1918: the year the Great War ended and its legacies
1. 1918: why did the Central Powers (Germany & Austria-Hungary) lose the war?
11 November 1918: the **armistice** is signed
an **unconditional capitulation**
A break from tradition

The **German point of view**: how to explain a defeat few Germans had anticipated

The defeat: something irrational, incomprehensible

The traditional concept of armistice (1648): a **temporary** and **mutually agreed** interruption of a conflict
A sort of ceasefire paving the way to a **negotiated peace**
November 1918: the German imperial army still occupies a large swap of Russia
Germany not invaded
Early 1918: Germany still in a position of strength

“Germany is going to win the war!”
(General Fayolle)
Immediate cause (as perceived then): mutinies leading to full-fledged revolution
The “stab-in-the-back” (*Dolchstoss*) myth
Revolution = defeat/military collapse

The image of a Germany invincible preserved
The German army not vanquished
Why did Germany lose? (the real reasons)

The real question: how did the Central Powers manage to hold on for so long?
1914-1917: a European war

A strategic nightmare for Germany & Austria-Hungary:
1- A war on two fronts
2- Numerical inferiority (118 millions vs. 260 millions)
3- Superior financial & naval resources (France & Britain)
4- Germany well integrated in global trade networks (imports of raw materials)
4- Extended hostilities = destabilizing hardship for civilian populations

The need to crush Germany’s opponents quickly & decisively
REASON 1: the Central Powers lost the war because time played against them
Summer-fall 1914: the failure of pre-established war plans

Schlieffen Plan: a huge (irresponsible) gamble

Plan XVII
The battle of the Marne (6-10 September 1914)

The end of an illusion: the war won’t be short

Time not on Germany’s side

Helmuth von Moltke (Chief of Staff)

No plan B
Unrestricted submarine campaign: “the last card” (January 1917)

A capital decision & worst decision of the war made by the German military (9 January 1917)

Britain on the verge of bankruptcy
French army demoralized
Russia on the edge of revolution

“I do not hesitate to declare that we can [...] force England through unrestricted submarine war to make peace in five months”
Conrad von Hotzendorff (Chief of Admiralty Staff)
Campaign to begin no later than 1 February 1917

The risk of provoking the U.S.
The U.S. not seen as a threat
Britain to sue for peace before the U.S. could make a difference
2 April: the U.S. (*world leading economic power*) declares war on Germany
Winter of 1916-1917: growing deprivation & hardship

Germany & Austria-Hungary: a home front defined by **food shortage**

**Priority to the military**

Entente blockade

Soil exhaustion (lack of fertilizers – priority to explosives)

Bureaucratic mismanagement
Winter 1917: 1 000 calories per adult
Food riots in German & Austrian cities
Reason 2: a problem of governance

The civilian power lost to the military (able to impose its decisions)
War to be inevitably lost if military leaders allowed to control a country’s political agenda
(Charles de Gaulle)

1916: the increasing domination of the German military over Germany’s political scene

Democracies vs. Authoritarian regimes
August 1916: the appointments of Hindenburg & Ludendorff = a new phase

Their program: victory, no matter the cost

Military necessity to prevail

The “Hindenburg Programme”: to prioritize military above economic and political considerations
German Reichstag powerless

Military power unchecked

Bethmann-Hollweg forced to resigned (July 1917)

France & Great Britain: control over military decisions

“Internal politics, I wage war; foreign affairs, I wage war. I always wage war”
George Clemenceau

Democracies: government control over military operations
Reason 3: the Central Powers lost because they could no longer manage militarily. Their defeat was a military defeat.
The German spring offensives (1918)
The **most important** of the immediate causes behind Germany’s defeat

To obtain victory before the massive arrival of U.S. troops
A desperate move
To concentrate enough troops in northern France: the need to remove troops in the Balkans

A disastrous effect on the moral of Bulgarian troops (summer of 1918)
General Ludendorff
8 August 1918: “A black day for the German army”
Germany’s defeat unavoidable
Government urged to negotiate armistice (28 September)

German military invented the stab-in-the-back myth to hide its defeat
Rapid increase of German POWs: desertion & insubordination (1 million German soldiers)

German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman & Bulgarian armies: RETREAT
Military defeat led to revolution, not the other way around.

Soldiers abandoned hope because of military defeat, NOT because of revolutionary propaganda.
November 1918: the Germans believe they did not (really) lose the war!

We end the struggle proudly and with our heads held high where we have stood for four years in the face of a world full of enemies.”

Field Marshal von Hindenburg's Order of the Day, 12 November 1918
2. The Paris peace conference and the peace treaties
Why the need for a peace conference?
To negotiate collectively the peace treaties
To develop a system aimed at eliminating the causes of wars

Vanquished nations & Communist Russia NOT invited
Powers with general interests vs. Powers with limited interests (a great many nations as extras)
18 January 1919: the opening of the Paris Peace Conference
27 delegations (32 including the British dominions)
An opportunity for countries to gain influence on the world stage
Paris 1919: the capital of the world
Key decisions made by the four leading victorious nations (Great Britain, France, U.S. & Italy)
The Treaty of Versailles and the question of Germany’s guilt

**TERMS**

**THE GERMAN PEOPLE MUST PAY FOR ALL DAMAGE TO CIVILIANS ON LAND OR SEA OR FROM THE AIR.**
Peace treaty seen as a *diktat* in Germany

Self-determination: Germany & Austria not permitted to unite
A German military limited to 100,000 men + no heavy weapons
Article 231 (Germany’s guilt)
Article 227: Wilhelm II to be judged for « *a supreme offence against international morality and the sanctity of treaties*”
"Auch Sie haben noch ein Selbstbestimmungsrecht: wünschen Sie, daß Ihnen die Taschen vor oder nach dem Tode ausgeräumt werden?"
Woodrow Wilson and the principle of self-determination
Hope in the colonies
Wilson’s open diplomacy: delegations from oppressed or colonized countries

The re-mapping of Central & Eastern Europe: a difficult task
Wilson’s “government by consent” = formidable hope in the colonies
Intellectuals & pro-independence leaders (India, Egypt, Korea & China) largely ignored in Paris

Self-determination in Europe & Ottoman Empire ONLY (Wilson)

The system of mandates for colonies and territories “inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world”
The Middle-East in turmoil
30 November 1918: armistice with Ottoman Empire – the start of a new conflict

Franco-British rivalry (partition of the Middle-East)

Map: The Middle East before and after WWI.
British strategy = Arab revolt against the Turks

Sharif Hussein, Emir of Mecca (Hashemite dynasty & descendant of the Prophet)

Sir Henry McMahon (British High Commissioner in Egypt)

Promise (vague & ambiguous) of a large independent Arab state (from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean)

Correspondence (July-November 1915)

Sharif Hussein, Emir of Mecca (Hashemite dynasty & descendant of the Prophet)
16 May 1916: Sykes-Picot secret agreement

Comprehensive [secret] agreement on post-war partition of Ottoman Empire

Sir Mark Sykes (British MP)

Francois-George Picot (French diplomat)
Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

“His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,
Lebanon created by the French in 1920 as a Christian state = civil wars linked to demographic shifts

Syria never reconciled with creation of Lebanon = 30 year occupation

No enduring peace & stability for Iraq

Arab-Israeli conflict has defined Middle-East as a war zone:
1. 4 major wars
2. Unresolved problems
Roots of the problems = fundamental contradictions of Balfour Declaration

Legitimacy of Middle-Eastern borders repeatedly called in question
ISIL’s goal: “to smash Sykes-Picot” and declared a Caliphate
Innovations: the League of Nations
The first collective security organization in history

Self-determination: a break from past practices

International Labour Organization (international norms aimed at improving the well-being of workers)
The impact of the economic crisis of 1929

Imperfect peace treaties

Question: what would have happened had it not been for the 1929 crisis?