a conciliatory spirit. Instead, the President irritated some of the senators, although a majority were not initially against accepting the League of Nations, rather they sought one or two assurances and some changes. Unfortunately for Wilson, three different elements came together at the same time. First, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge used the League controversy in order to damage Wilson on

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[57] See, for instance, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (TNA), FO 608/267/5, fol. 64–66, Earl Curzon to Arthur Balfour with a message from Russia of 22 January 1919, 1 February 1919, FO 608/208/1, fol. 1, Peace Congress. Russia. Operations General Denikin, note by E. H. Carr, 1. November 1919, and fol. 2, memorandum, General Sackville-West, Military Section, 5 November 1919. See also Mayer (see n. 38), pp. 813–826.

[58] TNA, FO 608/201/1, fol. 3, SECRET, B. B. Cubitt (War Office) to Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Office), 7 October 1919, fol. 4., General Staff, Disposal of Russian North West Army in the Event of the Baltic States making Peace with the Bolsheviks, 3 October 1919.

[59] TNA, FO 608/241/20, fol. 82–83, SECRET. British Empire Delegation, The League of Nations and the German Counter-Proposals. Memorandum circulated by Lord Robert Cecil, Paris, 3 June 1919.

the domestic political front. Second, Wilson became severely ill on 25 September 1919, so he was unable to exert any political influence throughout October. Third, irrational fears and weak leadership on the part of the Democrats conspired to influence the final vote in a negative fashion. Hence, when the United States Senate voted on 19 November 1919 to reject the Versailles Treaty, this was the outcome of these three political factors. This defeat had been, in fact, entirely avoidable.[60]

As a result, the hostilities between the United States and Germany were not formally ended in 1919. This did not occur until 25 August 1921,[61] an agreement which was ratified by both sides on 11 November 1921. The American opposition to the League of Nations was thus confirmed through this treaty and, as a consequence, the League was weakened at the beginning of the 1920s and, ultimately, undermined. The fact that the United States had turned its back on the League had further consequences. In Paris, the British representatives had offered Wilson their cooperation. The US President had not been very interested. The collapse of his project in the Senate caused considerable problems for Great Britain's "imperial strategy" and, as George Egerton has argued, it led to a defeat of their strategy at the Paris peace conference.[62]

The fourth macrofactor was without doubt the capitulation of the Big Three to Japan in relation to the German concession in Shandong. The Chinese delegation had travelled to Versailles with high hopes, not least of all due to the 140,000 Chinese workers who had served in the British and French armies during the war.[63] After the establishment by Western

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[60] Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr., and Nelson Manfred Blake, Since 1900: A History of the United States in Our Time. Fourth Edition (New York, 1965), pp. 239–263; Samuel Elliot Morison, The Oxford History of the American People (New York, 1965), pp. 873–887; Ralph A. Stone, The Irreconcilables: The Fight against the League of Nations (Lexington, KY, 1970). See also the telegram from the British Embassy in Washington to the Foreign Office in June, noting: "General public though they would not face a rejection of League or Treaty feel little enthusiasm and display a good deal of impatience over delays of Paris Conference whose difficulties they are entirely unable to appreciate." TNA, FO 608/175/3, fol. 11, Telegram No. 1021, Mr Barclay (Washington) to Foreign Office, London, 9 June 1919.

[61] A Treaty between the United States and Germany, signed on August 25, 1921, to Restore Friendly Relations Existing between the Two Nation Prior to the Outbreak of War. Text can be found online at https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/US_Peace_Treaty_with_Germany.

[62] George W. Edgerton, Britain and the "Great Betrayal": Anglo-American Relations and the Struggle for United States Ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919–1920, Historical Journal, 21 (4) (1978), pp. 885–911.

[63] A detailed treatment of this subject is Guoqi Xu, Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War (Cambridge, MA, 2011), and also Gregory James, The Chinese Labour Corps (1916–1920) (Hong Kong, 2013).

states of concessions in Tianjin, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion, China had been hoping for at the very least a return of the German concession around Qingdao. But the conference decided that before the founding of the League of Nations it would be expedient if the German colonies were divided up between the five victorious powers. On 6 May 1919, Wilson agreed in the absence of the Italians that whoever had occupied a territory at the end of the war would retain it. Among the reasons for the capitulation to the Japanese was, in part, related to the course of the negotiations up to that point as Wilson found himself under pressure from the Italians over Fiume. He could not afford an interruption of negotiations caused by Japan leaving the table. Strategic calculations strongly influenced the British position. Yet, while Africa was to experience a form of continued colonialism, the consequences for the future of the League were graver in Asia, most notably in the case of the German concession around Kiautschou Bay, around 552 sq.km.[64]

The outrage in China was immediate: demonstrations by students in Beijing turned quickly into the "Fourth of May Movement", in essence the beginnings of modern Chinese nationalism. China's representatives in Paris refused to sign the treaty document and called for the abolishment of all extraterritorial rights for foreign powers on Chinese soil. They demanded that Japan's twenty-one points of 8 January 1915 be declared null-and-void and that Qingdao be returned to China. Thus, just as China threatened to disintegrate on account of "Warlordism", nationalism became the only factor capable of uniting the country.[65] In this way, the Versailles System was discredited right from the start in Asia: on the one hand because a weakened China was not supported, on the other hand because the Western Powers appeared to be openly tolerating the foreign policy of an expansionist Japan (the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was still in existence when the Versailles Treaty was signed). Was this clear evidence that the Great Powers – completely contrary to the principles of the League – still had the right to moderate international politics? After China had refused to sign the treaty, she concluded a bilateral agreement with Germany. While pressure exerted by the United States

[64] Sharp (see n. 28), pp. 163–165. See also Gotelind Müller, Versailles and the Fate of Chinese Internationalism: Reassessing the Anarchist Case, in Urs Mathias Zachmann (ed.), Asia after Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order 1919–1933 (Edinburgh, 2017), pp. 197–211.

[65] Immanuel C. Hsü, The Rise of Modern China. Third Edition (Oxford, New York, Melbourne, 1983), pp. 501–505; Benjamin I. Schwartz, Themes in Intellectual History: May Fourth and After, in John K. Fairbank (ed.), The Cambridge History of China. Volume 12: Republican China 1912–1949, Part I (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 406–450.

restored the full sovereignty of Shandong as part of China in 1922, the damage to the international security system had already been done.[66]

In addition to the macrofactors, let us consider briefly some of general influences on the negotiations and the often ignored daily challenges in Paris. The first problem with which the diplomats were confronted was the catastrophic food situation in Europe. Lord Robert Cecil, a key figure in the British delegation, noted in his diary, a day after his arrival in Paris, that the food situation was "acute", and that this might lead to tensions with the United States. Following a meeting between Cecil and Hoover, the latter explained that the question of nutrition in Germany was the key to the political situation.[67] On 20 January, in a telegram from General Maxime Weygand, it was reported that the Inter-Allied Supply Council was delivering food stuffs to Danzig in order to alleviate the critical situation in Poland.[68]

For the Allied representatives in Paris, some of their difficulties, quickly forgotten after the conference, were closely related to the remaining formations of German troops. One of the most important matters to be dealt with was to decide upon the conditions for the disarmament of Germany. These military problems were of considerable consequence. During the first meeting of the Sub-Committee on Limitation of Armaments, General Weygand (France), Major-General Thwaites (Great Britain) and Brigadier-General Nolan (USA) attempted to estimate the quantity of weapons still in German hands. Thwaites observed that, according to his estimate, over a million rifles, 50,000 machine-guns, and 12,000 artillery pieces were still in the possession of German units. Nolan estimated the number of aircraft held by the Germans as 633 machines. According to Weygand, the Allied governments wanted to demobilize their own armies as quickly as possible, but this step could not be undertaken as long as Germany still possessed a certain level of combat potential. The main problem appeared to be the German divisions which were intact in Eastern Europe. As of 6 January 1919, 18 German divisions were still stationed in Russia and Poland.[69]

Allied officers identified in February a number of breaches of the conditions of the armistice. Soldiers from Alsace-Lorraine had still not been repatriated three months after the cessation of hostilities. German troops

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[66] Conze (see n. 1), pp. 323–340; Bruce A. Elleman, Wilson and China. A Revisited History of the Shandong Question (Armonk, NY, 2002).

[67] BL, Cecil Diary (see n. 3), entries, 7 and 11 January 1919.

[68] TNA, FO 608/249/1, fol. 23, Telegram. Field-Marshal Weygand to General Nudant, President, Inter-Allied Armistice Commission, 20 January 1919.

[69] TNA, FO 608/267/38, fol. 183–187, SECRET. First Meeting of Military Expert Sub-Committee on Limitation of Armaments, 29 January 1919.

in the Ukraine had hindered Polish troops who were trying to conduct anti-Bolshevik actions. The German government had, further, refused to follow the directions of the Allies. It was reported that the Germans had even negotiated a secret agreement with the Ukraine, against the conditions of the ceasefire. Among the other breaches of the Allied conditions of 11 November 1918 were the breaking-up of some U-Boats instead of handing them over to the Allies. Although the German representatives were able to conjure up several explanations, the British and French were extremely distrustful.[70]

In order to compel the German government to comply, the Allied subcommittee proposed a range of economic and military measures. One option was to refuse the delivery of foodstuffs to Germany. The Allied Supreme War Council recommended the reduction of German formations to 25 divisions in total, as well as a regulation of the situation in eastern Germany, in particular in relation to Poland. In the case of German non-compliance, the sea blockade would have to be reintroduced, furthermore "unlimited measures" would be employed by the Allied High Command.[71] The Allies did have the means to occupy Germany, but wanted to avoid taking such a step at all costs. On the basis of the files of various Allied military committees, it can be concluded that the problem of the estimation of the number of German divisions, and the weapons still available, had to be taken into account during the negotiations in Paris. What can be seen here is that enormous pressure was building on the diplomats to reach an agreement with Germany before the food situation worsened, or further military action became necessary.

A further aspect of the challenges facing the negotiators was the simple daily difficulties created by an improvised bureaucracy, often based in hotel rooms. These difficulties may have been banal, yet they exerted their own influence over the negotiations. Robert Cecil noted in his diary in early January, that "owing to the incredible incompetence of somebody none of our League of Nations papers have yet arrived."[72] The problem of the timely delivery of messages to participants was mentioned by the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff in a letter in April. According to General Sir Henry Wilson, "as Paris lives from day to day, not to mention the nights, one never knows when writing a letter that one won't walk

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[70] TNA, FO 608/249/1, fol. 5–17, Peace Congress (Military) 1919, Secret. Conclusions of Committee Assembled in accordance with the Decision of Supreme War Council on 10th February, 1919.

[71] TNA, FO 608/249/1, fol. 13–22, Conclusions of Committee, 10 February 1919, Annex II. Means of Enforcing Compliance.

[72] BL, Cecil Diary (see n. 3), entry, 9 January 1919.

into the room of the man to whom the letter is addressed before the letter is delivered."[73]

When it came to the huge task of the drawing of new borders, a further problem was the dearth of accurate maps. As one British geographer noted, shortly after the publication of the Versailles Treaty, on the four maps which appeared as part of the treaty document, the place names were plagued by spelling errors. Moreover, the geographical advisers to the delegates in Paris had had to describe physical areas in words. He also found it curious that the words "boundary" and "frontier" had been used as synonyms, although boundary meant a clear line, whereas frontier implied the territory adjacent to the line. In the case of imprecision between the maps and the text, the latter was taken as the final word. The geographer criticized the fact that the drawing of the new borders in the treaty was based almost exclusively on nationalities instead of physical, geographical features, adding that the use of maps would have been clearer than the descriptions in the text of the treaty.[74] Although the British and French delegations had the support of military cartographers, this defect was a further by-product of the time pressure under which the creation of the treaty document laboured. Eckart Conze has written of "a genuine battle of the maps".[75]

Alongside the practical difficulties, one should not forget either the mutual distrust which coloured relations in the delegations of the Big Three, their personal preferences and antipathies towards other diplomats and bureaucrats, as well as the intercultural misunderstandings which were reinforced during the course of the negotiations and social events. Numerous representatives of the great powers regularly offended their opposite numbers. The British diplomat Robert Cecil, who took the lead in questions relating to the League of Nations, and who described himself as "a kind of hybrid between a minister and an official",[76] expressed in his diary his distrust of the American Bernard Baruch with whom he had dined on 25 February. Cecil suspected that Baruch wanted to awaken the impression of a selfless observer, although his proposals

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[73] Henry Wilson to Major-General Sir Charles Harington, Paris, 8 April 1919, reproduced in Keith Jeffrey (ed.), The Military Correspondence of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson 1918–1922 (London, 1985), p. 96.

[74] "A.R.H.", Boundary Delimitations in the Treaty of Versailles, The Geographical Journal, 54 (August 1919), pp. 103–111. The four maps were inserted as appendices at the end of the document. See Treaty of Peace between the Allied and the Associated Powers and Germany and Protocol. Signed at Versailles, June 28th, 1919 (London: HMSO, 1919).

[75] Conze (see n. 1), p. 421; and, he comments further, "Mit ihrem eigenem Kartenmaterial waren die Hauptmächte im 'Rat der Vier' überfordert."

[76] BL, Cecil Diary (see n. 3), entry, 29 January 1919.

could not have meant anything other than the global dominance of trade by the United States. But he could not decide whether the profuse compliments of Baruch were merely an example of the "American style" of communication.[77] The British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour, for his part, wrote down his thoughts about the peculiarities of French diplomacy during the discussions on Syria. He felt that the misunderstandings on such questions usually had the same cause: "namely a very clear comprehension by each party of the strength of his own case, combined with a very imperfect knowledge of, or sympathy with, the case of his opponent."[78] When it came to the French attitudes towards the Americans, Cecil noted some anecdotes in his diary which illustrated the French contempt for the bad manners of the Americans. Yet, at the same time, he thought that the French were the worst diplomats in Europe, who were systematically destroying the remaining sympathies of their American counterparts.[79]

These examples of the role of the intense pressure of time and the mundane problems of diplomacy could certainly be added to. They are intended to illustrate how reaching agreement on a peace settlement faced numerous obstacles. As a third area in the challenge of enacting the process of peace-making, the competing responsibilities of the various Allied committees and organisations is likewise significant. Based on Articles 203–210 of the Versailles Treaty, the creation of an Inter-Allied Military Commission of Control was specified, so that the implementation of the peace could be monitored. There was also the Naval Inter-Allied Commission of Control and the Aeronautical Inter-Allied Commission of Control. In addition, the treaty laid down the creation of an Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission (Articles 428–432) to oversee the occupation of the Rhineland. With its Headquarters in Koblenz, this body commenced its work on 10 January 1920. While representatives of the United States did not belong to the military control commissions, two Americans were members of the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission.[80]

These organizations were subordinated to a higher command level. On 7 November 1917, on the initiative of Lloyd George, the Allied Supreme War Council had been created in an attempt to exert greater civilian control over the conduct of the war. At the beginning, Great Britain, France and Italy were represented, later also the United States and Japan. Fol-

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[77] BL, Cecil Diary (see n. 3), entry, 25 February 1919.

[78] BL, Sir Arthur Balfour Papers, Add.Mss. 49752, fol. 151, memorandum on the Syrian Question, 11 August 1919.

[79] BL, Cecil Diary (see n. 3), entries, 22 January and 14 February 1919.

[80] Treaty of Peace (see n. 74), Part V, Section IV, Art. 203–210, Part XIV, Section I, Art. 428–432.

lowing the cessation of hostilities, the Supreme War Council continued to function, bringing the Supreme Economic Council into existence on 8 February 1919. The fact that an additional body, the Allied Superior Blockade Council was entrusted with the continued sea blockade of the Central Powers and Soviet Russia highlighted the fact that the war, up to a point, was being continued.[81] At the end of March 1919, the Council of Four began to meet because the Council of Ten had proved to be too unwieldy. The Council of Five was subordinated to the Council of Four. Following the German signing of the Versailles Treaty, the Council of Five was turned into the "Council of the Heads of Delegation", in other words a committee for the representatives of the five Allied Powers – Great Britain, France, the USA, Japan and Italy. At the same moment, the Council of Four was dissolved. The expectation was that a Commission would manage the implementation of the treaty. Thus, in January 1920, the "Conference of Ambassadors of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers" (Great Britain, Italy, Japan, France, with the US Ambassador in Paris as an observer) was founded as the successor organization to the "Council of the Heads of Delegation". This institution was to be responsible for the disarmament of Germany, although Great Britain and France were not in agreement with this approach.[82]

The Kapp Putsch in March 1920 revealed for the first time the problems of the overlap in responsibilities of the League of Nations and the organs for the occupation of Germany. While the Ambassadors Conference sat in Paris, the Supreme Council continued to meet in London; and, there was also the "Council of Ministers and Ambassadors", which met in London between 12 February and 10 April 1920. All three bodies could not decide who was responsible for Germany's security. France undertook the occupation of five German towns on 5/6 April 1920. Lord Cecil argued that the appearance of German troops in forbidden zones was a matter which should be placed in the hands of the League of Nations. The following year, Great Britain and France rejected the proposal that the League should replace the "Inter-Allied Military Mission of Control" as the organization responsible for the disarmament of Germany. One reason was Lloyd George's belief that international problems were better solved through conference diplomacy, while France always wanted to maintain a veto when it came to the monitoring of Germany. Put in simple terms, at the beginning of the implementation of the peace settlement

[81] Elizabeth Greenhalgh, Supreme War Council, 1914–1918-online, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10886; David F. Trask, The United States in the Supreme War Council. American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917–1918 (Middletown, CT, 1961).
[82] MacMillan (see n. 5), pp. 61–65; Stevenson (see n. 7), pp. 236–244.

confusion reigned between several Allied committees, as well as a rejection by Great Britain and France of some of the functions of the League as laid down in the Treaty of Versailles. If the League of Nations was to have been given a chance to work effectively, the disarmament of Germany would have been the perfect opportunity both to test and establish its authority. But the treaty itself had been the result of a compromise between Great Britain, France and the United States – and the Americans were no longer officially represented. The new organization for the securing of the peace had been developed on the back of an improvised treaty.[83]

To draw these arguments together, it can thus be argued that at least three different types of challenges hindered, at least in part, the creation of a lasting peace settlement. The Big Three cannot, however, be held responsible for the events in Russia. Moreover, nor can the British and French in Paris, and also the Italians, be held responsible for the fact that the US Senate torpedoed Woodrow Wilson's blueprint for the League of Nations. Given the political pressure at the time, the scale of the task, at least four "macrofactors", as well as the sheer number of conference participants and their demands, it is possible to agree with Ruth Henig's argument that what was achieved in Paris was, despite the difficulties, nonetheless impressive.[84] When one takes account of the political, physical and economic circumstances, the final result was no more than could have been expected under the prevailing conditions of the time.

4.
Chaos Theory and the International System: A New Perspective on the Versailles Treaty

While the diplomats and statesmen were meeting in Paris, the war and destruction were by no means over. The violence continued to rage. In order to reach a judgement on the achievements and mistakes in Paris, it must be asked to what extent the negotiations became a victim of a war which had not yet ended, or whether the conference in fact contributed to the spiral of chaos. In this context, the starting point for any assessment of the Versailles Treaty must be the fundamental question as to whether the

[83] Alan Sharp, The Enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919–1923, Diplomacy and Statecraft, 16 (2005), pp. 423–438.
[84] Ruth Henig, The League of Nations: An Idea before its Time? in McDonough (see n. 49), pp. 34–49.

Great War lasted from 1914 to 1918/19. Is it useful in support of this argument to propose an alternative periodization?

Some historians have argued that, if one views the First World War as a global conflict, then it cannot be considered as a war of national states but rather one of empires, hence – so the argument runs – the war broke out in 1911 and continued to 1923. The argument that the war lasted another four years after 1918 holds a certain logic when one recalls the following events: the Russian Civil War (1919–1922), the Soviet-Polish War (February-October 1920), the Irish Civil War (June 1922 to May 1923), the beginning of the occupation of the Ruhr (January 1923), not to mention the armed conflicts on the territory of the old Ottoman Empire, which were only ended after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923. The claim that the war broke out in 1911 is, though, much less convincing since the Italian invasion of Libya was a colonial action of which there were several in the decade before the outbreak of war.[85] Still, two geographical areas offer examples as to why it can be argued the war did not end in 1918, examples which are of relevance for the negotiations in Paris as Germany was heavily engaged in both these "Shatter Zones of Empire".

The most significant cases which illustrate the challenges of creating a peace settlement could be found in central Europe and Russia where uncontrolled violence raged without any chance of intervention by the League of Nations, or even the Western Allies. When it came to central Europe, as the latest research has shown, a transnational form of violent action emerged (including assassinations) through the politically motivated activities of paramilitary formations in Germany, Austria and Hungary. What recent historiography has demonstrated is that the "white terror" in central Europe was a coherent phenomenon in terms of its ideology, a demonstrable collaboration between different organizations, while its capacity for extremes of violence was as prevalent in Hungary as it was in Germany or Austria. The high numbers of members of the nobility at the leadership level in the *Freikorps* associations can be seen in all three countries, as can the hatred of Bolshevism and the Jews. The extent of the destructiveness acted as a strong destabilizing factor in *Mitteleuropa* and weakened the establishment of democratic societies.[86] These

[85] Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, The Great War as a Global War: Imperial Conflict and the Reconfiguration of World Order, 1911–1923, Diplomatic History, 38 (4) (2014), pp. 786–800. A further justification for the argument that the war broke out earlier than July 1914, i. e. the Balkan Wars (1912–13), is likewise unconvincing as they were ended through the peace treaty of Bucharest of 10 August 1913.

[86] Robert Gerwarth, The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary, Past and Present, 200 (2008), pp. 175–209; T. Hunt Tooley, National Identity and Weimar Germany: Upper Silesia and the Eastern Border,

excesses of murderous behaviour could only have been dampened by alternative peace treaties, but would have been unlikely to have been halted.

In the Soviet Union, the almost unlimited violence was even stronger than in central Europe. The Russian Revolution had unleashed virtual anarchy, while, in addition, several independence movements had sprung up. The Baltic states, the Ukraine and Central Asia were regions where various full-blown wars continued until 1923. Violence was perpetrated by the German *Freikorps*, the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and their opponents. The establishment of new independent states – Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland – unnerved the Soviet leadership. The intervention of, among others, British, French, American, Rumanian, Canadian, Italian, Greek, Estonian and Japanese troops in the Russian Civil War increased their suspicion of Western governments. It is telling that in a Bolshevik propaganda poster from 1920, entitled "The League of Nations", France, the United States and Great Britain are depicted as three overweight, elderly gentlemen, wearing top hats, smoking cigars, whose bodies are made out of sacks of money.[87] Even if the USSR did, eventually, join the League of Nations in 1934, peace only settled in the East once the dying through war, hunger and terror had been brought under control, or had petered out due to general exhaustion. In the case of Soviet Russia, as the successor state to the Russian Empire, peace only came in 1923 – and, without the slightest involvement of the League.[88]

These two examples suggest that the proposition that the First World War lasted from 1914 to 1923 is convincing, not least of all as it dovetails with the now extensive literature on "Shatter Zones".[89] This said, it was

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1918–1922 (Lincoln, NE, 1997); R. G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Freecorps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923 (New York, 1970); B. Bodo, Paramilitary Violence in Hungary after the First World War, East European Quarterly, 38 (2) (2004), pp. 129–173.

[87] Plate 21, in Mikhail Guerman (compiler), Art of the October Revolution (London, 1979), no pagination.

[88] On this, see: Steve A. Smith, Violence in the Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1914–20: A Survey of Recent Historiography, in Łukasz Adamski and Bartłomiej Gajos (eds.), Circles of the Russian Revolution: Internal and International Consequences of the Year 1917 in Russia (London, 2019), pp. 25–39; A. V. Prusin, Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914–1920 (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005); F. Schnell, Räume des Schreckens. Gewalträume und Gruppenmilitanz in der Ukraine, 1905–1933 (Hamburg, 2012); J. Sanborn, The Genesis of Russian Warlordism: Violence and Governance during the First World War and the Civil War, Contemporary European History, 19 (3) (2010), pp. 195–213.

[89] See, for instance, Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (eds.), Shatterzone of Empire: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands (Bloomington, IN, 2013). Further works deserving of mention are: Jochen Böhler, Endur-

not only the spreading violence which accompanied the implementation of the new peace settlement from 1919 to 1923, but also a wave of other global crises which caused additional problems. Among these, one can identify the Spanish influenza epidemic, workers strikes and rebellions, and new political movements. Economic problems could be observed in Asia more so than Europe, and help explain the vehemence of the "Fourth of May Movement" in China, which was not only an expression of frustration with the Versailles Treaty but also a result of rising social tensions.[90] The appearance of strong and sudden undercurrents in the world economic system in the years 1919–23 saw world statesmen confronted with more uncontrollable global shocks than ever before. How can one interpret these four turbulent years within the context of the peace treaties without resorting to theories of globalization? One way is to apply chaos theory to the situation facing the negotiators in Paris.

Chaos theory has been employed mainly in applied mathematics, meteorology, climate research, physics, biology, engineering and philosophy. The theory is concerned in the first instance with "systems" which have predictable outcomes, but which over longer periods of time create final results which become increasingly harder to predict. The basis of the theory is that when "complex systems" are dependent upon sensitive initial conditions, the repetition of experiments can lead to dramatically different measurements, i. e. results can vary considerably. Chaotic behaviour within complex systems can only appear where experiments concern nonlinear systems. One of the most important principles of chaos theory teaches that the smallest differences can have huge consequences. Furthermore, the concept of "bifurcation" is of interest: sudden changes in the behaviour of a particular system can appear when one parameter varies constantly.[91] Of additional interest is also the phenomenon of "strange attractors" which is based on the observation that, despite irregular reac-

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ing Violence: The Postwar Struggles in East-Central Europe, 1917–21, Journal of Contemporary History, 50 (January 2015), pp. 58–77; Peter Gatrell, War after War: Conflicts, 1919–23, in Horne (see n. 7), pp. 558–575; C. Mick, Vielerlei Kriege. Osteuropa 1918–1921, in D. Beyrau, M. Hochgeschwender and D. Langewiesche (eds.), Formen des Krieges: Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart (Paderborn, 2007), pp. 311–326; V. G. Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I (Cambridge, 2000).

[90] Mark Metzler, The Correlation of Crises, 1918–1920, in Zachmann (see n. 64), pp. 23–54.

[91] Leonard Smith, Chaos: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford, 2007); David P. Feldman, Chaos and Dynamical Systems (Princeton, NJ, 2019); Paul Glendinning, Stability, Instability and Chaos (Cambridge, 1994). Historians have, thus far, paid little attention to chaos theory. A rare exception is Bernd-Olaf Küppers, Chaos und Geschichte – Läßt sich das Weltgeschehen in Formeln fassen?, in Reinhard Breuer (ed.), Wir in unserer Welt. Der

tions within a system, some typical forms of behaviour repeat themselves.[92]

Even if one examines chaos theory only in a superficial fashion, there are more than a few hypotheses which can provide some inspiration for any attempt to interpret the peace settlement in the period 1919–23. If applied to the international system after 1918, we can take chaos theory as a point of departure to postulate the following two hypotheses: first, the more conflicting factors which were present in the international system, the harder it was to predict future developments; second, due to the prevailing violent conflicts at the time of the peace conference, it was entirely reasonable for the Council of Four to seek to introduce a dual system. This dual system meant that: on the one hand, the Great Powers would guarantee continuity in the international system (even if this implied a continuation of colonialism); on the other, a new world order could only be introduced gradually with the support of the Great Powers.

If one focuses on the five geographical areas which were most significant during the peace negotiations, Germany, Austria-Hungary and the former Ottoman Empire represented urgent challenges. As the violence in these zones could not be kept under control, it was a priority that the peace settlement be drafted and signed quickly. Asia and Africa were considered to involve longer term issues which in Paris became victims of the "pragmatic solutions" of *Realpolitik.* In the newly created world system, it is possible to speak of at least five "sub-systems", to adapt the language of chaos theory for a moment. These each required their own individual solutions. The "follow-on treaties" did at least attempt to find solutions to Europe's problems. But the global difficulties which were caused by each of the five sub-systems, not to mention their interaction with one another, presented the peacemakers with challenges which were virtually impossible to overcome. Statesmen were confronted with an entirely new, globalized world, which was both politically and economically extremely volatile within each of its sub-systems. Against this background, the necessity for immediate, pragmatic solutions in Paris in 1919 becomes much more understandable.

Flügelschlag des Schmetterlings: Ein neues Weltbild durch die Chaosforschung (Herne, 1993), pp. 69–95.

[92] Smith (see n. 91), pp. 84–85, 168; David Ruelle, Chance and Chaos (Princeton, NJ, 1991); idem, Elements of Differentiable Dynamics and Bifurcation Theory (New York, 1989).

5. Concluding Thoughts

In summary, is it possible to reach an assessment of the Versailles Treaty which is different from its popular characterization as a "failed peace settlement"? What can be noted is that few historians have sought to consider whether no peace treaty – or another form of peace settlement – could have stopped the bloodshed and violence in eastern and southern Europe. The continual interaction between the different levels of transnational activities, tensions and inter-state relations in the new international order represented something completely new: for the first time, a global international system. The first flaw in the system was the absence of Germany from the League of Nations. This was certainly a compromise made to satisfy the elements of *Realpolitik* necessary for the completion of the treaty: a demand from one of the Great Powers to include Germany in the League would have caused the negotiations to fail. But it could, nonetheless, not be denied that the League introduced very progressive ideas into the international system, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), whose first conference took place in Washington DC between October and December 1919.[93] International cooperation in other fields was not so successful; the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1932, for instance, has been considered to have been only of limited value. Yet, the ILO continues to this day as part of the United Nations, suggesting that some of the ideas introduced at the Paris peace conference took several decades before they bore fruit.[94] Did, then, the League of Nations ever have a chance of succeeding?

In order to create a stable international order, at least along the lines of the concepts underpinning the League, the treaties would have had to have fulfilled two conditions: first, the United States would have needed to have ratified the Versailles Treaty, or would at least have had to support a less ambitious version of the League of Nations; second, as Russia was absent from the negotiations in Paris,[95] the League project would

[93] On the history and development of the ILO: A. Alcock, A History of the International Labour Organization (London, 1971); David Morse, The Origin and Evolution of the ILO and its Role in the World (Ithaca, NY, 1969); and, G. A. Johnston, The International Labour Organization: Its Work for Economic and Social Progress (London, 1970).

[94] For a defence of the performance of the League of Nations, at least until 1933, see Antoine Fleury, The League of Nations: Towards a New Appreciation of Its History, in Boemeke (see n. 44), pp. 507–522.

[95] A quite deliberate decision was made to include Russia only where it affected Germany. A member of the British delegation commented in November 1919 that whenever

have had to have been postponed until the situation in the country had stabilized and the Soviet leadership persuaded to come to the negotiating table. The second condition was very unlikely to have been realized, although the first condition might have been possible had events unfolded differently in Washington. Still, a peace based solely on the old diplomacy of the European Great Powers was also barely imaginable in 1919. The role of the British Dominions in Paris showed this very clearly. When one reflects, therefore, on the problem of peace in 1919 one searches in vain for alternative outcomes or solutions.

One of the most frequent accusations levelled against the diplomats in Paris in 1919 in the first phase of the post-1945 historiography was that the internal political tensions in Germany were not recognized, hence the country had a "revenge peace" imposed upon it. The result was, as Conze rightly observes, that "the Versailles Treaty hindered the young democracy to such an extent that the rejection of the peace treaty became a form of destructive minimal consensus which unified nearly all political positions".[96] One must, however, differentiate here. It is not true that the diplomats of the Allied Powers were not informed of the domestic political instability inside Germany. The documents of the negotiations show very clearly that they were well aware of the situation.[97] While they decided to make pragmatic decisions, they also had to take into account public opinion in Great Britain and France. The decisions they made were by no means fatal in their consequences. The miscalculation which did seriously damage the Weimar Republic was the move to undertake the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923.[98] But it should be emphasized that, in the early 1920s, the peace had by no means been irrevocably lost.

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the situation in Russia had come before the conference, "it has always created difficulties." He also noted that it was "deliberate and intentional" to deal with Russian affairs outside the conference. TNA, FO 608/208/1, fol. 17–20, British Delegation Paris to Hardinge, 15 November 1919.

[96] Conze (see n. 1), p. 11. The original German reads, "dass der Versailler Vertrag … die junge Demokratie schwer belastete, [sodass] die Ablehnung dieses Friedensvertrages wie eine Art zerstörerischer Minimalkonsens nahezu alle politische Richtungen verband".

[97] See, for instance, TNA, FO 608/229/19, fol. 359–364, Peace Congress. Foreign Office, Curzon to Arthur Balfour (German Protest), 4 February 1919, FO 608/241/8, fol. 66–71, George Lansbury to Robert Cecil, 7 February 1919, fol. 78–80, Cecil to the Prime Minister, 10 March 1919.

[98] See here: Robert McCrum, Rhineland Policy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Historical Journal, 21 (September 1978), pp. 623–648; Stephen A. Schuker, The Rhineland Question: West European Security at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, in Boemeke (see n. 44), pp. 275–312; and, Henning Köhler, Novemberrevolution und Frankreich. Die französische Deutschlandpolitik 1918–1919 (Düsseldorf, 1980).

Where one can identify an obvious error in Paris was in the unequal treatment of Japan and China. One explanation is that the problems in Europe lay at the centre of the negotiations, while at the same time the diplomats knew far less about Japan than they did Germany. Yet, the attempt to consider Japan as comparable to the European Great Powers was a serious mistake because the League of Nations had far fewer opportunities to intervene in Asia. It was Japan which was the first nation to undertake aggressive steps which seriously damaged the credibility of the League. Moreover, the ideology of Japanese militarism in the 1930s had more in common with Fascism than it did with the militarism in Europe before the First World War.[99] And, it was Japan's aggression which combined with that of Italy's to create closely linked, decisive defeats for the League in the first half of the 1930s.

To conclude, therefore, the following assertions can be made. The goal in Paris in 1919 needed to be the stabilization of the situation in central Europe and the foundation of a European peace settlement rather than a global security system. By applying the insights of chaos theory to international politics in 1919, however, it becomes easier to understand why the statesmen reached the decisions which became the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. Still, on the basis of chaos theory, one could fall into the trap of asserting that the League mistakenly assisted in the creation of too many smaller states in Europe. Just like many other decisions made in relation to Europe in the 1920s, though, these were not fatal errors. It was the interrelationship between developments in Soviet Russia, Germany, Italy and Japan which finally destroyed peace in Europe in the 1930s. But this final outcome cannot – and should not – be presented as the fault of the statesmen who met at the negotiating table in Paris in 1919.

[99] Treaty of Peace (see n. 74), Part IV: German Rights and Interests outside Germany, Section II, Art. 128–134; John K. Fairbank & Albert Feuerwerker (eds.), The Cambridge History of China. Volume 13. Republican China 1912–1949, Part 2 (Cambridge, 1986), esp. Lloyd E. Eastman, China's International Relations, 1911–1931, pp. 74–115, and Akira Iriye, Japan's Aggression and China's International Position, pp. 492–546.