

The Discuss of Versailles Washington System and its Reference to the Current International Relations

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Abstract

After World War I, the Versailles-Washington system came into being, a system designed to maintain world peace, but which failed completely fifteen years later and led to an even bloodier Second World War. The essence of the Versailles-Washington system was the redistribution of the world among the victorious imperialist powers, who blindly plundered their own interests without regard for long-term development, which directly led to the collapse of Germany and its control by the Nazis and thus triggered the Second World War. This paper will analyze the Versailles-Washington system and discuss how it has lessons for the management of international relations today.

Keywords

Versailles-Washington System; First World War; Second World War; Germany; Nazis; International Relations.

1. Background

The First World War left a tragic memory on this world. During this four-year long brutal war, eight and a half million combatants and thirteen million civilians died as a direct result of the war. Therefore, after the end of the war in 1918, world leaders were thinking about how to form a system that could maintain peace. The system they created was later known as the Versailles-Washington system. However, this complex system was undoubtedly a failure - just fifteen years later, Germany was under the brutal rule of the Nazi party, which, along with its allies, swept the world into an even bloodier war. To a large extent, the oppression and humiliation inflicted on Germany by the victors after its defeat caused Germans to abandon the peaceful and democratic government of the Weimar Republic in favor of the nationalistic and belligerent Nazis. E. H. Carr commented: "It was in their interests that the pacific Weimar democracy should firmly establish itself in Germany. But instead of doing everything in their power to enhance its prestige, they exposed it to such constant humiliations that it could never hope to win the loyalty and affection of the German people." (Carr, 1947) This paper will argue that the Treaty of Versailles predestined Germany to a second war from the very beginning of its establishment. It will also argue that in terms of world trends and the concept and philosophy of "A community with a shared future for mankind", it is important to have foresight among nations when dealing with international relations.

2. Analysis on the Treaty of Versailles

The Treaty of Versailles essentially served the interests of the victorious imperialist powers to re-divide the world. In constructing a peace structure, the victorious powers were thinking more about how to maximize it to their advantage than about how to better maintain a lasting peace. The United States wanted to seize world leadership by designing the new rules of the world; France wanted to do everything possible to weaken Germany in order to guarantee its national security and dominance in Europe; Britain wanted to maintain the integrity of Germany in order to maintain her balance-of-power policy, but wanted to extract benefits from

Germany; in a series of disputes and compromises, the Treaty of Versailles resulted to be extremely exploitative and humiliating in its treatment of Germany. Article 231 of the treaty declared that Germany and its allies should bear the responsibility for starting the war, and so, with the support of France, the Reparation Commission demanded a total of 132 billion Reichsmark from Germany. This was completely impossible for Germany, which was in ruins after the Great War, to pay. In fact, "Germany was forced to accept the reparations with the strategy that 'to fulfill it was to prove that it could not be fulfilled', and to take advantage of the contradictions between the victorious powers and to treat the reparations negatively." (Xu Lan, 2000) The Treaty of Versailles also caused Germany to lose a large amount of territory. According to statistics, about 13.5% of the territory and 10% of the population was ceded as a result of the treaty. Most of this was done without the permission of the inhabitants of these lands, making it somewhat of a departure from the principle of self-determination proposed by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson.

3. Humiliation and Hardship Germany Suffered under the Versailles-Washington System

After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany suffered not only great economic losses, but also humiliation from the victorious powers. Martin Kitchen wrote in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Germany*, "as the high moral tone affected by the *Entente*, an attitude which all felt to be the height of hypocrisy. The demand that the kaiser should be extradited and tried as a war criminal was felt particularly insulting. The German colonies were seized under the pretext that German colonial rule had been incompetent and immoral. The 'war guilt lie' of paragraph 231 was especially resented and its translation deliberately distorted to be even more offensive. All Germans rejected the treaty and were determined to see it revised..." (Kitchen, 1996) Indeed, at the National Assembly held on May 12, 1919, political leaders of all parties, including Chancellor Scheidemann, attacked the peace treaty that was forced upon Germany with the utmost vigor. (4) However, under the coercion of military pressure from the Allies, finally, Germany's representatives signed the peace treaty on June 28. Therefore, many Germans made the connection between the founding of the Weimar Republic and the forced signing of the Treaty of Versailles, causing the new democratic regime in Germany lost the support of the nationalists from the very beginning. The reparations process that followed brought Germany even closer to the brink of collapse. From 1922 onwards, the German currency was rapidly devalued accompanied by a horrendous inflation. By 1923, "the German economy had completely collapsed"; in January, the exchange rate between the mark and the dollar was 18,000: 1; by November, it had fallen to 4,000,000,000: 1, and was still falling. (5) The currency had lost its value: children made building block toys out of piles of Reichsmark; people used Reichsmark bills to cover their walls because it was cheaper than real wallpaper. Under such circumstances, the Germans' discontent with the Republic grew even more acute. After the war, Germany's economy was badly hit, the population was decimated, especially with the loss of the young and strong labor force sacrificed in the victory, and the country was further divided up, so to speak, on the verge of collapse.



Fig 1. Land Area of Austro-hungarian empire before and after world War I

Table 1. Comparison of land area in Germany before and after world War I

Territorial Size of Germany, 1914	540, 857 km ² (7)
Territorial Size of Germany, 1925	468, 787 km ² (8)

Table 2. Demographics of some of Germany's lost territories after World War I

Alsace-Lorraine: Approx. 1, 815, 000
Northern Schleswig: Approx. 163, 000
Posen and West Prussia: Approx. 4, 224, 000
Hlučín Region: Approx. 49, 000
East Upper Silesia: Approx. 965, 000
Danzig: Approx. 408, 000(9)

4. How the Nazis Used the Treaty of Versailles to Gain Public Support

As Germany struggled with humiliation and suffering, many dissatisfied Germans turned their attention to the extreme right-wing nationalist parties, especially the Nazi Party. The Nazi Party, formerly known as the German Workers’ Party, was a very small party when it was founded in 1919. After Hitler joined the party, he changed its name to the “National Socialist German Workers’ Party”, or the Nazi Party. As an ambitious man, Hitler made no secret of his hatred of Jews, his desire for territorial expansion, and his appreciation of the brutal Darwinian idea that “the strong will expel the weak”. In order to incite the German masses to achieve his political aims, Hitler attacked the Treaty of Versailles and expressed his strongest discontent with the state founded by the so-called “November criminals” who had surrendered and committed treason. (10) In a speech, he declared: “With the armistice begins the humiliation of Germany.” “So long as this Treaty stands there can be no resurrection of the German people; no social reform of any kind is possible! The Treaty was made in order to bring 20 million Germans to their deaths and to ruin the German nation.” (11) Such an approach clearly won the approval of the humiliated Germans: the Nazi Party, which had received only 810,000 votes in 1928,

managed to gain 6.4 million votes and 107 Reichstag seats by 1930. In 1933, Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany. (5) The dark era of totalitarian rule in Germany began.

5. How the Versailles-Washington System Could have been Modified to Avoid World War II

Although the Treaty of Versailles had its historical limitations, it is undeniable that the treaty, because of the Entente's excessive greed for their own interests, led to its becoming of a tool for exploiting defeated countries such as Germany rather than the cornerstone of peace it was supposed to be. The concept of "a community of shared future for mankind" states that "the legitimate concerns of others should be taken into account in the pursuit of national interests." From this perspective, the Treaty of Versailles did not pay attention to the legitimate concerns of Germany, thus causing both economic and national emotional harm to the German people and allowing the extreme right-wing ultra-nationalists to take advantage of the opportunity to seize German rule and start an even more tragic war. Then, if these two areas of harm had been mitigated, Germans might not have waved the flag for the Nazis and the war might have been avoided. From the point of view of national pride, it was insulting to the Germans that the peace treaty blamed the war entirely on the Allies, led by Germany, and that the Kaiser was to be tried as a war criminal. Therefore, it was necessary to remove the clause that made Germany fully responsible for the war, and to recognize that the war was the inevitable result of the struggle between the interests of the major powers. At the same time, economically, the heavy reparations and the brutal cession of German territory caused the economy of Weimar Germany to collapse, and two severe economic crises caused the Germans to lose confidence in the Weimar government and to choose the Nazis to rule the country. Therefore, the peace treaty should remove the German reparations and determine the division of the disputed territories by holding a referendum in the area. If the Treaty of Versailles had been amended in this way, the credibility of the German government would have been maintained at a relatively good level, the people would have been able to live in peace and prosperity after World War I and the far-right parties would not have gained the power to start another world war.

6. Conclusion

History, of course, has no ifs. The Treaty of Versailles and the subsequent Versailles-Washington system ultimately failed to keep the peace, and World War I did not become "the war to end all wars." Today, one hundred years later, we should be more concerned about what lessons we can learn from that period of history. After the end of World War I, the behavior of the victorious countries, who were so arrogant and wantonly sharing the benefits and disregarding the opinions of the defeated countries, is very similar to the practice of some countries in today's world, led by the United States, who boast of being the "world police" and brutally interfere with the internal affairs of other countries. "Humanity is a community with a shared future." From the Treaty of Versailles, all countries should realize that mutual respect and win-win cooperation are the right way to deal with international relations, and only this way can lead the world to a brighter future. International policies and agreements that only consider the short-term interests of their own countries without focusing on long-term development will only end up lifting stones to smash their own feet and destroy their own path to a greater future.

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