

1. Military

The most obvious reason why the Central Powers were defeated is the failure of their high-risk military strategies. They had gambled everything on a short, sharp war based around the **Schlieffen Plan**: the idea of invading France through neutral Belgium, knocking her out in a couple of months and then concentrating the entire German war machine against Russia. However, the Schlieffen Plan had been adjusted in the years immediately prior to the war so that less divisions were concentrated against France. This weakness in the plan made it easier for the Allies to slow down the German advance in the Battle of Marne, with trench warfare being the end result. Thereafter, the Germans threw everything they could into high-risk strategies to end the war: The **Zimmerman Telegram**, the use of **unrestricted submarine warfare**, the use of **gas weapons at Loos and flamethrowers at Verdun**. The ultimate expression of military desperation was the **Spring Offensive** of 1918, when – aware that the economic might of the United States would soon make defeat inevitable – Germany threw all of her available armies into a gigantic assault on the Western Front. Although her stormtroops made spectacular initial gains in terms of territory, they quickly outran their supply lines due to the parlous state of economic production in Germany by this stage. The advance ground to a halt as half-starved German soldiers fell ravenously upon French and British supply depots rather than advance further into enemy territory. As the Germans were driven back to the river Marne – where the BEF had originally held them back in 1918 – 30,000 German troops surrendered in the space of just two days. Other examples of German military weakness include Ludendorff's nervous breakdown in 1918, when he declared the war lost, then demanded that armistice negotiations be broken off, then resigned and fled into exile in Sweden.

In contrast, it is one of the ironies of the war that Liberal England managed to respond to the demands of total war more effectively than authoritarian Germany. Other examples of military flexibility include the fact that Haig and Petain agreed to give overall **allied control to Foch** in 1918 at the height of the Spring Offensive, thus preventing the Allied armies from being divided by the Germans; another example is that by 1918 Haig had perfected the **creeping barrage** and had successfully co-ordinated the efforts of artillery, infantry and tanks in effective counter-attacks against the Germans. And of course we should not overlook the fact that from 1917 the United States joined on the allied side, with the result that by January 1918 a further 50,000 fresh troops were arriving under the leadership of the talented **General "Blackjack" Pershing**.

1. Economic Factors

However, although military factors provide the most obvious reason why the Central Powers lost the war, it was **underlying economic factors that drove them towards such desperate military strategies in the first place: in particular, they were without the resources of Empire and so resorted to desperate and unsuccessful military strategies to break the Western Front**. It is true that Germany introduced the **KRA** under the leadership of **Walter Rathenau** to co-ordinate war production, which was described by Chickering as "The most successful economic organisation created...during the war". However, the essential fact is that Germany had gambled everything on a short war of movement dictated by the Schlieffen Plan – well aware that she did not have the economic resources of Empire which would enable her to win a long war of attrition against Britain and her allies. As a result, Germany imposed no ceiling on war profits made by the bosses; neither did she even tax these profits before 1916, when a national income tax system was finally introduced. As a result, the government could only cover 16% of its costs through taxes, when Britain was able to cover about a third. They therefore printed paper money and sold bonds on the assumption that they would recover their costs in reparations after the war; this created inflation as well as massive debt. In terms of foodstuffs too, the picture for Germany was bleak. With such a small coastline, the British Navy found it a relatively easy task to blockade her. The resulting food shortages in Germany pushed many civilians to starvation. By 1915 Germans were eating "Kriegsbrot" (War Bread) made of potatoes, and by the **"Turnip Winter" of 1917**, the supply of potatoes had run out and the only real alternative was turnips - which were traditionally used as fodder for livestock., 750,000 Germans ultimately died in the influenza pandemic which swept across Europe that year. Six times as many civilians died in Germany as in France – an occupied country! In the words of Offer, "Like an invisible net, the problems of food supply entangled German society and its leadership until the war effort became difficult, then impossible, to sustain".

In contrast, Germany's enemies were comparatively strong in an economic sense. As an island nation it was practically impossible for the Central Powers to blockade Britain effectively; when the Germans unleashed unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, a convoy system was quickly established to protect food supplies and a voluntary rationing scheme was introduced in Britain later that year, along with a vigorous propaganda drive encouraging people to produce their own food and waste as little as possible ("The Kitchen is the Key to Victory!", "Join the Women's Land Army!"). The scheme was made compulsory in 1918 and in his memoirs, Lloyd George stated that as a result "we were never faced with famine or actual privation". In terms of capital goods, The 1914 **Defence of the Realm Act ("DORA")** enabled the government to control the coal and armaments and encourage almost a million women into the workforce. The policy towards women in the workforce is an excellent example of the flexibility of Britain's economic flexibility. The authorities initially used women merely in a token role: for example, to encourage men to fight at the front through the "White Feather" movement, the poster "Women of Britain: Say GO!". However, following the **"Munitions Crisis" of 1915** the government encouraged thousands of women to work in armaments factories. By 1917, 80% of all shells were being produced by the "Munionettes", and many found this a "genuinely liberating experience" (Gail Braybon). In this way economic strengths led to direct military benefits.

3. Political

The military performance of the combatants had direct political results. On the one hand, and somewhat perversely, the military victories of Germany weakened her politically. In particular, the initiative for decision-making quickly passed from the Kaiser to his generals very early on, with the result that Wilhelm was marginalised and became a token figure. More importantly, the defeat of Russia in 1917 actually undermined the German war effort: firstly, because the final Treaty of Brest Litovsk was so harsh that it steeled the determination of the Allies to fight on until Germany's complete defeat; secondly, because the new Soviet government (which had been sponsored by the Germans to destabilise the Russian autocracy) deliberately hampered negotiations with the result that the German armed forces were not liberated to fight on the Western Front as quickly as they should have been; finally, because the communist ideology which was now the official position of Soviet Russia quickly spread into Germany itself and undermined its government. By 1918 Bavaria had declared itself an independent communist republic under the leadership of **Kurt Eisner**, creating further political tensions and distractions which undermined the German war effort.

On the other hand, but equally perversely, the military weaknesses of Britain strengthened her politically. In particular, Britain's reliance upon a volunteer army compelled the government to become flexible and pragmatic in its approach. The Liberal government under Asquith was desperate to avoid centralisation of economic control and the introduction of conscription, but Lloyd George challenged this position and thereby forced a shift of political opinion – firstly by becoming Minister of Munitions in 1915 and secondly by forcing Asquith's resignation, becoming Prime Minister himself and introducing compulsory military service. Lloyd George, the ultimate political pragmatist, also stirred up political discord among his enemies much more effectively than even the Germans (who of course sponsored the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916 and the Communist Revolution in Russia in 1917). Whereas German attempts were abortive or actually undermined their own position, the British attempts were more successful. For example, Lawrence of Arabia was sent over to the Middle East to offer British support for the Arab independence campaigns. Largely as a result of Arab support, the war ended with the Ottoman Empire in pieces that the British occupying the territory that was to become Iraq, Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

4. Cultural

The military conduct of the campaigns was also directly responsible for the socio-cultural conditions in each of the combatant nations in terms of morale. The British in particular generated vast amounts of propaganda designed initially to steel the British people in the belief that Germany was evil and that the war against her was therefore just. Posters such as "Remember Belgium!" and cinema shorts depicting Germany as a monstrous gorilla bent on world domination all helped to augment the "Your country needs you!" recruitment drive which in turn meant that by Christmas 1914 Britain had overcome the lack of conscript army by raising a force of 1 million enthusiastic soldiers. Moreover, the British were flexible with their propaganda. From 1916, when conscription had removed the need to persuade men to join up and the Battle of the Somme had made it impossible to hide the carnage of the trenches, propaganda focused instead on encouraging civilians to empathise with the terrible conditions being faced by men at the front (**Geoff Malins' "Battle of the Somme" film**) and to conserve food supplies in the face of U-Boat attacks ("The Kitchen is the Key to Victory!").

In contrast, Germany and her allies were always at a disadvantage in the propaganda war because nothing could disguise the fact that – whatever the long term provocations – Germany had **invaded neutral Belgium** and declared war on both Russia and France before any of her enemies had issued any declaration of war. As a result she sacrificed the moral high ground and found it very difficult to produce simple, effective propaganda to motivate civilians and soldiers. Military strategies such as the use of Zeppelin attacks ("**babykillers**") on Scarborough, the use of gas at the Battle of Loos and the use of flamethrowers at Verdun all increased the difficulties of Germany in cultural terms. **Hitler himself in Mein Kampf** referred disparagingly to the "the total failure of the whole German system of information" during World War One compared to the "psychologically efficient" propaganda of Britain and her allies. In particular, he criticised the tendency of German and Austria comics to depict the French and British soldiers as being weak and cowardly, since this merely bred complacency outside of battle and then a sense of betrayal within it once it became clear that this message was utterly untrue. In this sense German propaganda, in Hitler's view, was not merely inefficient but positively damaging to morale ("In England propaganda was regarded as a weapon of the first order, whereas with us it represented the last hope of a livelihood for our unemployed politicians and a snug job for shirkers of the modest hero type. Taken all in all, its results were negative").

Conclusion

In conclusion, the question "Why did Germany and her Allies lose World War One?" is inherently misleading on two levels. Firstly, Germany and her allies did not lose so much as the Allies won; in other words, the strengths, flexibility and successes of the Allies were at least equally important factors as any direct weaknesses, rigidity and failures of the Germans and their allies. Secondly, the question assumes that the Germans actually lost. Of course in a military sense it is a statement of fact rather than opinion that the Germans lost the war by signing the Armistice and then the Treaty of Versailles. However, on a broader level it could realistically be argued that Germany did not actually lose: culturally, the harsh Treaty of Versailles meant that Germany could reclaim the moral high ground and produce propaganda which depicted herself as the victim rather than the aggressor; economically, the burden of reparations ultimately led to the Dawes Plan – a loan of 800 million Gold Marks from the United States in 1924. And politically, the entry of Germany into the League of Nations and Stresemann being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926 was an interesting and ironic contrast to the political strife of Britain during the General Strike of the same year.

(should the question really be "Why did it take the allies so LONG to defeat Germany?")

Central Power Weaknesses

Bulgaria – Achieved her war aims against Balkan neighbours early on – so this undermined **political** support for the war - Pulled out **Sep 1918 – Dobro Pole** – encircled and crushed by **Greeks / Serbs(???)** = Military / Cultural (nationalistic); food riots in Bulgaria (**economic**). The same day that Bulgaria pulled out, Ludendorff told Kaiser that the war was lost.

Austria – Battle of Piave with Italy; Battle of Vittorio Veneto against Italy. **Military** defeat. Surrendered Nov 4th, 1918. May 12 1918 – mutiny in the army – Slovenians – when crushed, Serbs, Ruthenians and Czechs rose up in rebellion too. = **Cultural**

Ottoman Empire – Lawrence of Arabia etc (**cultural / political**). General Allenby (military).

Italy – Was in the Triple Alliance with Austria, Germany – but refused to fight 1914, instead joined Allies in 1915. Central powers now face war on THREE fronts (**military**).

Allied Strengths

France – Mobilised a larger percentage of their male population than Germany or Russia; 25% of women into workforce. – **political**. She was allies with Russia, meant war on two fronts for Germany. France guarded the mediterranean front navally.

Russia – Provisional Government continued the war from Feb-Oct 1917 – crucial few extra months. – **military**

USA – **economic** contribution – bankrolled the war effort; **cultural** – used propaganda well.

Serbia – occupied till 1918