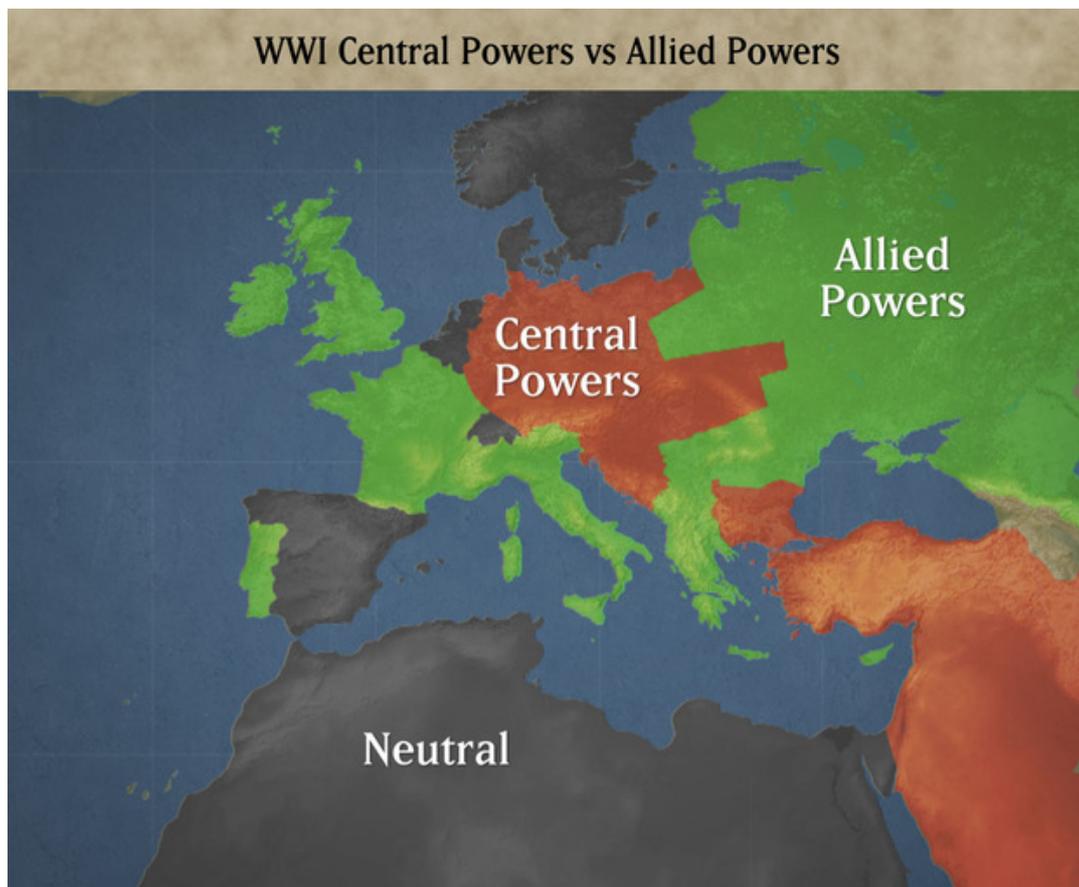


The Collapse of the Central Powers



Events

September 29, 1918 Wilhelm II pressured into accepting parliamentary government Bulgaria surrenders, signs armistice

October 3 Wilhelm II hands Parliament authority on military decisions Prince Max von Baden named chancellor of Germany

October 7 Poland declares itself an independent state

October 12 Germany agrees to withdraw forces from France, Belgium

October 14 Provisional government formed in Czechoslovakia Ottoman sultan requests peace terms for Turkey

October 25 Hungarian National Council established in Budapest Allied leaders meet at Senlis to establish formal armistice terms

October 29 Yugoslavia proclaims itself an independent state

October 30 Germany announces end to submarine warfare Turkey signs armistice

November 3 Austria signs armistice, begins to withdraw forces

November 9 German delegation begins formal armistice negotiations at Compiègne Max von Baden announces abdication of Wilhelm II

November 11 Germany signs armistice, formally ending the war

June 28, 1919 Treaty of Versailles signed

Germany and Austria Surrounded

By October 1918, although France and Belgium were still far from being free of German troops, it was clear to all sides that the **western front** was slowly collapsing. At the same time, Allied forces were steadily advancing northward from the south, liberating much of **Serbia** and putting pressure upon Austria-Hungary. Neither Germany nor Austria-Hungary was yet ready to surrender, but Germany's government was undergoing a revolution, and Austria-Hungary's army was collapsing amid mass mutiny.

Revolution in Germany

Germany's first **revolution** was a quiet one that happened in two stages. On September 29, 1918, Germany's top two generals, **Paul von Hindenburg** and **Erich Ludendorff**, pressured Kaiser **Wilhelm II** into establishing a constitutional monarchy, because the Allied forces refused to negotiate with the kaiser and insisted upon dealing with representatives of the German people instead.

On October 2, the kaiser relinquished all of his authority regarding military decisions to the new **Parliament**—an act that, for all practical purposes, reduced the kaiser to a figurehead. His cousin, Prince **Max von Baden**, was named chancellor and effectively assumed leadership of the country. Although Prince Max immediately began to make inquiries to the Allies about an armistice, he was not ready to surrender unconditionally, as he believed that he could negotiate favorable terms for Germany, despite continuing losses on the battlefield. A lengthy exchange of diplomatic notes went on for the next month.

Independence in Eastern Europe

Bulgaria was the first of the Central Powers to surrender, signing an armistice in Salonica on September 29, 1918. On October 7, **Poland** declared itself an independent state, which immediately sparked fighting between Poland and **Ukraine** over the possession of the border territory of East Galicia. On October 14, the provisional government of **Czechoslovakia** came into existence. On October 25, a Hungarian National Council was established in Budapest in preparation for an independent **Hungary**, separate from Austria.

The Elusive Peace

As the war petered out, President **Woodrow Wilson** of the United States became the primary Allied representative for handling the peace negotiations. Earlier in the war, when the United States was neutral, Wilson had repeatedly attempted to broker peace among the fighting powers and made sincere efforts to work out an agreement that would be fair to all sides. By 1918, however, Wilson's position had changed considerably. American soldiers were now fighting and dying against the Germans in France, and both Germany and Austria had considerably less leverage than before. Wilson was now determined that neither country would gain peace cheaply.

The Central Powers' Attempts at Diplomacy

On October 3–4, 1918, the first **joint German-Austrian diplomatic note** was sent to Wilson, requesting an armistice and suggesting that all hostilities end without any penalties for either side. Wilson rejected the note on October 8, stating that he would not even discuss the idea of an armistice until France, Belgium, and Serbia were completely free of German and Austrian forces.

On October 12, the German government announced that it had accepted Wilson's requirement and that it would **withdraw its forces** from France and Belgium. Despite the announcement, however, the fighting on the western front continued without letup. On October 21, Germany announced that it would **cease all submarine warfare**. On October 25, Allied military commanders met at **Senlis**, France, to discuss formal terms for an armistice. Although they disagreed over matters of detail, all concurred that Germany must be rendered unable to make war again.

The Dissolution of Austria-Hungary

By the end of October, Germany was still actively trying to broker a favorable way out of the war, but **Austria** could no longer afford to wait, because the country was already falling apart. On October 27, 1918, Austria approached the Allies independently for an armistice and ordered the Austrian army to retreat the same day. On October 29, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes proclaimed the establishment of a southern Slavic state to be called **Yugoslavia**.

On October 30, an Austrian delegation arrived in Italy to surrender unconditionally. That same day, **Hungary** formally declared its independence. On November 3, all the terms of the Austrian armistice were in place, and on the following day, Austria-Hungary formally ceased to exist.

The Collapse of the Ottoman Empire

On October 14, 1918, Sultan **Mehmed VI** of the **Ottoman Empire**, having suffered heavy territorial losses over the past year and facing a British invasion of Turkey proper, requested peace terms. An armistice was signed on October 30. One of its terms was that the **Dardanelles** be opened immediately to Allied ships. In the coming months, most of the territory of the Ottoman Empire would be redistributed under the trusteeship of various Allied forces and eventually reorganized into independent countries.

The Collapse of Germany

In the early days of November 1918, the situation in Germany deteriorated from unstable to outright chaotic. Prince **Max von Baden** proved ineffective at negotiating favorable terms for a German armistice, and unrest within the military grew, especially in the navy, where mutinies were becoming widespread. Kaiser **Wilhelm II**, who by this point was in hiding in the Belgian resort town of **Spa**, found himself under rapidly increasing pressure to abdicate, which he stubbornly refused to do.

On November 7, Max dispatched a group of German delegates by train to the secluded location of **Compiègne**, France, to negotiate an armistice. The delegation arrived on the morning of November 9, and negotiation promptly began. That same day, Prince Max took the step of announcing Wilhelm II's **abdication** of the German throne—without the now-delusional kaiser's agreement. Prince Max himself then resigned, and separate left-wing political groups respectively proclaimed the establishment of a **German Soviet Republic** and a **German Socialist Republic**, though neither would actually come to be.

The Armistice

Finally, on November 11, at 5:10 a.m., the **armistice with Germany** was signed. Hostilities officially ended at 11:00 a.m. that day. Thus, the end of World War I is generally reported to have come on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. It would be more than seven months, however, before formal peace treaties would finalize the arrangements among all the various warring nations.

The Treaty of Versailles

Just as it had begun, World War I ended with complicated diplomatic negotiations. It took many months, but the treaty defining Germany's present and future existence was signed at **Versailles** on June 28, 1919.

For Germany, it was a day of complete humiliation. The country was required to accept **losses of territory**, including Alsace-Lorraine and much of present-day Poland. Germany would retain the border region of the Rhineland but was strictly forbidden to develop the area militarily. Germany also had to agree to pay massive **war reparations** that would require half a century to fulfill. Finally, Germany was forced to publicly acknowledge and accept **full responsibility** for the entire war. This stipulation was a hard pill for many Germans to swallow, and indeed it was a blatant untruth.