

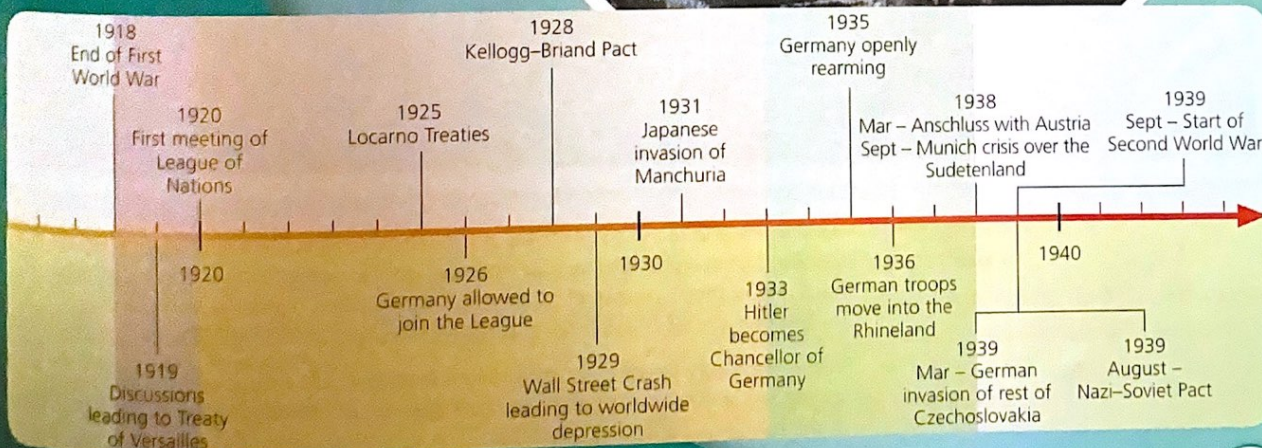
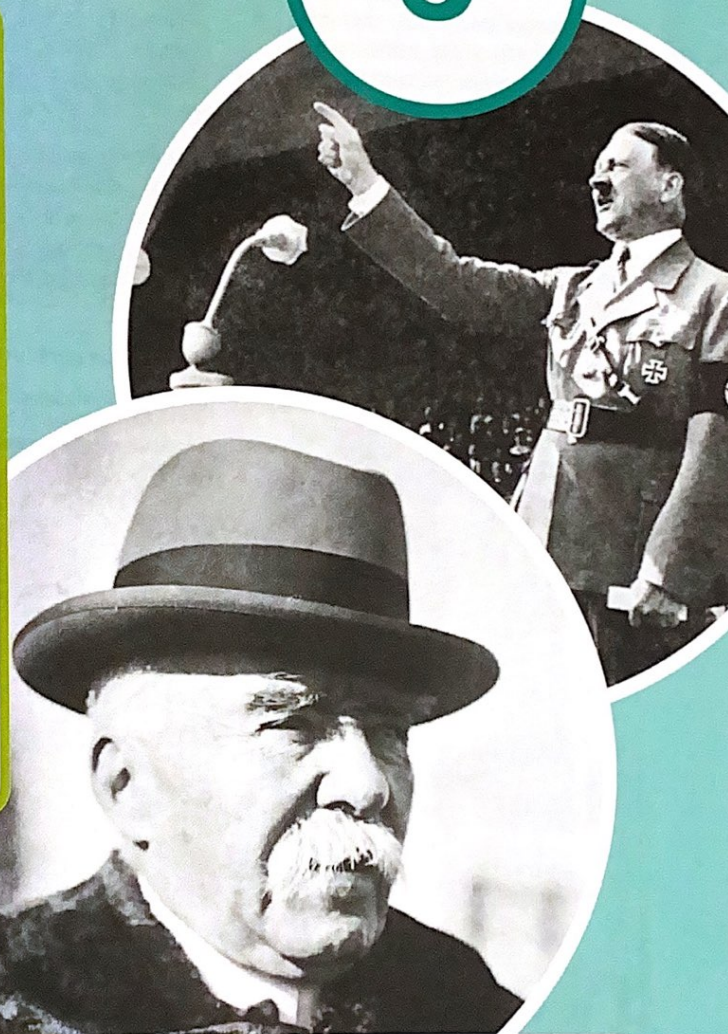
Conflict and Tension, 1918–1939

6

This wider world study is concerned with understanding the complex and diverse interests of different individuals and states. It focuses on the peace settlements after the First World War, the optimistic hopes of the 1920s, and then the slide towards war in the 1930s. In its focus on the Second World War you will be studying how and why conflict occurred and why it proved difficult to resolve the issues which caused it. You will also be considering the role of key individuals and groups as well as how they were affected by and influenced international relations.

The topic is divided into three sections:

- Peacemaking, 1919 – the aims of the leaders, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the reactions to it.
- The formation of the League of Nations, its structure and membership. The peace of the 1920s, followed by the difficulties of the 1930s and the ultimate collapse of the League.
- The origins and outbreak of the Second World War.



6.1 Peacemaking, 1919

• The armistice

FOCUS

This section explores the peace settlement made at the end of the First World War. It explains how the leaders of the victorious countries came together to sort out how to deal with Germany and its allies. Germany had no say in the terms that the German representatives had to sign at Versailles.

In this section, you will be studying the following:

- The ARMISTICE and the aims of the Big Three.
- The nature and extent of the Versailles Settlement and the extent to which it satisfied the Big Three.
- The impact of the treaty and why Germans reacted so angrily towards it.

SOURCE 1

Allied soldiers and officials watch the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.



Source 1 was taken at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles at the Paris Peace Conference. It was a spectacular occasion and a momentous event. Months of hard negotiation, argument and compromise ended when the two German representatives who had been summoned to sign the Treaty did so on 28 June 1919.

When the treaty terms were announced the Germans complained that it was unfair. Many historians have criticised it since. To understand this, we need to look at the mood in 1919.

The aims of the peacemakers in 1919

When the leaders of Britain (Lloyd George), France (Clemenceau) and the USA (Wilson) arrived in Paris in January 1919 to draw up a treaty, they were already under pressure to deal severely with Germany. The people of the victorious countries, particularly in France and Britain, felt strongly that Germany was responsible for the war and should be punished.

There was also a strong feeling that Germany should pay for all the damage and destruction caused by the war. Apart from the USA, all of the countries that had fought in the war were exhausted. Their economies and their industries were in a bad state. Millions of young men had been killed or injured on both sides. Total British and French casualties, killed or injured, probably amounted to over 9 million. Ordinary civilians had faced shortages of food and medicine. Villages and towns in large areas of Belgium and France had been devastated. Illness and disease was commonplace.

As soon as the Paris Peace Conference began, there was disagreement about what the Conference was aiming to do:

- Some felt that the aim was to punish Germany.
- Others felt that the aim was to cripple Germany so that it could not start another war.
- Many felt that the point of the Conference was to reward the winning countries.
- Others believed that the aim of the Conference should be to establish a just and lasting peace.

President Wilson (USA)

Wilson has often been seen as an IDEALIST whose aim was to build a better and more peaceful world from the ruins of the Great War. This is partially true, but Wilson was not a politician who could be pushed around. He refused to cancel the debts owed to the USA by Britain and its Allies so that he could put pressure on them to accept his ideas. Wilson did believe that Germany should be punished. However, he also believed that the treaty with Germany should not be too harsh. His view was that if Germany was treated harshly, some day it would recover and want revenge. Wilson's main aim was to strengthen DEMOCRACY in the defeated nation so that its people would not let its leaders cause another war.

He believed that nations should co-operate to achieve world peace. In January 1918 he published his Fourteen Points to help achieve this. The most important for Wilson was the fourteenth. In this he proposed the setting up of an international body called the LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

He also believed in SELF-DETERMINATION (the idea that nations should rule themselves rather than be ruled by others). He wanted the different peoples of eastern Europe (for example, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks) to rule themselves rather than be part of Austria-Hungary's empire.

FACTFILE

The Paris Peace Conference, 1919–20

- The Conference took place in the Palace of Versailles (a short distance from Paris).
- Thirty-two nations were supposed to be represented, but no one from the defeated countries was invited.
- Five treaties were drawn up at the Conference. The main one was the Treaty of Versailles which dealt with Germany. The other treaties dealt with Germany's allies.
- The important decisions on Germany's fate were taken by the 'Big Three': Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson.
- The Big Three were supported by many diplomats and expert advisers, but they often ignored their advice.
- The Big Three got on badly from the start and relations between them got worse throughout the Conference.

SOURCE 2

President Wilson in 1918.

Sometimes people call me an idealist. Well that is the way I know I am an American ... America is the only idealist nation in the world.

THE FOURTEEN POINTS

- 1 No secret treaties.
- 2 Free access to the seas in peacetime or wartime.
- 3 Free trade between countries.
- 4 All countries to work towards DISARMAMENT.
- 5 Colonies to have a say in their own future.
- 6 German troops to leave Russia.
- 7 Independence for Belgium.
- 8 France to regain Alsace-Lorraine.
- 9 Frontier between Austria and Italy to be adjusted.
- 10 SELF-DETERMINATION for the peoples of eastern Europe (i.e. they should rule themselves).
- 11 Serbia to have access to the sea.
- 12 Self-determination for the people in the Turkish Empire.
- 13 Poland to become an independent state with access to the sea.
- 14 League of Nations to be set up.

PROFILE**Woodrow Wilson (President of the USA)****Background**

- Born in 1856.
- Became a university professor.
- First entered politics in 1910.
- Became president in 1912 and was re-elected in 1916.

Character

An idealist, and a reformer. As president, he had campaigned against corruption in politics and business. However, he had a poor record with regard to the rights of African Americans. He concentrated on keeping the USA out of the war. Once the USA had joined the war, he drew up the Fourteen Points as the basis for ending the war fairly, so that future wars could be avoided. Once he made up his mind on an issue he was almost impossible to shift. This irritated Clemenceau and Lloyd George. So did the fact that Wilson felt the USA was morally superior to the European powers.

Many people in France and Britain did not agree with the ideas contained in Wilson's Fourteen Points. They seemed impractical. Take self-determination, for example. It would be very difficult to give the peoples of eastern Europe the chance to rule themselves because they were scattered across many countries. For example, 25 per cent of the population of the new state of Czechoslovakia were neither Czechs nor Slovaks. Some people were bound to end up being ruled by people from another group with different customs and a different language. Some historians have pointed out that, while Wilson talked a great deal about eastern and central Europe, he did not actually know very much about the area.

PROFILE**Georges Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France)****Background**

- Born in 1841 (he was aged 77 when the Paris Conference began).
- First entered French politics in 1871.
- Was Prime Minister from 1906 to 1909. From 1914 to 1917 he was very critical of the French war leaders. In November 1917 he was himself elected to lead France through the last years of the war.

Character

A hard, tough politician with a reputation for being uncompromising. He had seen his country invaded twice by the Germans, in 1870 and in 1914. He was determined not to allow such devastation ever again.

Georges Clemenceau (France)

France had suffered enormous damage to its land, industry, people – and self-confidence. Over two-thirds of the men who had served in the French army had been killed or injured. The war affected almost an entire generation. By comparison, Germany seemed to many French people as powerful and threatening as ever.

Ever since 1870, France had felt threatened by its increasingly powerful neighbour, Germany. The war increased this feeling. German land and industry had not been as badly damaged as France's. France's population (around 40 million) was in decline compared to Germany's (around 75 million). Clemenceau and other French leaders saw the treaty as an opportunity to cripple Germany so that it could not attack France again. The French President (Poincaré) even wanted Germany broken up into a collection of smaller states, but Clemenceau knew that the British and Americans would not agree to this. Clemenceau was a **REALIST** and knew he would probably be forced to compromise on some issues. However, he had to show he was aware of public opinion in France. He demanded a treaty that would weaken Germany as much as possible.

FIGURE 3

Proportion of forces killed or wounded.

	% dead	% wounded	% unhurt
Britain	12	27	59
France	14	53	29

SOURCE 4

Georges Clemenceau, speech at the Paris Peace Conference (16 June 1919).

The war which began on 1 August 1914, was the greatest crime against humanity and the freedom of peoples that any nation, calling itself civilised, has ever consciously committed. For many years the rulers of Germany, true to the Prussian tradition, strove for a position of dominance in Europe. They were not satisfied with that growing prosperity and influence to which Germany was entitled, and which all other nations were willing to accord her, in the society of free and equal peoples. They required that they should be able to dictate and tyrannize to a subservient Europe, as they dictated and tyrannized over a subservient Germany. Germany's responsibility, however, is not confined to having planned and started the war. She is no less responsible for the savage and inhuman manner in which it was conducted.

The conduct of Germany is almost unexampled in human history. The terrible responsibility which lies at her doors can be seen in the fact that not less than seven million dead lie buried in Europe, while more than twenty million others carry upon them the evidence of wounds and sufferings, because Germany saw fit to gratify her lust for tyranny by resort to war.

Justice, therefore, is the only possible basis for the settlement of the accounts of this terrible war.

David Lloyd George (Britain)

At the peace talks Lloyd George was often in the middle ground between Clemenceau and Wilson. He wanted Germany to be justly punished but not too harshly. He wanted Germany to lose its navy and its colonies because Britain thought they threatened the British Empire. However, like Wilson, he did not want Germany to seek revenge in the future and possibly start another war. He was also keen for Britain and Germany to begin trading with each other again. Before the war, Germany had been Britain's second largest trading partner. British people might not like it, but the fact was that trade with Germany meant jobs for them.

Like Clemenceau, Lloyd George had real problems with public pressures at home for a harsh treaty. Even his own MPs did not always agree with him and he had just won the 1918 election in Britain by promising to 'make Germany pay', even though he realised the dangers of this course of action.

FOCUS TASK**Part 1: What were the aims of the Big Three at the Paris Peace Conference?**

Using the information and sources on pages 240–43, draw up a chart like the one below summarising the aims of the three leaders at the Paris Peace Conference.

N.B. Leave the fifth column blank. You will need it for a later task.

Leader	Country	Attitude towards Germany	Main aim	

SOURCE 5

Lloyd George speaking to the House of Commons, before the Peace Conference.

We want a peace which will be just, but not vindictive. We want a stern peace because the occasion demands it, but the severity must be designed, not for vengeance, but for justice. Above all, we want to protect the future against a repetition of the horrors of this war.

THINK

- 1 In your own words, what were Clemenceau's arguments, as set out in Source 4?
- 2 What evidence do you have to support Clemenceau's claims?

PROFILE**David Lloyd George (Prime Minister of Britain)****Background**

- Born in 1863.
- First entered politics in 1890. A very able politician who became prime minister in 1916 and remained in power until 1922.

Character

A realist. As an experienced politician, he knew there would have to be compromise. Thus he occupied the middle ground between the views of Wilson and those of Clemenceau.

SOURCE 6

A cartoon from *Punch* magazine, 1919. The original title was, 'Giving him rope?', with the caption: 'German criminal (to Allied police): "Here, I say, stop! You're hurting me!" [Aside] "If I only whine enough I may be able to wriggle out of this yet."'



Disagreements and compromises

As the talks at Versailles went on, it became clear that the very different objectives of the three leaders could not all be met. Clemenceau clashed with Wilson over many issues. The USA had not suffered nearly as badly as France in the war. Clemenceau resented Wilson's more generous attitude to Germany. They disagreed over what to do about Germany's Rhineland and coalfields in the Saar. In the end, Wilson had to give way on these issues. In return, Clemenceau and Lloyd George did give Wilson what he wanted in eastern Europe, despite their reservations about his idea of self-determination. However, this mainly affected the other four treaties, not the Treaty of Versailles.

Clemenceau also clashed with Lloyd George, particularly over Lloyd George's desire not to treat Germany too harshly. For example, Clemenceau said: '... if the British are so anxious to appease Germany they should look overseas and make colonial, naval or commercial concessions'. Clemenceau felt that the British were quite happy to treat Germany fairly in Europe, where France rather than Britain was most under threat. However, they were less happy to allow Germany to keep its navy and colonies, which would be more of a threat to Britain.

Wilson and Lloyd George did not always agree either. Lloyd George was particularly unhappy with point 2 of the Fourteen Points, allowing all nations access to the seas. Similarly, Wilson's views on people ruling themselves were somewhat threatening to the British government, for the British Empire ruled millions of people all across the world from London.

THINK

Study Source 6.

- 1 According to the cartoonist, what is the German trying to achieve?
- 2 What is the message of the cartoon?

ACTIVITY

- 1 Work in groups. Draw up a table to show what views:
 - Clemenceau
 - Lloyd George
 would have expressed on points 2, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 14 of President Wilson's Fourteen Points. You can find them on page 241.
- 2 On your own, write a letter from one of the two leaders to Wilson summarising your view of the Fourteen Points.
- 3 Copy the following diagram and use it to summarise the attitudes of the three leaders to each other.

