EL TRATADO DE VERSALLES DE 1919

y el destino de Europa

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Entre las actividades desarrolladas para conmemorar el 50 aniversario de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, el Ciclo de Conferencias de Excelencia en la Fundación Ramón Areces contó con la presencia de la prestigiosa historiadora Margaret MacMillan. En su conferencia se refirió al Tratado de Versalles de 1919 como "una concentración de hombres de estado de todo el mundo que duró seis meses. Había más de treinta países, algo impensable hoy en día, que los presidentes de tantos países se sentaran durante tanto tiempo para hablar. Todos tenían sus intereses y peticiones". Según Macmillan el precio que pagó Europa con la gran guerra fue carísimo, la destrucción fue enorme, y los países acordaron que era necesario castigar a Alemania. Había una opinión pública y tenían que tener en cuenta a la población. El Tratado de Versalles, que entró en vigor el 10 de enero de 1920, llevó a cabo esas negociaciones de compromiso.

The catastrophe that was inflicted on Europe by the war was then compounded by what happened at the end of the war

The current view of the Treaty of Versailles is still very much that it was propagated by the great economist John Maynard Keynes in 1919. At that point, he wasn't so well-known. He was still a young man. But he left the Peace Conference in disgust. He felt they weren't listening to his advice among other things. And he went home and he wrote a book in six weeks, which has never been out of print since. It has a very boring title. It is called *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. But it is a wonderful polemic. It paints a picture of the statesmen in Paris as ignorant, foolish, and vindictive. Any number of adjectives that you can think of. His mother actually made him take out some of the ruder passages because she felt he was being a bit unkind. But what is left is certainly unkind enough. Regarding the Peace Conference, Keynes said, "Paris was a nightmare and everyone there was morbid. A sense of impending catastrophe overhung the frivolous scene. The futility and smallness of man before the great events confronting him. The mingled insignificance and unreality of the decisions, levity, blindness, insolence, confused cries from without. All the elements of ancient tragedy were there." Keynes went on to describe the statesmen meeting in Paris as hypocritical, subtle and strange as spellbinders indulging in empty and arid intrigue. The Treaty of Versailles, the treaty that was signed with Germany on the 28th of June 1919, he described as imbecile greed, oppression, and rapine, dishonorable, ridiculous and injurious. This gives you a sense of the tone of the book. And his view has been enormously influential. It has helped to shape and others have helped to shape a view of the Treaty of Versailles and the peace settlements collectively as creating a divided and desperate Europe, which led Europeans to follow dictators down very dangerous paths. And ultimately led Europe and the world towards the Second World War.

And even today I will meet people who say, "Isn't it true that what happened in 1919 led directly to 1939?" My short answer is that what happened in 1919 did not lead directly to 1939. There were 20 years between 1919 and 1939. And the question I always ask and we should ask ourselves is, "What was everyone doing for 20 years? What was happening?" There were other decisions made. Other statesmen, other people in power, other trends that were happening in society. And I think it is fair to say that the ending of the First World War was in many levels unsatisfactory. And it helped to create the conditions for the Second World War. But I don't think the Second World War was inevitable. "What would we have done if we had been there?" It is very easy to go visit the past and say, "You shouldn't have done this. You should have done that." But I think we have to try and understand what is what people at the time were thinking, feeling and dealing with. They did not have, as we do not have, complete freedom in their decisions. They had to deal with the circumstances in which they found themselves. And I do think we need to remember that. I'd like to start by making a few general remarks about why making peace at the end of wars is often difficult. And that I think is for a number of reasons. At the ends of wars, particularly great wars, there is a level of destruction and damage.

There are unpredictable things happening. And there are many different desires that people have about what they would like to see following. We are still not very successful at ending wars. And I think we should remember that with a little bit of humility. We haven't ended Afghanistan after 20 years. We haven't done much about ending the war in Syria. It may eventually come to an end. But not thanks to anything we have done collectively. A war is dragging on in Yemen. And we seem no closer to ending that in any particularly satisfactory way.

And there are problems when you end wars

And there are problems when you end wars. One is how do you rebuild a war-torn world? And of course, the greater the war the more the challenges there are. And what to do about the defeated? Do you try and bring them into a community of nations? That's what happened at the end of the Napoleonic wars at the Congress of Vienna when it was decided that France would be allowed to come and sit around the table and would be included in a community of nations, which came to be known as the Concert of Europe. And so the French took part in the negotiations in Vienna ending in Napoleonic Wars. And France became a member along with Austria, Hungary, Russia and Britain of the Concert of Europe, which actually helped to maintain peace and stability in Europe. And that was one way of treating a defeated nation. But not always easy. Do you isolate and punish the defeated nation? That is what Germany did to France after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. It treated France very harshly indeed. The French lost two large provinces, Alsace and most of Lorraine. France was obliged to pay a very large indemnity. Possibly bigger than what Germany paid France and Belgium and the other allies after the First World War. It's much debated. And until France paid off its indemnity, it also had to pay the cost of the German occupation forces who were in France. And that was a harsh treaty and a harsh treatment.

And Bismarck, the great German statesman, worked until he was finally dismissed from office at the beginning of the 1890s to keep

France isolated. He prevented France from having any allies, from having any International support, any international friendship. That was one way. It left the French - you will not be surprised to know - with a longing for retribution. Understandable I think. One of the other ways of treating a defeated nation is to grind it down so much that it will not dare to challenge the peace settlements. And if we look at the peace settlements that happened after the Second World War, Germany and Japan were treated very harshly indeed. Far harsher than Germany was treated at the end of the First World War. And so we need to think that there are different ways. We need to remember there are different ways of treating the defeated. I'm not sure any are ideal. None necessarily will lead to peace. What also happens when it comes to peacemaking is that war-time coalitions which come together to defeat the enemy inevitably and naturally begin to fall to pieces. Even during wars, there will be tensions between allies about how to fight the war, about what each is going to get, whether each is doing a fair share. You can see the tensions. And we can all see and we all know about the tensions in the Great Alliance, the Grand Alliance in the Second World War. Even as the war against Hitler and Japan and their allies was going on.

The Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain were disagreeing on how to defeat those nations, how to deal with those nations who they hoped they would ultimately defeat. They were disagreeing about who was doing the greatest share of the war. They were disagreeing about a great deal of things, and once the war is over, that glue, in a sense, that holds the coalition together, has gone. And so naturally enough, national interests come to the fore. Another problem with making peace at the end of great conflicts is the greater the conflict, the greater the expectations of what is going to happen. War aims tend to grow, understandably, with the scale and the length of the conflict. In 1914, the nations that went to war didn't really have much in the way of aims. There were certainly ideas floating around, but Germany's aim was to defeat France and Russia and ensure its borders. Russia's aim was to come to the protection of Serbia. Austria-Hungary's aim was to survive as an empire. France's aim was to survive in the face of what was a German attack. But as the war dragged on and as the losses mounted, and as we all know, these were dreadful losses, unprecedented for Europe in modern history, the demands began to grow. If you have a great conflict, if you spend a great deal, if you spend the lives of your young men, if you spend your treasure, if you spend your resources, you want something out of it. And so by 1918, war aims had become both much bigger and much more articulated.

What wars can also do, and of course the First World War did this, is to put tremendous pressure on societies, and they will often bring out what are existing tensions and existing problems within society. And so part of what I think happened at the end of the First World War was that some of the tensions that had been there in Europe before the First World War were now there in a much stronger form. Already before 1914, Europe was feeling the pressures of modernity. Europeans were reacting, as other peoples around the world were, about a pace of change, which they felt were leaving many of them behind and creating a world which they were unfamiliar with. And in Europe before 1914, there was also a rise of ethnic nationalism and revolutionary socialism, and those things didn't go away with the war. And they certainly hadn't gone away when the war ended. If anything, they were there stronger than ever. And so I think there are general problems with making peace at the end of wars, and I think the greater the

conflict, often understandably, the larger the problems are.

In 1919, of course, as at the end of every war, there were particular challenges. And so when the powers began to meet in Paris, they found themselves dealing with a range of issues they hadn't really expected to deal with. They found themselves dealing with the need to make peace terms with the defeated nations, and that of course was going to be very difficult. They also found, thanks in part to what the American president Woodrow Wilson had said, but thanks also in part to the expectations of their own publics, that they were having to think about how to create a new world order, how to make a world order that would prevent something like the First World War from ever happening again. So it wasn't just a question at Paris of punishing the defeated and coming up with peace terms for them. It was also a question of, how do you build a world in which this sort of thing wouldn't be necessary again? And because Paris represented a great concentration of power, lots of people from around the world who had things they wanted, who had petitions, came to Paris as well because what you've got in Paris between the very intense part of the Peace Conference, which lasted from the beginning of January 1919 to the end of June 1919, was a concentration of statesmen– and they were mainly men in those days. There were very few women represented at the Peace Conference, you've got a concentration of statesmen really unlike anything the world had seen, even greater than the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and 1815. Heads of state, foreign ministers, and leaders came from around the world. You had the American president there. You had the French president there, the British prime minister there, the Italian prime minister there, the king of the Belgians. You had foreign ministers coming. You had something like 30 countries represented there, including some of the world's greatest powers. Unthinkable today. Unthinkable that an American president, or a British prime minister, or a French prime minister, whatever, would sit down and talk

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to each other for six months. I mean, if they talked to each other for half an hour at a G7 before someone starts being rude, that is almost unthinkable. And so petitioners came, as well. Because the world was so fluid, as the ambassador rightly said, four empires disappeared in the course, and in the ending of the First World War an awful lot of territory was open to be taken. It was a time when borders were up for grabs, up for debate, up for dispute, just as many borders were up for debate at the end of the Cold War, but there were even more bits of territory and borders that had to be settled in 1919.

And so what you got were people coming who wanted something. You got ethnic nationalities coming to ask for their own countries. Suddenly, the numbers of the peoples who had lived in the Ottoman Empire, in the German Empire, in the Russian Empire, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, saw an opportunity for independence. And they thought, rightly, that if they didn't grab it right then, that things would settle down and then their chance and their opportunity would be missed. And so Czechs came, Slovaks came, Poles came. Czechs and Slovaks wanting to create a new country, Poles wanting to resurrect a country which had been buried through partitions in Europe for over a century. Peoples came from the far east. Koreans came asking for independence from Japan. African Americans came to ask for greater rights for their people in the United States. Africans came, people from Indochina came to ask for independence from one of the European empires.

But this was a time for the people who had something they wanted, women's groups came asking for greater suffrage, greater rights for women. So the people who were meeting in Paris suddenly found themselves being besieged by all sorts of demands, all sorts of requests, and all sorts of petitions. And what was also happening was they were finding themselves in some way acting as a sort of temporary world government, because the chaos in the center of Europe that was caused by the collapse of the empires and the growing chaos in the Middle East, which was also caused by the collapse of empires, was something that they were expected to deal with. The catastrophe that was inflicted on Europe by the war was then compounded by what happened at the end of the war. Not only did an influenza epidemic break out, which, ultimately, was going to kill about 50 million people around the world, but formally secure and stable economic organizations and political organizations suddenly vanished. And so Vienna, which was, and had been, one of the richest cities in Europe, suddenly found that its people were starving because the grain they used to get from Romania was no longer coming because now there was a new border. The coal they used to get from Poland or Czechoslovakia was not coming because of new borders and, in any case, the whole railway network had broken down. And so the Red Cross, which was attempting to feed people in Vienna in the winter of 1918 to 1919, said they saw starvation and diseases caused by starvation they had never expected to see in Europe. They'd expected to see them elsewhere in the world but not

in Europe. And so I think I'm not trying to defend what the peacemakers did but I think it's important to know what it is they were dealing with. They didn't have the leisure to sit there and think about things. They were bombarded constantly by crises, by issues, by people coming to see them, and, of course, by disagreements among themselves. What was also happening is their power was dwindling, shrinking, vanishing, and melting away day by day because the soldiers and the sailors and the people in the air forces didn't want to remain in uniform for the most part. The war was over, they had survived it, and they wanted to go home. The treasury, the taxpayers, the peoples of these countries didn't want to go on paying for these troops to be maintained. There were huge armies that had been summoned up in the course of the First World War. The power that the Allies actually had to dispose of was beginning to melt. And they were becoming very conscious of this. How did they actually project their power into the heart of Europe? There was an issue that came up one day before the small inner group of Lloyd George, the prime minister of Britain, Clemenceau, the prime minister of France, Woodrow Wilson, the president of the U.S., and Orlando, the prime minister of Italy. Someone came in and said Hungary and Czechoslovakia are fighting over a border issue. And it involved coal mines and it involved wealth that was quite an important issue. And we've told them to stop and they're not stopping. And so they said, "Well, we must do something about this." And they called in Marshall Foch who was the Supreme Allied Commander and said, "Look, we got to get troops over there and impose a cease-fire on this burgeoning war." And there were a lot of such little wars all over Europe and Foch came in and said, "Of course I will follow your orders, but I'd like to point out that I don't have the troops. And the troops I have are not reliable, there'd already been mutinies and that is a worry. And furthermore, the railway is in such a tangle there is no way I can get troops into the center of Europe." And so they looked at each other in despair. And the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who was

always an optimist said, "I have the solution." And they turned to him and he said, "We will send them both very, very stern telegrams." And I think that gives an idea of just how little power they sometimes had. On paper they had power but in reality, that power was not as great as they might think. One of the real issues and one of the real concerns was that they wouldn't be able to impose the peace treaty on Germany. They were really worried about having to move troops into Germany. Would those troops be reliable? And would the Germans resist as they did in 1945? Would they resist house to house, village to village, town to town, city to city?

This is part of the context we just need to remember when we look at what they were facing as they came to try and make power. Now initially, they thought that what they would do is do it in the old way. They thought they would have a peaceful meeting of allies and work out their common peace terms. And so the group that met, the 31 or so nations that met in Paris in January 1919, was meant to simply spend a couple of weeks drawing up the peace terms that they would then offer Germany and the other defeated nations. And they seemed to at first thought it would rather be like the Congress of Vienna. And so each member of the British delegation was issued with something like a thousand visiting cards and they were to go run and drop visiting cards on all their corresponding diplomats in the other delegations? And that, of course, rapidly became impossible, so they dropped that as they dropped a number of other things. Far more seriously what happened is, they found it was not that easy to agree on the peace terms to be offered to Germany. It took them until May to reach agreement, and there were very, very difficult arguments. But the result was that the preliminary Peace Conference imperceptivity turned into the real thing, and by the time they finally agreed on the peace terms to be offered to Germany, they didn't dare to reopen the whole thing. And the Germans who felt that they would be called to sit around a table and talk about their peace terms were not treated in that way. They were brought to Paris at a very tense ceremony in the Trianon Palace Hotel and Clemenceau handed the peace terms and said, "You have two weeks to look at them, and you can put your comments in writing. There will be no negotiations." And that was something, of course, that the Germans were going to hate. They hated the Treaty of Versailles for many reasons, but that was to be yet another strike against the Treaty of Versailles.

And so here they are, attempting to get together an allied position, dealing with chaos, a series of wars across Europe. There were going to be wars. Churchill said in one of his memorable phrases, “the war of the giants has ended, and the wars of the pygmies have started." And Europe and the Middle East and the Caucasus were going to see wars well into 1923. They also had to worry about revolutionary Socialism. Not only were they worried about the disintegration of Europe, the economic disintegration of Europe, the political disintegration of Europe, but they were worried that this would open the door to the spread of Bolshevism. Nobody quite knew what was happening in Russia. Communications were very bad. There was a civil war going on, but they knew some sort of new society was being built there. Now, for a lot of people living in Europe and around the world, this seemed really helpful, particularly after the horrors of the First World War, and it seemed a way out of some of the manifest inequalities and injustices in European society.

But what worried the leaders in Paris and those who felt like them was that Bolshevism

Exposición hemerográfica sobre La Gran Guerra. Del Armisticio a Versalles. Europa 1928-1919, en la Fundación Ramón Areces

was like an illness, a disease they often called it, that would spread into Europe and perhaps spread further afield. And they had some reason to worry about that. Hungary had a communist revolution at the end of 1919 and had a communist government for six months. Munich had a communist revolution for a week. It was perhaps more a comic-opera revolution, although it ended with the death of the revolutionary leader, so not all that comical. But there were revolutionary insurrections initially in Britain and in France. On the 1st of May, which is traditionally the day when labor celebrates itself in marches, the center of Paris was impossible to get through. There were pitched battles in the streets between extreme left-wingers and the authorities, and a number of people were killed. And a lot of the Peace Conference on that day actually had to be shut down.

And so, those trying to make peace, they are dealing with a Europe which is in turmoil, a world which increasingly looks as if it's going to be in turmoil as well. They're dealing with the terrible challenges of the influenza epidemic, economic challenges, and they have this fear that it's going to get a lot worse. And that is something that is very much in their minds. So they meet in these circumstances and they begin to talk about what sort of terms Germany should get, and this is when, as I mentioned earlier, the national differences begin to come out. The United States had a very definite program, and it had played the key role in actually making the amnesties. It was not yet the world power it was going to become. We should never assume it was as powerful as it later became, but it was a power and it was clearly a growing and a rising power. And it had become more powerful as a result of the First World War because American industry had expanded. American military capacity had expanded. American sense of itself had expanded.

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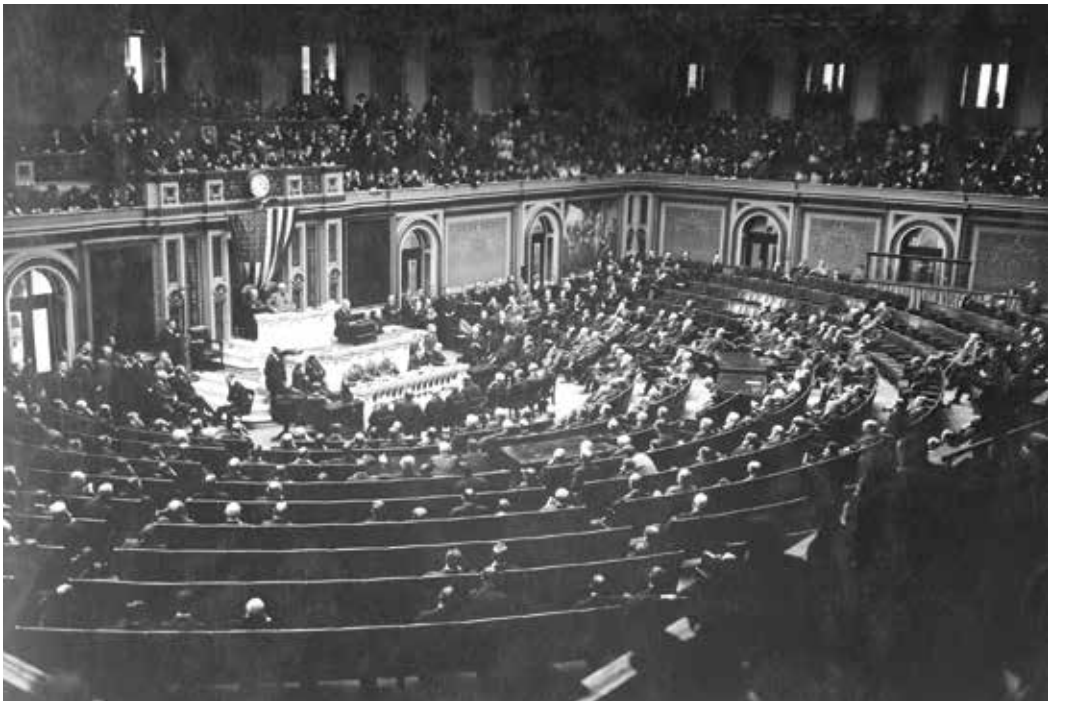
Woodrow Wilson

Woodrow Wilson, when he brought the United States into the war in 1917, made it very clear that the US was not coming in like other nations, and that reflects American exceptionalism, which we still see and have seen in the past. We still see it today. He refused to allow the United States to become an Ally. The United States was always an associate, showing its slightly removed position. And he said very clearly the United States wanted nothing for itself. The United States was coming into the war to make the world a safer democracy, to build a better world, but it wasn't totally on selfish power. Now, that can be taken with a slight grain of salt, as we say in English. The United States had actually done very well out of the war. The United States had sold a great deal of war material. Its production had gone up enormously as a result of the war. And because increasingly, the Allies Britain and France, Britain primarily, had had to turn to the United States for funds, the United States had become the world's creditor nation. Lending had moved across the Atlantic from London to New York. New York was now the great financial capital, so the United States had, in fact, done very well out of the war. Nevertheless, Woodrow Wilson felt that what he was offering the world was an alternative vision, a better vision. And I think this very much reflected the sense that the United States has had of itself as a power unlike any other powers. Instead of the old system of treaties and the hopes that there'd be a balance of power that would keep the peace, no nation strong enough to take on any other combination of nations, what you needed, Wilson believed, was a world organization. And this, of course, was to become the League of Nations. And he talked about this in his famous Fourteen Points speech and in other speeches. He wanted to build a world in which people worked together and in which barriers were eliminated, including, of course, trade barriers. He wanted to build this new organization which would serve the interests of humanity. All democratic nations would be able to join it. Even Germany, once it became properly democratic, it was promised, would be allowed to join it. And the world would operate on different lines. Many have attacked this as being simply a cover for extending US power, but it was a very, very important and powerful vision. It didn't all come to pass but I think it nevertheless introduced a very important new element into international relations.

Many of the ideas that Woodrow Wilson drew on, of course, had come from Europe. And it's always important to remember that a lot of Europeans supported the idea as well. There has been for too long a myth, among the many myths about the Paris Peace Conference, that Wilson brought this new vision of a better world to Europe and the Europeans rejected it with scorn. And that is simply not true. Many Europeans wanted a different type of world. Many of them had come through the war. Many of the younger



generation at the Peace Conference had been wounded in the war, had fought in the war. They knew what the war had done to Europe. If you hadn't been to the battlefields, you could take a car or a train out to the battlefields and be back in a day to Paris and see what that world looked like. And of course, in those days, the battlefields were still absolutely raw and the bodies still had not all been buried and the ordnance had still not all been cleared away. And so the Europeans, many of them, also welcomed this new vision. But the different powers at the Peace Conference also wanted different things, as did the United States. Great Britain wanted and had achieved most of what it wanted before the Peace Conference. It wanted German colonies, or in some cases, the different parts of the British empire wanted German colonies but Britain had to go along with it. And they wanted an end to the German naval threat. One of the great worries that the British had had before the First World War was that Germany was building a very large navy. And the German navy, at the end of the war, under the armistice terms, was interned in British ports, both the submarine and the surface navy. So the British had effectively got control of the German navy before the Peace Conference met. What you begin to see happening with Britain, and it certainly happens in the 1920s and '30s and alas, is happening today, is that Britain was beginning to turn away from the continent of Europe, beginning to see it as a place that caused trouble, that Britain would intervene in only to protect its own interests. And so even at the Paris Peace Conference, you see a withdrawal on the part of the British and they're beginning to turn to their worldwide empire and their worldwide trading interests.

France

Then we have France. France had been invaded twice by Germany and France hadn't provoked it either time, really. Had been invaded twice by Germany in the space of forty years. Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, had been a young man in Paris when the Germans had invaded in 1870. And he had

seen what that had done to France. He had lived through the Occupation. The French had not started the First World War. Germany had decided for its own reasons because it had a very inflexible military plan, that if it was going to fight Russia, it was going to have to fight France. And so the Germans had invaded France unprovoked and had invaded Belgium unprovoked.

So the French were kind of entitled to think that this was not their fault. What is more, most of the war on the western front had been fought on French soil. The rest had been fought on Belgian soil. France had lost something like 40% of its industry and coal-mining capacity because so much of it had been concentrated up in the north, where the war had taken place. And so the French were facing a tremendous burden of rebuilding. They were facing tremendous losses. And they felt that they were the innocent party. What is more, they continued to be worried about Germany. Germany remained a strong country in the heart of Europe, in some ways stronger than it had been before the war because it no longer had a common border with Russia, which had tended to keep Germany looking eastwards over its shoulder. The reemergence of Poland now put a buffer between Germany and Russia. And Germans were producing children at a greater rate than the French were. Germany already had a bigger population in 1918 and that gap was going to grow. The French knew they were going to be producing fewer potential soldiers than the Germans would be. It is understandable what they wanted was recompense for what they felt was not their fault.

And they wanted security. They wanted security against a third German attack in another 30 or 40 years. They talked about breaking up Germany. They talked about detaching the Rhineland, which is a bit of

Germany west of the Rhine River. They even made claims to the Rhineland based on fake ethnographic evidence. There was a wonderful thing I read where a German officer says, "You know, the Rhinelanders talk German, but they are naturally French. They love good wine and they have a *savoir faire* that the rest of the Germans don't have." But this was not something that Lloyd George or Woodrow Wilson were going to approve of. Lloyd George said it would just cause trouble again and Germany will not rest until it gets the Rhineland back. So what France got was an occupation by Allied troops of the Rhineland for 15 years. It got the right to use the coal mines in the Saar coalmining region of Germany because French coal mines had been destroyed. And it got a guarantee, apparently, from the United States and Britain that if Germany attacked France, the United States and Britain would come to its defense. Well, when Woodrow Wilson took the Treaty of Versailles back to Washington, he didn't get it through Congress and so that guarantee fell

down. The French then turned to the British who, living up to their name of Perfidious Albion, said, "The guarantee was only a guarantee because we were doing it with the Americans. And since the Americans can't do it, we can't do it either." And so the French were left feeling very, very vulnerable indeed, which helps to explain their policies in the intervening years.

Italy wanted to expand its borders and also wanted to expand across into the Adriatic and that was going to cause real problems because Yugoslavia was emerging and was claiming some of the same territory. Japan wanted its conquests in the Pacific and in China to be recognized, but I think equally important for Japan, it wanted to be treated as an equal of the Western powers. It was a very sensitive point with Japan that its nationals were not allowed to go and settle in a number of countries and were treated as inferior if they did they all agreed, however, on the need to punish Germany. Now, what we also have to remember-- but as they were making these arrangements and as they were discussing the peace terms, they were dealing with public opinion, and this is not something that the statesmen who met in Vienna had to worry about. These were mostly representatives of monarchies. In the case of Britain, they represented a constitutional monarchy with a very limited franchise, and so there really wasn't what you would call public opinion in 1814 and 1815, but there certainly was in 1919. There was something like 700 journalists at the Paris Peace Conference, and the publics in different countries took an intense interest in it. And what is more, of course, they had the power to throw out a government that did things they didn't like. All leading politicians in Paris had to think about the next election, and I think this makes a difference as well.

And so the Treaty of Versailles is made in these conditions. It's made through a series of horse trading, negotiations and bargains are made. Some felt this was disgraceful. I think it's simply how you do an international negotiation. You have to give up something if you want to gain something. And what you got in the Treaty of Versailles was a series of compromises, and by the time they'd finish it, they didn't dare discuss it with the Germans. They had nearly lost the Peace Conference as a whole. The whole thing had nearly broken up. The Italians had walked out at one point when their claims weren't being fully recognized. The Japanese were threatening to walk out and so were the Chinese. And so it was felt that they simply had to give the terms to the Germans and try to get it done. The Treaty was a mess, it is 440 different articles which are thrown together. And the trouble is nobody read it through properly before it was sent to the printers.

The first part of the treaty is the Covenant of the League of Nations, so this is the vision

We do not hear complaints about how badly Germany was treated after 1945. And constitutional democracy has taken deep root in Germany. To the point that in the rather complicated and confused world of today we often look to Germany to support democracy, which is a real change

for the New World. The second and third parts are about Germany's new borders and various other things, and then you get into German colonies, naval terms, and then issues such as prisoners of war and war graves, what penalties there should be for the Kaiser. And the final sections, the eighth section, is about reparations. What should Germany pay for the damage that it has done? But in the treaty, there were all kind of clauses. Foreign officers dusted off old claims, and they were thrown in. My favorite is the demand that a skull of an African chief, which was in the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, should be given back to the British. So it gives you a sense of the treaty, everything from the Covenant of the League of Nations to the skull.

Germany

Germany had expected that it would lose Alsace on the Rhine. It did not like some of the other terms, of course. The Germans later claimed that they had lost something like 10% of their total land mass and 13% of their population. It was probably an exaggeration. In many cases, they lost land which had not been occupied by German speakers. But what the Germans really disliked, more than anything else were the military disarmament terms. They felt that they were being unfairly penalized. They were being left with unarmed forces much too small to defend themselves, and they felt that the Allies, who had promised that they would also disarm, were being very slow about it. One of the other problems with the disarmament terms is also mechanism for enforcement. The Germans were meant more or less to do it themselves, and you can understand why the Germans didn't feel like doing it themselves. They found ways, and it was done with the support of German government, of evading the terms. They were not meant to build tanks, and so they did a quiet deal with the new Soviet Russia and they tested all their tanks way out of anyone's sight in the interior of Russia. They were not meant to have an air force, but all over Germany in the 1920s you had Saturday morning flying clubs, with young men in uniform who would march out and fly in formation, which looked suspiciously like military formations, around the airfields. It was not difficult for Hitler, soon after he had taken power, to say, "Germany now has an air force," because, in fact, it was already there. But the thing that really stuck with the Germans was the whole reparations issue. How much should Germany pay, and how much responsibility should it take for the

war? And the article which became infamous was Article 231, which says Germany and its allies accept responsibility for starting the First World War. For starting the War, as it was known in those days. And this the Germans attacked. They gave it the name The War Guilt Clause. The clause doesn't mention guilt, but clearly, guilt is somewhere implied. And what they didn't do was look at it in context with the next clause, Article 232, which came immediately after, which said Germany's reparations shall depend on its capacity to pay. And so it was not unlimited reparations that Germany was being asked to sign up to. It was being asked to sign up to some form of reparations. But because the Allies couldn't agree, and this was a fatal mistake, they didn't put a figure in the treaty. It was set by a commission later and the Germans had some reason to feel aggrieved.

Eventually, in 1921, a reparations commission set a figure of 132 billion gold marks to be paid by Germany, primarily to France, Belgium, and Britain, the few smaller amounts. Now, this was a huge figure, and the Germans felt it was a huge burden. The Allies knew that they would never collect it. But they couldn't tell their publics that. And so they set a very large figure, which the Germans, of course, were horrified by. But if you look at the actual way that the reparations were to be paid, you can see that the Allies were finessing it. What they did is, they divided the payment of reparations into three. The small slice had to be paid first, and Germany paid that. Paid in gold and things like railway timbers. That was paid. The second slice, which was, I think, about 15%, would be paid by the German government issuing bonds. The third and largest slice, 83%, would not be paid until the first two slices had been paid. And everybody in the inside circles knew that the third slice would never be paid.

It's been estimated that in the end they kept revising the German reparations bill down until finally, Hitler canceled it. Everybody knew that Germany would probably not be able to pay the full amount, but they had to show their own publics they were trying to get it out of Germany. It's been estimated that Germany paid less in reparations than France paid after 1870-71. And France paid it off very, very quickly. So, why has the treaty been so controversial? Well, circumstances, the way it was given to Germany, the fact that

there were no negotiations has helped make it controversial. But there are other reasons here. One of the most important reasons is that Germany and most Germans came to think they hadn't lost the war. If you haven't lost the war, then why should you pay any penalty? Now, there are several reasons why they came to think they hadn't lost the war.

The German High Command had essentially established a military dictatorship in Germany by 1917. There was a civilian government, but it was kept very much in the dark. The press, of course, was censored and so the German public had very little idea of how things were going on the various battlefronts. And so the reports they got was one victory after another. And there were, in fact, victories up until the summer of 1918. The German High Command launched a last sort of series of attacks in the spring, late winter and spring of 1918 to try and break through the Western Front before the Americans could arrive in force. Those failed. And what they did was exhaust German capacity. The Germans were running out of manpower. They were putting 15-year-old boys onto the Western Front, or 46-year-old men. They were running out of petrol. They were running out of ammunition. By the summer of 1918, they were struggling to maintain their lines. On August the 8th, which is known to the German Army as the black day, allied attacks broke through the German lines. And suddenly, lines that really hadn't moved since 1914, began to move very quickly indeed, and German troops were pushed back in great leaps and steps towards the German borders. And so by September 1918, it was quite clear that Germany was losing. What's more, Germany's allies were collapsing. Hungary was falling to pieces. Bulgaria could no longer fight. The Ottoman Empire was going to fall into pieces, and it was trying to pull out. And it simply was becoming clear that Germany was not going to be able to fight on.

The German High Command panicked as the gravity of the situation was borne in on it at the end of September 1918, and went to the civilian government, who had been kept in the dark about this and said, "You have to get an armistice immediately. We can't fight on." And so the civilian government was suddenly thrown this very difficult task, and they appealed to the American president, who had offered to be mediator with an armistice request. And Wilson negotiated with the civilian government, a bit to the displeasure of the allies because he didn't consult them. It has been argued, with some reason, by a German historian that Wilson made a mistake in negotiating with the civilian government. He should've negotiated with the generals, who should've been made to carry the burden of that defeat. As it was, the German generals were able to avoid responsibility for what was a serious defeat. They later argued that they could've fought on, that it was just the cowardly civilians who let them down. This is a complete distortion -or, complete falsehood. Fake news, we could call it. They argued that it

wasn't just the cowardly civilian government that wasn't willing to fight on. It was the civilians themselves, that people at home had stabbed Germany in the back. And this stab-in-the-back myth became very, very important in German politics. And guess what? They blamed the socialists, the liberals, and the Jews. And so a very pernicious ground was laid for what was going to be the Nazi appeal.

What also happened was that Germany made a conscious decision or, the German Foreign Office made a conscious decision to attack the Treaty, to attack what they called the War Guilt Clause, to say that they had been offered a fair peace, that Woodrow Wilson had offered them a fair peace, and they hadn't got a fair peace at all. And they continued those attacks on the Treaty throughout the 1920s. There was a special unit of the Foreign Office which selectively released documents to favored, usually American historians, which seemed to show that Germany had been promised a fair peace and hadn't got it. And in the end, everything that went wrong in Germany came to be blamed on the Treaty of Versailles. And this was a very, very strong public view that it was unfair, unjust, and it was responsible for all of Germany's miseries. An English journalist who was in Weimar, the capital of Germany in the 1920s, met a couple of old widows who said, "Before the war, we could send our laundry out every week. And now we can only send it out once every two weeks, and it's all the fault of that dreadful Treaty." And so that was a conscious decision on the part of the Germans to attack the Treaty. The growth of the stab-in-the-back myth. And then finally a debate over the origins of the war.

The German Foreign Office was instrumental in fostering this view that it really wasn't Germany's fault. That somehow it was everyone's fault. And this became a very common view. And I think it's still a view today in, particularly, the English-speaking countries. The French never had quite the same view. The French tended to blame Germany for the war. But in English-speaking countries, in Britain, the British always tend to get impatient with the French, when it comes right down to it. They felt they were being unreasonable. And the United States was withdrawing from the world and from Europe and beginning to regret that it had ever been involved in the war. And so the history was developed to argue that the war was just simply something that had happened. It happened because the balance of power broke down. It happened because it was an arms race. But it wasn't anyone's fault. And so you can see the German point of view. If Germany hadn't started the war, if Germany hadn't lost the war, if they had been promised a different sort of peace and hadn't got it, the Treaty of Versailles was deeply unfair. And that was to be one of Hitler's main appeals. He promised in his propaganda, in his election campaigns that he would break the chains of the humiliating Treaty of Versailles.

In Germany, it was known as the Diktat, the dictated piece, a deeply unpopular treaty. And that view begins to be shared in a number of other countries, particularly in Britain where it helps to feed into appeasement, and in the United States where there is some regret that the United States went into the war at all. Now does that mean that the world was doomed to another war?

Gustav Stresemann was a great German statesman in the 1920s that actually tried to modify the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, tried to fulfill them as much as possible, tried to bring Germany into the Community of Nations, and led Germany into the League of Nations. Gustav Stresemann said, "But we do dance on volcanos and sometimes the fires below subside." And it did look in the 1920s as if those fires that had led to the First World War and had created such resentment after the war were beginning to subside. Europe was recovering. The League of Nations was up and running. It wasn't perfect but it was working. There were international agreements made in which Germany promised not to try and change some borders in the west by force. They were meant to be doing the same in the east but they never quite got around to it. There was a lot of disarmament work, the Big Naval Conference in Washington, the Geneva Disarmament Congresses, and real attempts to build a better world order. In 1928 there was a pact to outlaw war altogether as a means of settling disputes among nations. It was known often as Briand-Kellogg after the two men who signed it. And eventually, 61 nations including Germany signed it. In my opinion, what went wrong was the Great Depression of 1929 that tore societies apart, which shook the face of individuals and groups of people in their own governments, in their own elites. Shook people's faith in constitutional democracy and in capitalism and turned them towards extremes. Either on the left or the right. There was a marked growth in the Great Depression, particularly in those early years, in membership in Communist parties who offered an alternative to what seemed to be a total failure of a system. And a marked growth

in the right-wing parties. I think, myself, that given more time Weimar Republic might have survived. Germans wouldn't have liked the Treaty of Versailles but they might have learned to live with it. And as they saw their terms being modified and the reparations bill being lowered. I think Hitler would not have gotten into power without the polarization of German politics, without the idiocy of some right-wing Germans who thought they could use Hitler and the Nazis, who thought they'd put him into power and then use him and dismiss him. And what they didn't realize is he had exactly the same plans for them.

And so I think the 1920s should be seen as a time when what was perhaps a difficult ending of a war, not a satisfactory end of a war but they never are. But there were times of hope. And I think what really went wrong was the catastrophic effects of the Depression which drove insignificant nations, peoples to extremes. And we did get a Second World War. What we should also reflect, just one last thought, is after 1945 Germany was treated even worse. Much worse than it had been treated after 1918. Germany was occupied. Its cities and industries and towns had been leveled by Allied bombing. The whole country was occupied, which did not happen at the end of the First World War. So very few Germans felt the experience of defeat after the First World War. They certainly felt it after the end of the Second World War. They paid reparations. The Soviets, in particular, took whatever they could get out of the country. And nobody said they should stop. Yet we don't hear complaints about that piece. We do not hear complaints about how badly Germany was treated after 1945. And constitutional democracy has taken deep root in Germany. To the point that in the rather complicated and confused world of today we often look to Germany to support democracy, which is a real change.

Bio

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Catedrática de la Universidad de Toronto, su ciudad natal, y Emérita de Historia Internacional en la Universidad de Oxford, cuenta en su haber con varios libros por los que ha recibido numerosos premios; entre sus obras, *Los Pacificadores: La Conferencia de Paz de París de 1919 y sus intenciones de terminar la guerra*, premiado con el Duff Cooper, el Hessell-Tiltman, el Samuel Johnson y el premio del Gobernador General de Canadá.
Su atracción por la historia, según palabras de la profesora: *"comienza con las personas del pasado y sus vidas, si nos privamos de la historia nos privamos de una herramienta imprescindible para comprender el presente"*.
Margaret MacMillan ha sido miembro de los consejos de administración del Instituto Canadiense de Relaciones Exteriores y del Consejo Atlántico de Canadá, de la Fundación "Herencia de Ontario" y de la Sociedad Churchill por la Superación de la Democracia Parlamentaria, Capítulo de Canadá. Es también miembro de la Real Sociedad de Literatura, miembro honorario del Colegio San Anthony de Oxford y miembro del Colegio Massey de la Universidad de Toronto. Su último libro: 1914. *De la paz a la guerra*, publicado en octubre de 2013, analiza en profundidad las causas de la Primera Guerra Mundial.