

Have we learned the lessons of WWI?

One hundred years ago today, the United States entered "The Great War" in Europe after spending nearly three years determined to stay out.

But Germany's violation of its pledge to suspend unrestricted submarine warfare in the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean, as well as its attempts to entice Mexico into an alliance against the United States, forced President Woodrow Wilson to ask Congress for a declaration of war in order to "make the world safe for democracy."

World War I continued for another 19 months and claimed the lives of 10 million soldiers, including 117,000 Americans.

As our nation honors the sacrifice of those men, the United States finds itself at another crossroad in its relations with other countries around the world. I wonder what, if any, lessons today's global leaders learned from the bloody carnage of World War I.

If any leader had the potential to create worldwide peace it was Woodrow Wilson in the months following Germany's defeat.

Wilson believed that the best way to insure future peace was to make a generous settlement guaranteeing all nations — including Germany — justice, liberty and security. He promoted a 14-point plan that would, among other things, eliminate secret defensive alliances,

remove trade barriers, establish arms reductions and create a League of Nations to monitor international peace.

Wilson's peace plan was immediately hailed in the United States and Allied nations, and even by Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin, as a landmark of enlightenment in international relations.

Although Wilson subsequently used the points as the basis for negotiating the Treaty of Versailles in the winter and spring of 1919, Britain and France rejected most of it, wanting to see Germany and Austria punished severely for the war.

The treaty subjected Germany to strict punitive measures. It required the new German government to surrender approximately 10 percent of its prewar territory in Europe and all of its overseas possessions.

It limited the German army and navy in size, and allowed for the trial of Kaiser Wilhelm II and a number of other high-ranking German officials as war criminals. And it required the Germans to accept responsibility for the war and the liability to pay \$32 billion in financial reparations to the Allies.

Despite the harsh conditions, Wilson still succeeded in incorporating the League of Nations covenant into the treaty. He only had to persuade



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Congress to ratify it.

By the time Wilson returned to the United States in July 1919, 32 state legislatures passed resolutions in favor of the treaty, but the U.S. Senate strongly opposed it insisting that the League of Nations covenant

ceded the war powers of the U.S. government to the League of Nations' council.

Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Henry Cabot Lodge, a staunch political opponent of Wilson's, led the battle against ratification stating that it would only lead to "entangling alliances that would require the United States to go to war when it was against her own interests."

Had Wilson been patient, he might have found common ground with moderate Republican senators who had fewer reservations. Instead he succumbed to his own foolish pride and went on a national speaking tour taking his case to the American people. Already in poor health, Wilson suffered a severe stroke on Oct. 2, 1919, and was left with significant brain damage.

With Wilson out of commission, the Treaty of Versailles fell short of ratification by seven votes when the Senate voted on it on March 19, 1920. Consequently, the United States never joined the League of Nations, which

was weakened without her participation.

Worse, the peace settlement designed by Britain and France resulted in a fragile truce. Germany was humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles being reduced geographically and economically to poverty. When Adolf Hitler, a charismatic politician who served as a colonel in the German army during World War I, rose to the head of a new Nazi Party, Germany became bent on restoring her once powerful status.

World War I ended monarchs and czars, but they were replaced by even worse military dictators in Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. Together, those dictators launched a second, more devastating world war.

Today the world looks again to the United States for leadership to confront a new generation of dictators and bullies, including an ambitious Russian president with expansionist designs; a genocidal Syrian dictator; a North Korean madman bent on nuclear war; and a theocratic Iranian tyrant who exploits the threat of international terrorism. We can only wonder if our president has the moral courage, diplomatic wisdom and personal discipline to lead the rest of the world in confronting them.

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