



Written by [Brian Farmer](#) on January 8, 2018

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Wilson's Fourteen Points

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After the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia during the autumn of 1917, they published the texts of the secret treaties that the Allies, including the Russians, had concluded earlier in the Great War (the expression used to describe World War I at that time), presumably to discredit the czar and his regime. In response, Allied leaders felt that it was necessary to counter any unfavorable impression and to make public declarations that might reassure the Bolsheviks and encourage them to continue in the war.



The first to speak out was British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Addressing the Trades Union Congress in London on January 5, 1918, Lloyd George declared that the Allies were not fighting a war of aggression against the German people. He stated that the first aim of Britain was “the complete restoration, political, territorial, and economic, of the independence of Belgium and such reparation as can be made for the devastation of its towns and provinces.” The second aim was the restoration of Serbia, Montenegro, and the occupied parts of France, Italy, and Rumania. The third aim was the restoration of Alsace and Lorraine to France. The fourth aim was an independent Poland. He concluded:

If, then, we are asked what we are fighting for, we reply, as we have often replied — we are fighting for a just and lasting peace — and we believe that, before permanent peace can be hoped for, three conditions must be fulfilled. First, the sanctity of treaties must be re-established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be securely based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed; and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organization to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.

Partly so that Lloyd George might not seem to be the spokesman for all of the Allied and Associated Powers, partly because the United States was not a party to any of the secret treaties among the European Allies, and partly because U.S. President Woodrow Wilson wanted to show that his nation had a broader and more unselfish view of the needs of the future, Wilson hastened to issue a statement of his own views. Addressing the U.S. Congress on January 8, 1918, he outlined “the only possible program” for peace, in what was to become known as Wilson’s Fourteen Points, shown here slightly abridged:

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I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of



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international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire....

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations....

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The people of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.

XI. Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea....

XII. The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development....

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea....

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

The Fourteen Points speech received lavish praise in the United States initially. Even Theodore Roosevelt publicly gave his approval. *The New York Tribune*, usually a harsh critic of Wilson, called it "one of the great documents of American history" and compared it to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.



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Senator Henry Cabot Lodge observed that the speech had been met with “general approbation” but that too much of it was “general about virtue being better than vice.”

Seldom mentioned in standard histories is the fact that “Wilson’s” Fourteen Points (to which he subsequently added the “Four Principles,” the “Four Ends,” and the “Five Particulars”) were actually the creation of two shadowy organizations that have stamped a dark mark on world history: the Fabian Society, Britain’s premier socialist organization; and the Inquiry, the secret group that became the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Both of these groups were committed to, among other things, two of the revolutionary goals central to the Fourteen Points: assisting the establishment of communist control of Russia (Article VI) and world government (Article XIV).

The Inquiry was organized by Wilson’s indispensable advisor and “alter ego” Colonel Edward Mandell House, a founding member of the CFR. The Inquiry, which rapidly ballooned into over 100 globally minded intellectuals, was headed by Dr. Sidney Mezes (CFR), president of the City College of New York and brother-in-law of Colonel House. House handpicked journalists Walter Lippmann and Ray Stannard Baker (both CFR) to serve as liaisons among Wilson, the Inquiry, the Fabian Society, and the official delegates to the Paris “peace” conference. Wall Street banking insider Thomas W. Lamont (CFR) would serve as Wilson’s top economic advisor in Paris.

Ray Stannard Baker, who became Wilson’s official biographer, wrote, “Practically nothing, not a single idea in the covenants of the League was original with the President.” In *Fabian Freeway*, historian Rose L. Martin documents that the Fabian socialists had come up with an almost identical program, entitled *Labour’s War Aims*, published prior to the Fourteen Points. And establishment historian/propagandist Walter Millis (CFR) acknowledged that Colonel House’s “sole justification for preparing such a batch of blood [i.e., WWI] for his countrymen was his hope of establishing a new world order.”

In Europe the response was less glowing than that in the United States. The German, French, British, and Russian governments were all displeased at Wilson’s initiative and embarrassed by the political idealism it portrayed. Major General Erich Ludendorff, who was in virtual control of the entire German war effort, had his heart set on carving out a Greater Germany that would dominate the continent of Europe. The French had similar dreams at Germany’s expense. When French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau heard of Wilson’s Fourteen Points, he growled sarcastically, “The good God had only ten.” And the British, being the strongest naval power in the world, and carrying out a naval blockade of German ports as part of their war strategy, did not much like the sound of “freedom of navigation on the seas in peace and war,” or of an adjustment of colonial claims in which the interests of colonial subjects would be considered.

Wilson’s speech did not favorably impress the Bolsheviks, either. Leon Trotsky dismissed it as capitalist hot air and accused the Allies, including Wilson, of secretly backing the tough German negotiating stance with Russia at Brest-Litovsk, which had ended the war on the Eastern Front. And all of the Allies were offended by Wilson’s omission of what they viewed as a very important point, namely, reparations.

Meanwhile, the war raged on. However, ever since the United States had been drawn into the war in April of 1917, Germany’s fate had essentially been sealed. As 1918 began, more than 200,000 American troops were arriving in Europe every month. That, combined with the British naval blockade of Germany, ensured that there was no way that Germany could win a war of attrition. The most that Germany could hope to accomplish would be to secure the best armistice terms possible. As the last



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desperate German offensive of 1918 was crushed by the American juggernaut, it was plain that the situation could not last. By September, German morale was crumbling, and the bottom of the barrel had already been scraped as far as recruiting more manpower for military service was concerned.

On September 29, General Ludendorff and his nominal superior Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg met with Kaiser Wilhelm II and asked that a peace proposal be made to President Wilson, without delay, on the basis of his Fourteen Points. Wilson had provided the beleaguered Germans an opportunity with which they might be able to pull themselves out of the morass of failed hopes with at least a shred of honor.

On October 3, the kaiser turned to his respected cousin Prince Max von Baden to succeed Georg von Hertling as imperial chancellor. Prince Max was a proven liberal. He had opposed the resumption of the unrestricted submarine warfare that had drawn the United States into the war. Hence, the kaiser reasoned, Prince Max would be palatable to President Wilson.

On October 4, the German government requested an armistice, not from all of the Allied Powers but, rather, from the American president, based on his Fourteen Points. This was a clever move by Prince Max. By accepting the Fourteen Points, he had appeared to lift Germany from the status of bullying aggressor to Wilson's moral high ground in a single stroke.

Wilson replied to the German government on October 8, asking whether Germany would really accept the Fourteen Points as a basis for peace. Prince Max responded on October 12 that Germany did indeed accept the Fourteen Points and asked whether the Allies did likewise. This was a shrewd move, for the Allies were actually enraged at these one-sided negotiations, fearing that Wilson might try to cheat them out of the fruits of victory.

Two days before Prince Max dispatched his second note, a German submarine sank the steamship *Leinster* in the Irish Sea with the loss of 500 passengers, some of whom were American nurses. This outraged President Wilson and gave him the excuse he needed to stiffen his terms. Germany's decision to continue unrestricted submarine warfare while peace negotiations were under way was an incredibly stupid one, and was another sign of the insensitivity to world opinion that was so often a characteristic of German policy. Wilson replied on October 16, demanding that an armistice be worked out by the Allied and American military authorities, that armistice terms secure the military superiority of the armies of the United States and the Allies, that submarine warfare be halted at once, and that the German government prove that it had become democratic.

Prince Max accepted these new terms on October 20, promised far-reaching constitutional changes, and invited armistice proposals. The United States and the Allies met a German delegation on November 8 in a railroad car on a siding in Compiègne, France. On November 9, the German delegation accepted the terms offered. After the terms were accepted in Berlin, the armistice agreement was signed by the delegations on the morning of November 11. The war was over on the 11th day of the 11th month at 11:00 a.m.

The high-sounding moral rhetoric of the Fourteen Points gave way to revenge and betrayal, as Wilson signed on to the Versailles Treaty, a brutal "Carthaginian Peace" that ground Germany into the mire, guaranteeing the destitution and bitter resentment that Hitler would ride to power. British economist John Maynard Keynes called the treaty terms "abhorrent and detestable." David Lloyd George admitted it was too harsh, saying, "We shall have to fight another war again in 25 years time."



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