

Paris Peace Conference: Overview ©

Sixth Edition



VERSAILLES AND THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

The Armistice of November 11, 1918, ended the Great War in Western Europe. The Paris Peace Conference convened on the 18th of January 1919, with over thirty representations participating from different continents. It was an impressive assembly the equal of which had never been witnessed. The War had destabilised Europe significantly. Consequently, it became a necessity to assemble an authoritative 'tour de force' – The Big Four – that could tackle numerous pressing and contentious issues expeditiously. Indeed, some circles during the War years contested *The Conscience of Europe* and questioned aspects regarding *The War and The Future*, with a view that the psychology built up by the European leaders and philosophers for the peaceful development of the European Civilisation had, to a large extent, failed. This vast conflagration was, of course, an unforgettable catastrophe, but as far as the Civilisation was concerned, it could not set back the hands of the clock. Moreover, holding it accountable for the serious mismanagement of the politicians was unreasonable. Assuredly, its substantial development timeline coalesces markedly with the dominant aspects of its primacy. [European Civilisation](#). As expected, an urgency developed in order to establish new standards, fortify values and promote a stable order.

The 'tour de force' in Paris also possessed a notable representation from the new world. Indeed, the American delegation, led by President Woodrow Wilson made important contributions. Wilson's Fourteen Points were most progressive. He was the former President of Princeton University, and in 1919 he was to win the Nobel Peace Prize. The British, French and Italian delegations were led by David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Vittorio Orlando, respectively.

The Paris Peace Conference drew up a series of peace settlements among the conflicting nations. Japan, as an Allied power in the east, was also a signatory to the treaties. Peace terms regarding Germany – also involving loss of its colonies and overseas privileges – were integrated into the pivotal Versailles Treaty, signed on the 28th of June, 1919, effective from the 10th of January, 1920. Peace terms regarding three further defeated European Central Powers were: Austria, Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, signed on the 10th of September, 1919; Hungary, Treaty of Trianon, signed on the 4th of June, 1920; Bulgaria, Treaty of Neuilly-sur-

Seine, signed on the 27th of November, 1920. Thus, directly linked conferences organised by the Allied and Associated Powers continued well into 1920. The Paris Peace Conference, however, ended in January that year. The same month witnessed the establishment of the League of Nations – the precursor organisation to the United Nations. Its creation, at that early stage, was an outstanding step in international and inter-state relations. The Covenant of the League was incorporated within the Versailles Treaty. The said Treaty's fundamental advancements, such as the ideals of the aforementioned League, or the principles for the creation of an independent Poland in the east – also involving territorial alterations – are developments embossed with longevity. Germany, however, vehemently opposed the loss of territory, especially in the east. Hence, the German Chancellor's 22 August 1939 [Obersalzberg Speech](#) – two decades later – remains a somber reminder.

The Allies correctly held Kaiser's Germany liable for the moral responsibility of the War – classified as War Guilt – and placed a significant reparation claim in gold – revised later – upon the Weimar Republic's / *Deutsche Reich's* weakened economy. Collective impairment suffered by the European economies of the Allied Powers was also significant. Indeed, their recovery eventually proved to be far less dynamic than that of Germany. None of the extensive and most devastating trench-warfare battles had been fought on German soil. In this respect France and neutral Belgium were the primary victims. Insufficient arms-control exertions regarding a defeated Germany, however, undermined long-term security, hence, helping to pave a path for a second continent-wide catastrophe twenty years later.

The ferocity, as well as the geographic expanse, of the First World War had caused the disintegration of a number of empires. It also became the profound duty of the victorious Allied Powers to rapidly bring justice and self-determination to as many national regions of such dismantled imperial entities as possible. Thereupon, a number of new states were established. According to the mandate system of the League of Nations, the European powers were also willing to administer less developed or less stable territories and prepare them for self-determination.

In some regions, however, resurgence of aggression towards smaller nations barred them from receiving the expected help and justice. Consequently, significant objectives of the Sèvres Peace Treaty signed on the 10th of August, 1920 – involving a defeated Ottoman Empire and its regional nations awaiting freedom – could not be effectuated similarly to the aforementioned treaties. The Allied Powers were unable to eliminate the resurgent malfeasants militarily. Firstly, there were pressing budgetary constraints, helping to prompt a thoroughly broad demobilization, and secondly, the Treaty predominantly involved territories geographically on the edge of Europe and beyond, often impregnated with logistical problems. Additionally, of course, the Bolsheviks also incited adversity; indeed, the disjointed Allied military measures to eliminate them failed decisively. Fundamentally extremist regimes were successionaly considered as barriers to the problem – a hazardously unrealistic outlook. Thus, the merited corrections of profoundly illicit transgressions in this category were halted. Hence, a number of subsequent contrary alterations brought in – outside the internationally established legitimate constitutional context of the Conference – may not be categorized as immutable. Indeed, treaties are not transient mandate developments involving three pliant classifications. [International Treaties](#). Moreover, the European Cultural Frontiers at their southernmost point were critically undermined. Maintaining the European Civilisation upon its broadly established progressive path on all fronts, as entrusted by its global geography, may help to stem adverse factors decisively. [Frontiers of Europe](#).

The Permanent Court of Justice of the League was established in 1922, it is the predecessor of the International Court of Justice. As formerly observed, despite the fact that there were advancements for the establishment of a new era, peace was not to attain longevity. In this respect, an additional factor was the severe polarisation of strictly incompatible new ideologies – Fascism, Nazism, Communism – within the European political spectrum. Even Entente Italy was promptly swept away by an extremist regime. Entente was, of course, an

Alliance incorporating specific objectives. Russia, a former Allied Power, had disengaged during the War, and through the Bolshevik Revolution found itself ideologically ostracised. Nazism was yet to appear. The League of Nations was faced with an impossible political atmosphere, some influential nations even failed to join its ranks. Nevertheless, experience gathered during this period helped to initiate a more stable order after the Second World War, thus avoiding certain inadequacies of the past. Albeit, international law, fundamentally European in origin, had been incrementally progressing towards a global structure even before this difficult yet innovative phase.

During the Conference, The Big Four – Britain, France, United States and Italy – as the super ordinate victors, remained prominent; the last mentioned country in the group, however, proved markedly to be the least influential. Hence, at times, they are also classified as The Big Three. Certain decisions had long-term implications, especially when significant frontier alterations are considered; yet, the defeated Central Powers did not have their territories entirely occupied by the victorious Allied Powers. For example: Germany proper and central Anatolia remained free of occupation, prompting certain adverse traits to remain unaltered. Consequently, inherent political reconstruction could not be conducted. Undoubtedly, a number of critical problems were pushed forth chronologically.



The League of Nations' first meeting took place in Paris on the 16th of January, 1920. The first General Assembly meeting was held in Geneva, on the 15th of November, 1920. After the Second World War, the United Nations Charter became operational from the 24th of October, 1945. The League of Nations was



dissolved on the 20th of April, 1946, and its assets were transferred to the United Nations. The above-mentioned Big Three, with Russia, as the Soviet Union, and China, became the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The period after the Second World War also witnessed the decolonisation process move forth rapidly. It was mainly during the dangerous Cold War years – primarily the prolongation of a former ideological confrontation within a wider and more contentious political format – that the United Nations established its requisite global instruments inclusive of Human Rights and related issues. [UN Charter, Treaties, Protocols and Conventions](#). Consequently, such matters were placed on a broader and more effectively structured avenue.



Paris



Geneva



New York

An overall psychological view – encompassing chronological interlinks – reveals that it has been mostly a protracted and highly challenging 'European Journey' that eventually became global with significant success at the final stage: Peace Conference – Paris / League of Nations – Geneva / United Nations – New York. Yet it is judicious to state that there is scope for further enhancement.



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