Chapter 33

Descent into the Abyss: World War I and the Crisis of the European Order

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

Because of European imperialism and economic influence, the conflict that broke out in 1914 came to encompass much of the world. World War generated historical forces that continue to shape our world today.

II. The Coming of the Great War

A. Introduction

Diplomatic tensions and colonial rivalries led to the formation of two hostile alliance in Europe.

B. Hostile Alliance and Armaments Races

Fear of growing German power led Britain, France, and Russia to form the Triple Entente alliance. Germany and Austria-Hungary, and to a lesser extent Italy, formed the Central Powers alliance. Tensions between these alliances were magnified by increasing rivalry for the few remaining uncolonized regions in the world. Jingoism increased in Europe. Germany’s growing naval power prompted Britain to ally with France, fearing its naval dominance was being lost. Domestic tensions also increased, as strikes mounted and unions and socialists became more powerful.

C. The Outbreak of War

European rivalries increasingly focused on the ethnically complex Balkans. The murder of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife by a Serbian nationalist led to a diplomatic confrontation between the two alliances that escalated into war by July 1914. Britain’s entry in the war made it global, as it brought in soldiers from its far-flung empire and the help of its ally Japan.

III. A World at War

A. Introduction

European leaders allowed war to begin in part because they believed it would be quick and decisive.
B. The War in Europe

The failure of Germany's plan for a swift defeat of France and Belgium set the stage for three years of stalemate on the Western Front. Soldiers dug trenches the length of the front to defend themselves from machine guns and artillery. These weapons, along with poison gas, led to unprecedented death tolls. Despite millions of deaths, neither side could advance against the other's defenses.

C. The War in the East and in Italy

Neither the aristocratic officers or the peasant soldiers of Russia were prepared to fight the modernized German military, leading to the virtual destruction of the tsarist armies and a steady loss of territory to Germany. Nicholas II, who had taken direct control of the front, was so incompetent that it contributed to his overthrown in 1917. While doing better against the Austro-Hungarians, Russia could not protect its ally Serbia. Italy, which had decided to fight the other Central Powers, did very poorly.

D. The Homefronts in Europe

As the war dragged on, soldiers at the front were became angry with political leaders and disturbed by civilians at home who continued to support the war much more strongly than the soldiers. Governments took direct control of many industries and made use of sophisticated propaganda. Unions and socialist leaders became increasingly tied to government, something rejected by many rank and file. Labor protests in Russia helped spark the fall of the Tsar. Women’s participation in the labor force increased, though many were pushed out of work after the war ended. Their participation in the war effort helped the gain the vote in Britain, Germany, and the United States.

E. The War Outside Europe

Fighting spread to the colonies, and troops from the colonies were recruited for war in Europe. British naval power contributed greatly to the globalization of the war. Japan seized German possessions in Asia and the Pacific. The Dominions contributed supplies and troops to the British effort. India and African colonies also participated. The Ottoman Empire sided with Germany, and military failures led to a genocidal assault on Armenian Christians, some of whom had backed Russia. The U.S. entry into the war made it a major global power. U.S. supplies and troops led Germany to believe it needed to launch a major offensive.

F. Endgame: The Return to Offensive Warfare

The failure of the April 1918 offensive by the Germans and the collapse of the Austrian military led Germany to agree to an armistice. Many Germans came to blame the civilian government that replaced the Kaiser. The immense destruction in Europe and very high death tolls, some 10 million, were compounded by a worldwide influenza epidemic that killed millions more. These factors helped create the Great Depression a decade later.

IV. Failed Peace

Woodrow Wilson’s plan for a nonpunitive peace was thwarted by the Entente allies. Britain and particularly France demanded reparations and a treaty that blamed Germany for the war. The concerns of colonized regions were ignored. Germany was deliberately humiliated, the
Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismembered, and France turned inward. The United States refused to join the League of Nations, despite Wilson’s urging.

V. World War I and the Nationalist Assault on the European Colonial Order

A. Introduction

World War I bolstered nationalist movements by weakening the European powers. Hundreds of thousands of African and Asian troops were conscripted for European armies during the war. Colonies also served as important sources of food and raw materials. During the course of the war, European vulnerability became evident. As troops were withdrawn from the colonies for the European fronts and administrative personnel were recalled, Africans and Asians began to fill posts previously reserved for European masters. To maintain support, European nations made many promises for future independence, but they often failed to fulfill them after the war. The destruction of the war cast doubts on claims of European superiority, and its disruptions bolstered nationalist movements.

B. India: The Makings of the Nationalist Challenge to the British Raj

Colonized long before Africa, India and Asian colonies were the first to establish independence movements. Western-educated minorities organized politically to bring about the end or modification of colonial regimes. India and Egypt provide examples of early decolonization movements. Regional associations of Western-educated Indians located in major cities coalesced to form the Indian National Congress party in 1885. Without a base of mass support, the primary function of the early party was to present grievances to the British colonial administration. Most of the issues concerned the Indian elite, not the poor. Despite its limited aims, the Congress party allowed the formation of a sense of Indian identity.

C. Social Foundations of a Mass Movement

British economic and social policies helped the Congress party attract a mass following. Indians supported the massive costs for the colonial army, high-salaried bureaucrats, and the importation of British-manufactured goods. Problems among the peasantry, including shortfalls of food supplies, induced nationalists to blame the British policies that encouraged peasants to shift from the production of food to commercial crops.

D. The Rise of Militant Nationalism

Some nationalists, such as B. G. Tilak, emphasized the Hindu basis of the mass movement. Tilak and his supporters used Hindu religious festivals as a means of recruitment. Tilak urged the boycott of British manufactured goods. Tilak's conservative Hinduism frightened moderates, Muslims, and Sikhs. When evidence of Tilak's support for violence against the British regime surfaced, he was arrested and deported to Burma. Some Hindus embraced terrorism as a means of ending British rule. Terrorist groups favored secret organizations that targeted British officials and public buildings. British suppression and lack of mass support reduced threats from terrorism prior to World War I. Peaceful schemes for protest against British rule, such as those developed by Mohandas Gandhi, drew support from the more violent movements of Tilak and the terrorists. With the repression of the latter groups, lawyers within the Congress party emerged as leaders of the nationalist movement.
E. The Emergence of Gandhi and the Spread of Nationalist Struggle

India played a significant role in World War I. Even the nationalist leaders of India supported the war effort. Wartime inflation reduced standards of living among the Indian peasants and produced famine in some regions. Following the war, nationalists were frustrated by the British refusal to move directly toward independence. The initial promise of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 was offset by the Rowlatt Act, which limited Indian civil rights. Frustrations permitted Gandhi to build a nationwide protest against colonialism. Gandhi combined the qualities of a Hindu mystic with the acumen of a Western-educated lawyer. Both peasants and the middle classes supported his leadership. His boycotts and campaigns of civil resistance made him acceptable to both radical and moderate nationalists. As a Hindu mystic, Gandhi could mobilize widespread support for his movement.

F. Egypt and the Rise of Nationalism in the Middle East

British occupation following the rebellion of Ahmad Orabi left the Egyptians with both the Turkish khedives and the British as overlords. Lord Cromer directed British policy in Egypt. He attempted economic reforms to reduce the khedival debts and to improve irrigation and other public works. The masses of the Egyptian population realized little benefit from the changes. The ayan, the greater landlords, were able to extend their control farther into the countryside under the British administration. The great estates came to monopolize most Egyptian land, with small landholders reduced to tenancy. Resistance to the British administration of Egypt emerged from within the ranks of the Egyptian business classes. Journalists were particularly prominent in the nationalist movement. As journalists attacked the British administration and British racial attitudes, three nationalist parties were created. To forestall more violent nationalist movements, the British granted a new constitution to Egypt that included parliamentary representation. When World War I broke out, the British suspended the constitution and imposed martial law.

G. War and Nationalist Movements in the Middle East

In the years after World War I, the Entente powers broke promises made to Arabs for independence in the Middle East. Ottoman rule collapsed, leaving behind a Turkish republic in Asia Minor led by the modernizer Ataturk. British and French forces occupied mandates created artificially within the League of Nations. In Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, Arab resistance to the mandate system was common. More serious was Arab concern over the British mandate in Palestine, which was coupled with the creation of a Jewish homeland. Lord Balfour had promised Zionists in 1917 that the British would support a Jewish homeland in Palestine after the end of the war. Pogroms against Jewish communities, particularly in Eastern Europe, accelerated the creation of a Zionist plan for migration to the proposed Middle Eastern homeland. Zionism remained a largely East European movement until 1894, when Theodor Herzl mobilized West European Zionism and formed the World Zionist Organization. Both Zionism and the British takeover of Palestine seemed to violate assurances to the Arabs of nationalist independence. Rising Arab opposition caused the British to limit Zionist settlement in Palestine. Zionists thus began to arm themselves in order to resist both British government and Arab opposition to further settlement. Arabs in Palestine remained virtually without a voice in the diplomatic negotiations concerning the fate of their region.
H. Revolt in Egypt, 1919

The imposition of martial law in Egypt during World War I imposed great hardships on the peasantry. When the war ended, British refusal to allow an Egyptian delegation to attend the Versailles peace conferences touched off a rebellion. The British were able to regain control, but were forced to recognize the nationalist Wafd party under Sa'd Zaghlul. Between 1922 and 1936, British forces were progressively withdrawn to the Suez Canal zone, although they reserved their right to defend their interests in Egypt. Although they had achieved a degree of independence, the Wafd party failed to enact significant social or economic reforms.

I. The Beginnings of the Liberation Struggle in Africa

During World War I, most Western-educated African elites remained loyal to the colonial regimes. The war effort disrupted African economies and drew heavily on African manpower. After the war, the Europeans kept few promises of economic improvement leading to strikes and civil disobedience. As the depression took hold during the 1930s, dissatisfaction with colonialism spread. The first nationalist movements appeared in Africa in the 1920s in the guise of unworkable pan-African organizations. Charismatic African-American leaders had significant roles in the formation of pan-African movements. In French Africa, a literary genre, *négritude*, celebrated black culture as an attack on European racist attitudes. In British colonies, there was more direct political organization. Although actual political parties were slow to emerge, political associations began the process of developing a mass base and agitating for political reform.

VI. Global Connections: World War and Global Upheavals

World War I undermined Europe’s global dominance and bolstered rivals like the United States and Japan. Revolution broke out in Russia and the east, while socialists gained ground in the western democracies. Gender roles changed dramatically. While the empires of the Entente nations actually grew, liberation movements gained ground as a result of the war.
TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

- foundation of the Indian National Congress party
- Balfour Declaration
- Franco-Prussian War
- armistice ending World War I
- foundation of Turkish Republic
- outbreak of World War I

1870
1885
1914
1917
1918
1923

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

- Triple Entente
- Central Powers
- Dreadnought
- Archduke Ferdinand
- Western Front
- Nicholas II
- homefront
- Gallipoli
- Armenians
- armistice
- self-determination
- reparations
- Versailles
- Georges Clemenceau
- League of Nations
- Indian National Congress party
- B.G. Tilak
- Morley-Minto reforms
- Lord Cromer
- effendi
- Dinshawai incident
- Montagu-Chelmsford reforms
- Rowlatt Act
- Mohandas Gandhi
- satyagraha
- Muslim League
- Simon Commission
- Government of India Act
- mandates
- Leon Pinsker
- Zionism
- Theodor Herzl
- Wafd party
- négritude
- Ataturk
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Turkey
Palestine
Iraq

Lebanon
Egypt
Transjordan

How did the map of the Middle East change after World War I? Was the region likely to be more stable or volatile politically? Why?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What were the causes leading to World War I?
2. How was the outcome of World War I determined?
3. How did World War I change life on the homefront?
4. In what way did the Peace of Paris contribute to political and economic upheaval after the war?
5. What forces led to the European loss of colonial dominance?
6. What was the Indian prototype of decolonization movements?
7. How did the early Egyptian nationalist movement vary from that of India?
8. Why was Gandhi critical to the all-India nationalist movement?
9. Discuss the settlement of the issue of Palestine after World War I.

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. What were the common elements of all nationalist movements in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa? What were the primary differences?
2. What were the larger issues that began to break down the European world order in the first part of the 20th century?
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. The event that triggered the outbreak of World War I was the
   a. invasion of Poland by the Germans.
   b. assassination of the Austrian Archduke by a Serbian nationalist.
   c. murder of the German emperor by a disgruntled soldier.
   d. escape of Lenin to Russia.

2. Which of the following was NOT a feature of the war on the homefront between 1914 and 1919?
   a. Governments organized the major sectors of the economy for war production.
   b. Executive branches of government increasingly took over from parliaments.
   c. Governments controlled public opinion through the manipulation of mass media.
   d. Despite shortages of manpower, governments kept women out of the work force.

3. The Balfour Declaration
   a. offered secret U.S. support to Britain and France in 1914.
   b. recognized the Turkish republic.
   c. was a German memorandum seeking Mexican support during World War I.
   d. promised British support for a Jewish state in the Middle East.

4. Which of the following was NOT included in the final set of treaties that ended World War I?
   a. A League of Nations was formed.
   b. Russia was rewarded for its service to the Allies by the grant of substantial territories in Poland and the Baltic republics.
   c. Germany was forced to accept blame for the war.
   d. Austria-Hungary was divided up into a Germanic Austria as well as the independent states of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

5. Which of the following statements concerning the British administration of India in the last decades of the 19th century is most accurate?
   a. The British demilitarization of India caused substantial unemployment.
   b. The enlightened British policy, begun in the 1880s, of fostering Indian industrialization began to improve the Indian economy.
   c. British emphasis on the production of cash crops led to shortages of food production.
   d. Indian economic dependency on Britain was beginning to end.

6. Who was the first Indian leader with a genuine mass following?
   a. J. Nehru
   b. M. Gandhi
   c. M. A. Jinnah
   d. B. G. Tilak
7. The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909
   a. severely restricted the civil rights of Indians.
   b. granted home rule to the Congress party.
   c. agreed to the partition of the Indian subcontinent.
   d. provided educated Indians with expanded opportunities to elect local and all-India councils.

8. What incident permitted the British occupation of Egypt in 1882?
   a. the Dinshawai incident
   b. the Mahdist revolt
   c. the Orabi revolt
   d. the Suez Canal crisis

9. In 1931, Gandhi renewed his civil disobedience to the British administration of India with the
   a. guerrilla assault on the Simon Commission.
   b. March on Hunger.
   c. coal strike.
   d. Salt March.

10. After World War I, the Egyptian nationalist movement was centralized increasingly in what nationalist party?
    a. Liberal Constitutionalist
    b. Union
    c. Convention Peoples
    d. Wafd