The 14 Points and Treaty of Versailles

In 1918 before the end of the war, President Wilson addressed Congress on American War aims. He called for a lasting peace based upon 14 Points. Wilson truly envisioned that the Great War could be the last of all major wars.

### 14 Points

1. Open Treaties  
2. Freedom of the Seas  
3. Removal of international trade barriers  
4. Reduction of armaments  
5. Impartial adjustment of colonial claims with regard for native peoples  
6-13. Adjustment of European boundaries in accordance with the principle of nationality. i.e., the right of any group to self-determination regarding its own government and the form of an independent nation state. These points seek to spread the principles of democracy in Europe with the key being the concept of the ‘self determination of all peoples.’ The points have specific provisions dealing with Russia/Belgium/France (including the Alsace-Lorraine), Italy/Austria-Hungary, Balkan nations/Turkey (and the Dardanelles), the formation of an independent Polish state.  
14. ‘A general association of nations…’ which will become the League of Nations.

### Peace Conference at Versailles

Allied leaders had reservations with the 14 Points in that they believed they had a right to territories gained in secret treaties and during the war. There were four leaders who dominated the peace conference. Each with different objectives:

1. **David Lloyd George** – Prime Minister of England. He sought to expand England’s colonial empire, preserve her naval and industrial supremacy. His goal was to make Germany pay for the war.  
2. **Georges Clemenceau** – Premier of France. He sought to ensure France would be safe from future German invasion/aggression. He wanted to weaken Germany by imposing military limitations, financial payments, and territorial losses.  
3. **Vittorio Orlando** – Premier of Italy. He sought to expand Italy’s European territory and its overseas holdings.  
4. **Woodrow Wilson** – President of the United States. HE sought to provide a just peace and create a better world through his 14 points. He approached the conference with a Progressive idealism (one that would lead to his political downfall).

### The Treaty of Versailles

The **Treaty of Versailles** was one of the peace treaties at the end of World War I. It ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers. It was signed on 28 June 1919, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, one of the events that triggered the start of the war. Although the armistice signed on 11 November 1918 ended the actual fighting, it took six months of negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the peace treaty. Of the many provisions in the treaty, one of the most important and controversial required Germany and its allies to accept responsibility for causing the war and to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions and pay reparations to certain countries that had formed the Entente powers. The Treaty was undermined by subsequent events starting as early as 1922 and was widely flouted by the mid-thirties.

The result of these competing and sometimes incompatible goals among the victors was a compromise that nobody was satisfied with. Germany was neither pacified nor conciliated, which, in retrospect, did not bode well for the future of Germany, Europe, or the world as a whole.

### I. Territorial Changes

a. Germany Surrendered  
   
i. Alsace-Lorraine to France  
ii. Saar Valley to the League of Nations, allowing its inhabitants to determine the political future through plebiscite  
iii. Return border regions to Denmark and Belgium  
iv. The formation of Poland (and the Polish corridor)  
v. The City of Danzig, a vital port city on the Baltic Sea (and one of Germany’s only warm water ports) became a free city for Poland’s use.
II. Colonial Losses:
   a. Germany ceded all of her colonies to the Allies to be held by the League of Nations.

III. Disarmament: Done to prevent Germany from waging war in the future
   a. German Military would be limited to 100,000 volunteers (conscription forbidden)
   b. The Rhineland in West Germany was demilitarized.
   c. The German Navy was reduced
   d. U-Boats, military aircraft, and war industries were forbidden in Germany

IV. Reparations & ‘War Guilt’
   a. Germany was forced to accept sole responsibility for causing the war
   b. Germany was forced to pay reparations for war damages (paid to England and France until 1931).

V. League of Nations
   a. The first article of the Treaty provided for the establishment of the League of Nations. At its greatest extent from 28 September 1934 to the 23 February 1935, it had 58 members. The League's goals included disarmament, preventing war through collective security, settling disputes between countries through negotiation, diplomacy and improving global quality of life. The diplomatic philosophy behind the League represented a fundamental shift in thought from the preceding hundred years. The League lacked its own armed force and so depended on the Great Powers to enforce its resolutions, keep to economic sanctions which the League ordered, or provide an army, when needed, for the League to use.

Results of War:
1. Social: (a) Casualty estimates of 20 million. (b) large civilian deaths (c) eventual nationalism would spread through Europe.
2. Economic: (a) War cost $350 billion (b) Communists close Russia to trade (not to mention the new economic system in Europe due to the Russian Revolution) (c) Large series of debts & loans throughout Europe and the world.
3. Political: (a) Major dynasties dethroned – Hapsburgs & Romanovs (b) Russia, Germany, & Italy eventually become dictatorships (c) New European nations – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia Romania, Austria, Hungary (d) the United States emerges as a leading power in the world, though initially reluctant to assume the role – as seen with the US rejection of the Treaty and the League of Nations.