

Incompetence, Technology, and Justice: Today's Lessons from World War I

By Eric D. Patterson

Some wars seem fresh on the mind, despite the passage of decades. World War II is such a war: despite the passage of 80 years, Adolf Hitler, the Holocaust, Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, the atom bomb, and Winston Churchill's speeches still belong to our world, to our time. In contrast, World War I long ago faded to seem like a different epoch, a clash of Old World civilizations with little connection to today. Yet on the centennial of that truly cataclysmic war, which not only resulted in millions of battle deaths and the collapse of empires but also unleashed Spanish influenza on the world, are there lessons for today that are relevant for our political and military leaders? Yes.

This chapter looks at leadership issues from the Great War and draws lessons regarding accountability, the philosophy of technology, and postwar justice. Each of these areas tracks with one of the three basic components of just war thinking: the ethics of going to war (*jus ad bellum*), of how war is fought (*jus in bello*), and of ending war well (*jus post bellum*).¹ When thinking about World War I, one has to consider whether the grotesque body counts were the result of incompetent leadership, and, if so, why were these incompetent leaders not fired? Second, World War I was characterized by the pell-mell introduction of new armaments and technologies, including tanks, machine guns, submarines, and chemical agents. What is

the appropriate philosophical framework for establishing protocols for use and restraint of the tools of modern warfare? Third, each of the principal victors—Georges Clemenceau (France), David Lloyd George (the United Kingdom), and Woodrow Wilson (the United States)—took a different approach to postwar justice, ranging from vengeance to restoration. What was at stake, and which was the most appropriate? Operating from the just war framework, this chapter argues that these questions have currency today, whether in the consideration of how to measure the success of battlefield commanders, defining the norms and limits of cyber warfare, or advancing postconflict stability and justice.

Dealing with Incompetent Leadership

Most militaries have been slow to fire incompetent leaders, and World War I is apparently no exception. I state “apparently” because in another chapter in this volume, Nigel Biggar takes a more generous view of the performance of General Douglas Haig and some other Allied generals. Regardless, our focus is on the *willingness to fire* incompetent or poorly performing military leaders. This is a stewardship issue because it has to do with how decisions are made and how men and military materiel are spent. This is the blood and the treasure of a nation.

How does one measure the success of military leaders? One benchmark might be whether they look the part. Historically, it was important for military leaders to look gentlemanly, whether they were knights during the Middle Ages or gentlemen officers in the 19th and 20th centuries. “Looking the part” set them up for success, in some eyes, from the very beginning. The rigid class structures of many European countries meant that social distinctions and pedigree were important: senior leaders had gone to the right schools, knew the right people, and were from the right social class. The distinction between officers as gentlemen and the enlisted class was quite dramatic. But is that a measure of success?

Americans had faced a similar set of issues early in the Civil War (1861–1865) when many flag officers were political appointees, not trained

or prepared warriors. It was even worse down the ranks, as many officers were elected by their peers.

Field Marshal Sir John French led the British expeditionary force in the first year of World War I. On seeing the unprecedented destruction of early trench warfare, explosives, and machine guns, he apparently lost his nerve on the battlefield and eventually was replaced with Sir Douglas Haig. Critics can quibble over whether it took too long to replace French, but the larger questions are about whether Haig truly was a competent general for modern warfare and whether he was able to adapt. To be fair, let's dispel for a moment the fallacy that leaders in World War I should be excused because they could not have foreseen the shocking destructive power of machine guns, barbed wire, trench warfare, and so forth. This point is often used as an excuse, at least for the first year of the war, to exonerate those leaders for sending tens of thousands of men to their deaths *on a daily basis*. The "How could they have known?" argument falls apart because European armies had sent observers to the U.S. Civil War a generation earlier and had witnessed first-hand not only the advances due to rifled bullets and artillery, but also the introduction of the Gatling gun there (and on the American frontier). In fact, European armies employed machine guns in colonial conflicts across Africa and Asia in the decades before World War I. Consequently, military leaders in London, Paris, and elsewhere should have had a better appreciation for just how destructive pitched battles would be, or they should have learned more quickly not to simply throw waves of men at emplaced machine guns and artillery.

From a just war perspective, these are "likelihood of success" issues, but they are rooted in the cardinal just war principle of "legitimate authority": wars are waged under the aegis of proper political and military authorities, which demand a high level of political and strategic responsibility from elected officials, senior civilian officials, and flag officers in particular. Moreover, the nexus of authority (decisions and deeds by leaders) and likelihood of success demonstrates the multidimensionality of how the prudential *jus ad bellum* criteria (for example, proportionality of ends,

likelihood of success, last resort) are intertwined with the *jus in bello* criteria (proportionality, discrimination).

Consequently, lessons were drawn from the Crimean War and U.S. Civil War—hence other advances in weaponry on land and sea and in the air. Thus, by the first year or so of World War I, lessons should have been learned about trench warfare, barbed wire, and the rest. Yet it was throughout the entire 4 years of war that the mass group tactics continued to result in thousands of men dying in a single day. In fact, on a single day in a single battle—the first day of the Battle of the Somme—General Haig oversaw the loss of 57,000 men. His response was that people at home did not understand just how vast the battlefield was.²

I raise this point about firing incompetent leaders because, from the just war perspective, the first principle of *jus ad bellum* is legitimate political authority. For the past century, that has meant elected leaders in the West. But then they delegate battlefield authority to general officers, to admirals, and to their subordinates. So again the question arises: what should be the measure of success? This is a moral principle that involves leadership and stewardship.

Recently, military officers have thought a lot about this because of Tom Ricks's famous book *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today*.³ Ricks is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and popular historian, and *The Generals* looks at the willingness of General George Marshall during World War II, supported by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to fire many incompetent leaders. The book also discusses some general officers' willingness to hold some of their subordinates accountable, while contrasting the Marshall era with the unwillingness, particularly during Vietnam, for political leaders to question the viewpoints of military officers and for military leaders to hold their subordinates accountable for winning. Ricks reports this is due to a shift in the U.S. military, where officers were trained for staff duties rather than to be warriors and leaders, resulting in a cautious, bureaucratic organization rather than an audacious fighting machine. Ricks argues that this is one of the reasons that the United

States was not successful in Vietnam and that it accounts for some of the missteps in Korea a decade earlier as well: poorly prepared senior officers who were better at staff work than leading a warfighting organization, an overreliance on technology, and at times some disregard (or disdain) for the common Servicemember.

In World War I, there were some isolated instances of officers, such as French General Joseph Joffre, who lost their jobs due to performance. It is more noteworthy that First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill manfully took the blame for Gallipoli in the Dardanelles campaign and resigned his position in government. He was scapegoated for a campaign that he was a mastermind in promoting but that was not effectively executed on the ground by generals and admirals. Churchill then freely went to fight in the trenches. That was a voluntary resignation. Again, the point has to do with accountability, about how we measure success, and about legitimacy. The questions for us today are multiple: do we have a culture of self-accountability where those who are promoted beyond their ken will self-select out? Will elected officials hold flag officers accountable for success? How do modern militaries define and measure the success of a military leader, ethically and prudentially, in wartime? There are many subsidiary questions to be raised here, but it is noteworthy that at the time of this writing, an anonymous U.S. Air Force officer has captured the attention of the Pentagon and beyond for his criticisms of how officers are developed and promoted.⁴

I realize that I am closing this section with both an assertion (We need to do better at having indicators of success for wartime military leaders.) and questions (How do we measure success? And why do we not fire the unsuccessful?) rather than answers. That is in part because this chapter began as an exhortatory address to military officers at the National War College in Washington, DC. But let me point to a couple of resources that may help. The first is that we must get back to the basics of winning. As Colin Powell remarked over and over again, the purpose of the U.S. military is to fight and win the Nation's wars. With that simple maxim in mind, we need to reestablish the notion that meaningful victory is our purpose. My

chapter on the “morality of victory” in an edited volume of the same title demonstrates the morality of winning as well as why the West has given up on seeking outright victory in recent years.⁵ The country cannot expect to have successful military leaders on the battlefield if there is not a culture of excellence and expectation of victory. Second, there is plenty of literature on the difference between management and leadership. The U.S. military needs both. But in times of hot war, we will need well-prepared, moral warriors who will serve their nation by leading, not simply by managing numbers, accounts, and reports. Many of the experiences that they will need to be courageous, broad-thinking, risk-taking leaders who will be trusted by their troops will not be found on the campuses of war colleges, in the cubicles of the Pentagon, or managing PowerPoint presentations as staff officers. We need to think about how to put rising leaders into situations that demand physical and moral courage, perhaps as battlefield observers in foreign countries, on current deployments, and in risky natural disaster situations, in order to develop a sense of responsibility and decisionmaking under real conditions of pressure.

Technological Utilitarianism

A second moral issue from the Great War is technological utilitarianism, or the morality of technology. This is an ethics of how we fight (*ius in bello*) issue, which makes it different from the *ius ad bellum* issues of incompetent leaders.

More specifically, I am talking about just means, or what General James McConville in this volume’s preface calls “doing the right thing the right way.” There are multiple ways of thinking about how to do ethics. One way is to do virtue or deontological ethics, which have to do with right and wrong, good and evil, moral obligations and duties. But a different way of thinking about ethics is about what works or what might work in any given situation. One part of this utilitarian approach is a *realpolitik* that states the moral end of a state is its own preservation, and thus the morality of high politics and national security is quite different than the morality between individuals.

Those who take a utilitarian approach to technology argue that technology is amoral; it is simply a set of ideas that is constructed into reality, whether it is a laser, hydrogen bomb, computer, or an M16. For the utilitarian, it is how these things are used and the purpose to which they are put that define whether they are right or wrong. This is the morality of the ends justifying the means.

One might think that this is not a pressing moral issue, but it truly is. It was an issue during World War I because technological advancements were hurried to the battlefield and things such as chemical and biological agents were used, including on civilians, with the argument that the other side had them, the other side had used them, or the other side would use them sooner or later—so it is appropriate for us to do so. That is simply not right. In our modern era of warfare, this is increasingly an issue because as we automate the weapons of war, we are distancing human moral judgment from action. Think for a moment about how artificial intelligence (AI) works: an algorithm is created, and then there is an expectation that the algorithms will replicate, ultimately resulting in machine learning, and eventually an autonomous machine will make decisions. AI's fundamental DNA is an algorithm, but human agency recedes over time, and the expectation is that the autonomous interface makes the decisions. This violates just war principles of authority, just cause, and right intention, or it at least violates them if the programming is just numerical code disembodied from the kinds of virtue and deontological ethics that are the backbone of American society.

Think about how cyber warfare works. At any given second, many of America's adversaries are knocking on our cyber doors. They are trying to infiltrate our banks, intelligence secrets, and defense plans. And we have set up a sophisticated array of technological traps and walls to halt those hackers in their tracks. There is no way that a human can respond in real time to all of these threats, so we create a set of algorithms, a set of protocols that respond in nanoseconds to our adversaries. It is thrust and parry at the subatomic level occurring at the speed of light in bits and bytes. A

technologist will simply say that if it works, if it protects us, then it is okay. But this is not the way that warfare works.

We need to think in terms of not just utility but also morality, and that morality begins with thinking about who writes the code, what is his training, what are the limits, what would we be willing to do on the offense, what would we consider beyond the pale? In just war terms, who is authorizing and monitoring the content, under what conditions do we respond (and how), what are our frontiers of action (and our limits), how do we train the programmers on the ethics of technology, and how do we define supreme emergency? When it comes to nuclear deterrence, we have worried a great deal about these issues as they apply to watch officers sitting in missile silos, and we have bookshelves of books on the morality of deterrence, second- versus first-strike capacity, tactical (restrained?) versus strategic nuclear weapons, and so forth. But in 2019 and beyond, one worries that our elected leaders and our flag officers are far divorced from the young personnel sitting in cubicles who are doing the code work when it comes to these types of things.

Jus Post Bellum and the Versailles Treaties

One way to consider the moral challenges of bringing the Great War to an enduring resolution is to consider the jus post bellum criteria of order, justice, and conciliation and to see if the political objectives of leaders and the political outcomes (that is, treaties and their aftermath) at the war's end promoted these principles. As I wrote in *Ending Wars Well* and *Just American Wars*, the jus post bellum criteria can be implemented in practice by establishing the military, governance, and international security dimensions of a basic postconflict order, such as buttressing local law enforcement; investing in governance (domestic politics and institutions) and the rule of law; and ensuring a positive international security dimension, which means that the state no longer faces an imminent threat from an internal or external foe.⁶ In some cases it is possible to move beyond order to justice, with a focus on the responsibility of aggressors (punishment) as well as the

needs of victims (restitution). In some cases, it is possible to come to terms with what occurred in the past and imagine some form of conciliation with past adversaries.

A look at the bargaining positions of the Big Three (Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Wilson) suggests that the last was zealous about transcending this conservative model. Wilson envisioned revolutionary change. He did not want to rehabilitate Germany—he wanted to transform the world and earnestly believed that he had a divine mission to do so.⁷ Lloyd George was in tune with the vengeance demanded by the British public, while secretly ordering his negotiating team to seek outcomes that would restore Germany to its place as a British trading partner and counterbalance to Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, Clemenceau represented French and Belgian opinion: grind the Germans in order to punish them and hold them down in perpetuity.

Clemenceau: Make Germany Suffer

The battles of World War I's Western Front were fought almost entirely in France and Belgium, and at war's end, both countries wanted significant reparations from Germany.⁸ French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wanted not only vindication but also vengeance and a new transcontinental political order that neutered the German people (Germany, Austria) and resulted in both restitution and new overseas territories for France.

Clemenceau's, and France's, memory was long. The French people were humiliated by the quick collapse of their armed forces in 1914 and over the course of the war lost 1.4 million troops and 4.3 million wounded. Parts of France were uninhabitable at war's end due to mine fields and the decimation caused by artillery shelling. But France did not just have the Great War in mind when it demanded German reparations. A generation earlier, in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), Germany had humiliated the French army, seized territory, marched victoriously through the streets of Paris, and forced the French to pay a 5-billion-franc indemnity.⁹

Consequently, the French citizenry were unified in demanding a pound of flesh from Germany and its allies but were also riven by political

intrigue and factionalization, from the French right to surging communists enthused by events in Russia. Certainly, the French wanted some form of justice, but typical sentiments went far beyond justice to revenge. Not only did the French want to see Germany and its allies take responsibility and make amends for what had been done, but France also wanted to hurt Germany: most French citizens wanted the satisfaction of seeing Germany as a country, as a set of leaders, and as a people expiate French losses through German pain and suffering. As French President Raymond Poincaré stated in a 1922 speech:

You who witnessed these horrors, you who saw your parents, wives, children fall under German bullets, how could you be expected to understand and stand idly by if today, after our victory, there were people sufficiently blind to advise you to leave unpunished the actions of such outrages, and to allow Germany to keep the indemnities she owes.¹⁰

What was galling was that the war actually never touched German soil: the German armies, however weak, marched home at war's end. This was a stark contrast to the wastelands of France and Belgium. So the French public and its leadership, as well as many among their allies in the publics of Belgium, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, wanted to crucify Germany. This was not vindication; it was vindictiveness of a very human kind.

In practice, this policy of revenge as well as France's understanding of the strategic landscape resulted in policies designed to weaken Germany and its closest allies so that a German state could never threaten France again. For example, the Austro-Hungarian empire was dismembered, but independent, German-speaking Austria was left with only a small, landlocked territory and a legal prohibition from merging with Germany. Germany's first reparation payment alone was the staggering equivalent of \$5 billion today, not to mention the unique language of the Versailles Treaty blaming the war on Kaiser Wilhelm II and Berlin. John Maynard Keynes observed:

So far as possible . . . it was the policy of France to set the clock back and undo what, since 1870, the progress of Germany had accomplished. By loss of territory and other measures her population was to be curtailed; but chiefly the economic system, upon which she depended for her new strength, the vast fabric built upon iron, coal, and transport must be destroyed. If France could seize, even in part, what Germany was compelled to drop, the inequality of strength between the two rivals for European hegemony might be remedied for generations.¹¹

Lloyd George: Short-Term Politics and Long-Term Statesmanship

David Lloyd George served in many cabinet posts before taking over as prime minister in 1916. He did not begin as a hawk, arguing early on that war with Germany, if it could be averted, was not in Great Britain's interest because the two were major trading partners and such a war could have disastrous consequences. Lloyd George was a shrewd and bold elected official overseeing a coalition government. His own Liberal Party was fractured between his faction and that of H.H. Asquith, and Lloyd George consistently looked to the Conservative Party for support. Like many politicians, he gave hundreds of speeches, interviews, and commentaries, from Whitehall to newspaper interviews. Thus, on the one hand, he was the leader of a powerful empire and, on the other, he had to be responsive to public opinion in a bruised and vengeful country. In fact, he faced an election the very week of the 1918 armistice.

Consequently, one finds many statements by Lloyd George about what should be done with Germany, but for our purposes we will only look at two. The first is a public campaign statement made in November 1918. The second is a memorandum, marked "Secret," for internal use by the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in March 1919. In general, it is noteworthy that Lloyd George's primary consideration was to balance justice with long-term European order and to focus sharp-est attention narrowly on Germany's leaders while providing a path of

targeted retributive justice that would ultimately restore Germany to the community of nations.

Lloyd George's campaign speeches were in tune with a public weary of war and hungry for victory and vengeance. Shortly before the elections, he stated "that German industrial capacity 'will go a pretty long way'" and that "[w]e must have . . . the uttermost farthing" and 'shall search their pockets for it.' As the campaign closed, he summarized his program:

- trial of the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm II
- punishment of those guilty of atrocities
- fullest indemnity from Germany
- Britain for the British, socially and industrially
- rehabilitation of those broken in the war
- a happier country for all.¹²

This was Lloyd George's *public* position during an election cycle, and although it is tough on Germany and its allies, it is certainly not nearly as harsh as it could have been. Lloyd George calls for a juridical process for holding accountable the individual widely seen as responsible for orchestrating the war by goading Austria-Hungary into invading Serbia in the first place—Kaiser Wilhelm II. The Germans were also considered guilty of "atrocities," particularly in the early days of the war in what historians call the "rape of Belgium." These atrocities included the massacre of thousands of civilians,¹³ destruction of over 25,000 homes as well as public buildings, and displacement of nearly one-fifth of Belgium's population in August–September 1914.

In public pronouncements, Lloyd George also called for the "fullest indemnity" from Germany. Later we will look specifically at what the Versailles and other treaties demanded of Germany and its allies and what Britain was to receive. The key point, for the British electorate, was that Germany had started the war and was responsible for nearly one million dead (about 700,000 British troops killed and another 250,000 from Australia,

Canada, and other imperial dominions) and 2.27 million wounded.¹⁴ Germany (and its allies) should make atonement, and that payment should be for most or all of the cost of the war.

But Lloyd George had a different strategy for the private negotiations at Versailles. In a secret cable he laid out some considerations for the negotiating position of the British government and, by extension, the Allies. Lloyd George recognized the tensions inherent in trying to actualize a new European political order in the face of spreading communism, widespread desolation, and calls for rough justice. Here are Lloyd George's reflections and directions to the British negotiating team:

When nations are exhausted by wars in which they have put forth all their strength and which leave them tired, bleeding and broken, it is not difficult to patch up a peace that may last until the generation which experienced the horrors of the war has passed away. Pictures of heroism and triumph only tempt those who know nothing of the sufferings and terrors of war. It is therefore comparatively easy to patch up a peace which will last for 30 years. . . . What is difficult, however, is to draw up a peace which will not provoke a fresh struggle when those who have had practical experience of what war means have passed away. History has proved that a peace which has been hailed by a victorious nation as a triumph of diplomatic skill and statesmanship, even of moderation in the long run has proved itself to be shortsighted and charged with danger to the victor. . . .

You may strip Germany of her colonies, reduce her armaments to a mere police force and her navy to that of a fifth-rate power; all the same in the end if she feels that she has been unjustly treated in the peace of 1919 she will find means of exacting retribution from her conquerors. The impression, the deep impression, made upon the human heart by four years of unexampled slaughter will disappear with the hearts upon which it has been marked by the terrible sword of the great war. The maintenance of peace will then depend

upon there being no causes of exasperation constantly stirring up the spirit of patriotism, of justice or of fair play to achieve redress. Our terms may be severe, they may be stern and even ruthless but at the same time they can be so just that the country on which they are imposed will feel in its heart that it has no right to complain. But injustice, arrogance, displayed in the hour of triumph will never be forgotten or forgiven. . . .

If Germany goes over to the spartacists it is inevitable that she should throw in her lot with the Russian Bolsheviks. Once that happens all Eastern Europe will be swept into the orbit of the Bolshevik revolution and within a year we may witness the spectacle of nearly three hundred million people organised into a vast red army under German instructors and German generals equipped with German cannon and German machine guns and prepared for a renewal of the attack on Western Europe. This is a prospect which no one can face with equanimity. Yet the news which came from Hungary yesterday shows only too clearly that this danger is no fantasy. . . .

If we are wise, we shall offer to Germany a peace, which while just, will be preferable for all sensible men to the alternative of Bolshevism. I would, therefore, put it in the forefront of the peace that once she accepts our terms, especially reparation, we will open to her the raw materials and markets of the world on equal terms with ourselves, and will do everything possible to enable the German people to get upon their legs again. We cannot both cripple her and expect her to pay.¹⁵

Lloyd George argued that efforts at justice should not undermine security (order), nor should punishment make long-term conciliation impossible. He was writing with real-world events in mind, including the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, communists (Spartacists) marching across Germany, and communist agitation (the day before writing this memorandum)

in Hungary. Lloyd George recognized that the Paris Peace Conference needed to not push Germany's vast population and industrial strength into the hands of Vladimir Lenin and his ilk.

Lloyd George summarizes that justice may be "severe," "stern," and even "ruthless, but at the same time they can be so just that the country on which they are imposed will feel in its heart that it has no right to complain." He thus represented the positions of a wise statesman and wily politician. He understood that there was tension between the vengeance demanded by many Western publics and the realities of the great game of high politics. He focused attention on punishing Germany, but doing so in a way that made it unlikely that communists could take over the country. At the same time, he understood that Germany required some economic success if it was to be able to pay its reparations bills to London and the other Allies; it was in the best interests of the United Kingdom for its trading partner, Germany, to return to the world stage as an active economic player.

Wilson: Idealism in Transforming the World

"The moral climax of this, the culminating and final war for human liberty, has come." This is how President Wilson closed his famous Fourteen Points speech to a joint session of Congress on January 8, 1918. This dramatic proclamation was not just an oratorical flourish in the moment; rather, it illustrated the transformational, moralistic, and revolutionary nature of Wilson's desired outcome for World War I. In short, Wilson did not simply seek a return to the status quo ante bellum or even a revised international order that included some targeted punishment of aggression. Wilson sought a revolution of the global order, an end to the old institutional arrangements that had governed Europe and much of the globe for the preceding three centuries and a new system based on the self-determination of ethno-linguistic groups. Wilson's Fourteen Points attempted to end history.

When one reads Wilson's famous speech a century later, it does not seem revolutionary or transformational. All the talk of transparency, democracy, openness, the aspirations of ethnic and national groups, and

a league of nations seems consonant with the spirit of our times and the goals of most citizens in most places since at least 1989, if not 1945. On the other hand, if one is suspicious that Wilson actually meant what he said, one could see it as the canny speech of a veteran politician in that it tries to bypass Europe's elites by speaking directly to the masses. Furthermore, Wilson rhetorizes—with little practical detail—utopian but impractical goals.

But Wilson's objective really was a brave new world. First, Wilson distinguishes not simply between the militarists and "the more liberal statesmen," but more importantly, between elites and the revolutionary spirit of the masses. He identifies the former as the old order, made up of that "military and imperialistic minority." In contrast, Wilson presents an almost Hegelian tone when speaking of the people whom "liberal statesmen" in Europe represent: "to feel the force of their own peoples' thought and purpose." Wilson asserts that there is a universal spirit of freedom advancing across the globe. This is a revolution. Today's reader is probably surprised that Wilson's exemplar is not the United States or any other Western power or even the unleashed energies in the collapsing empires of Central Europe, but rather the populace of Russia that was at the time going through the Communist Revolution. He states that the "voice of the Russian people" is calling for universal "definitions of principle and purpose," which to Wilson was "thrilling and compelling" because "their soul is not subservient" despite reverses on the battlefield, and they "have refused to compound their ideals or desert others that they themselves may be safe." He concluded that the Russian people's "utmost hope" is not for vindication or vengeance, but for "liberty and ordered peace":

It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part we see

*very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us. The program of the world's peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this.*¹⁶

In addition to Wilson's confidence in the spirit of a new age, so too he presents a dramatic reshaping of how politics should work. He derides the formal institutions, customs, and courtesies of yesteryear's political elites: it "is an age that is dead and gone." The practice of princes and generals, remote from the trenches, playing global chess in their ornate staterooms and making "secret covenants" that "upset the peace of the world" is over: "the day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by." High politics should not be the domain of elites making secret bargains and competing for land and resources with little thought for the faceless everyman; high politics should be practiced in the light of day with the best interests of the global citizenry in mind.

Today's reader is typically familiar with the first few of Wilson's Fourteen Points, which outline what today we call a liberal international order. In 2019, they do not sound revolutionary:

- Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at . . . but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
- Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas.
- The removal . . . of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations.
- Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with *domestic* safety (note that Wilson states domestic, not international—this is a very dramatic statement).

In 1918, these goals sounded radical, and they struck at the old imperial order of not only America's enemies but also its closest allies. Wilson called for "open" and "public" negotiations and peace treaties, whereas the high politics of Europe typically involved private diplomacy among elites.

Professional diplomats and government officials assert that such privacy is absolutely necessary to enable the opportunities for negotiation and compromise; indeed, even the U.S. Continental Congress had to go into private sessions to complete its most important documents. But Wilson's argument struck at the motives of those in power. He was effectively arguing that the national interest was often out of touch with the interests of local people on the ground, and thus peace settlements typically just moved around pieces of geography between kings with little regard for the sentiments of the populace.

The issues of "free navigation" and "free trade" also were a blow to most of the world's leading powers, including mercantilist Britain and France. Colonies such as India and in Africa provided raw materials to the imperial center as well as markets for finished goods, and these patterns of exchange were typically protected by a web of laws and policies that were well-known to American colonists in 1776. Thus, Wilson was calling for a transformation of international markets and trade that would primarily affect his closest Allies and their colonial dominions.

Wilson also called for dramatic disarmament: "Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety." Again, he does not call for national armaments reduced to the lowest point consistent with "international security" but rather "domestic safety." Clearly weapons do not cause a war, but a criticism of the arms industry was that the United States, along with its Allies, prolonged the war by profiting through wide-scale production of ammunition, weapons, and munitions. This issue of military and industrial readiness ultimately came back to haunt the United States when it was forced to enter the war.

Much more could be said about Wilson's Fourteen Points, but only one more point needs to be made. What is missing from the speech? Wilson has little to say about justice. Indeed, it is clear that what is most important to Wilson is avoiding punishment and seeking a form of global conciliation based on the creation of a new world order. In other words, Wilson is trying

to leap through conciliation to a new 20th-century order without dealing with the elements of the 19th-century order that still existed and handling the justice issues present in the minds of Europeans, especially in Brussels, Rome, Paris, and London. Wilson was correct that 1919 was not just a new year but a new epoch, but many of his ideas would not become enshrined in such a charter until 1945, and it was not just his Allies abroad that resisted him: Congress and many Americans were suspicious of his grandiose plans as inviting risk and expense to the United States.

When we think about ethics at war's end, we need to be humble in the attempt to establish enduring order in all its dimensions and then think through whether efforts at justice bring resolution and chart a path toward conciliation, or if ethics are instead a fig leaf for vengeance in ways that are counterproductive.¹⁷ Statesmen will practice creativity and restraint and will need the help of military and diplomatic leaders to bring conflict to a real ending.

Conclusion

One might make the mistake of thinking that we have not learned from the lessons of the past, that we learned nothing from “the war to end all wars.” That would be inaccurate. Although there remain things to learn, such as having mechanisms—and the will—to hold ineffective leaders accountable, nevertheless some policies and practices have changed. Here are a few things that the United States and its allies have learned or have changed for the better.

First, General John “Black Jack” Pershing, leader of the American Expeditionary Forces in 1917–1918, created the Military Police (MP). In fact, he set up the first MP school in France on his authority. The training and development of MPs are important for security, discipline, and accountability.

Second, World War I added impetus to law of armed conflict jurisprudence and moral thinking. Sadly, this was largely due, at least in part, to the use of chemical and biological agents on the battlefield. The Hague

Conventions of 1907 were given a fresh look, and various additional protocols, later resulting in the Geneva Conventions, began to develop.

Third, the postwar world heightened the accountability of political leaders, and elites more generally, to their publics. There was a sense in the United Kingdom, France, and elsewhere that elites had dragged the citizenry into the war and that it was not just royalty, such as the Russian tsar, German emperor, or Austro-Hungarian emperor, but political and business elites who profited from the war but did not have skin in the game. There was a global democratic reaction across societies against political elites who did not have to pay in blood, sweat, and tears for this terrible war. This resulted in democratic impulses in Wilson's Fourteen Points and across Europe's masses. Some of those energies were common people who got caught up in socialistic types of movements, such as the Spartacist movement, but the point should be made that these were often mass movements for greater rights and greater accountability of their leaders. By war's end, four empires were destroyed and many new countries were born in what Samuel Huntington famously labeled the "first wave of democracy."

Fourth, today we do noncombatant immunity and protection of innocents (discrimination) much better than we did during World War I. We should feel proud about this. One of the lessons in the past 100 years has been an increasing emphasis on protecting prisoners of war, noncombatants, civilians, women and children, the weak, and the elderly. This emphasis has been led by Western governments who fought in the trenches of World War I. Similarly, we fight with far greater precision (proportionality) than a century ago. In 1918 our artillery, airplanes, battleships, and other weapons were largely indiscriminate. The United States in particular has led advances in targeted precision weaponry that are a dramatic and positive change over the past.

Finally, in the United States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and elsewhere, the professionalization of our services means far greater stewardship of resources. It means less likelihood of untrained recruits doing things they should not on the battlefield. It also means a much more thoughtful

and accountable generation of Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen who are fighting the Nation's wars. We are much more professional today than we were a century ago when mass armies fought across the European theater, and hopefully we will continue to be wise learners so that future generations can point to 2019 and say that we were careful to consider the moral content of our plans and deeds.



Notes

¹ For a basic explication of just war principles, see Eric D. Patterson, *Just War Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007). Also see James Turner Johnson, *The Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

² John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Vintage, 2012).

³ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

⁴ A U.S. Air Force officer, using the pseudonym “Ned Stark,” has published multiple articles that have drawn attention from the ranks all the way up to the Service’s Chief of Staff General David Goldfein. A summary of the debate can be found in Brian Ferguson, “Goldfein Reaches out to ‘Ned Stark,’ Critic of Air Force Promotion System,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 21, 2018.

⁵ See Eric D. Patterson, “Moral Victory and the Just War Tradition,” in *Moral Victories: Ethics, Exit Strategies, and the Ending of Wars*, ed. Cian O’Driscoll and Andrew Hom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶ Eric D. Patterson, *Ending Wars Well: Order, Justice, and Conciliation in Post-Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), and *American Just Wars* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁷ Milan Babik, “George D. Herron and the Eschatological Foundations of Woodrow Wilson’s Foreign Policy, 1917–1919,” available at <www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44254537.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab8602106a88ef4013fd43fe669139c6a>; Lloyd Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and American Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Cara Lea Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Barry Hankins, *Woodrow Wilson: Ruling Elder, Spiritual President* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008).

⁸ Belgium’s King Albert argued against draconian punishment of Germany (and the dethroning of so many Central European monarchs) as destabilizing; he wanted reparations but did not want an anti-monarchical set of dominos falling with the tsar already gone and Kaiser Wilhelm in exile.

⁹ This amount was another example of “tit for tat”: it was based on the amount Napoleon had forced on Prussia in 1807.

¹⁰ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: 6 Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 214.

¹¹ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of Peace* (London: MacMillan, 1920), 32.

¹² Alfred F. Havighurst, *Britain in Transition: The Twentieth Century*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 1985), 107.

¹³ According to two databases as reported by Wikipedia, “Throughout the beginning of the war, the German army engaged in numerous atrocities against the civilian population of Belgium, including the destruction of civilian property; 6,000 Belgians were killed, and 17,700 died during expulsion, deportation, imprisonment, or a death sentence by court. 25,000 homes and other buildings in 837 communities were destroyed in 1914 alone, and 1.5 million Belgians (20% of the entire population) fled from the invading German army.”

¹⁴ John Graham Royde-Smith, “World War I: Killed, Wounded, and Missing,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at <www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Killed-wounded-and-missing>.

¹⁵ Lloyd Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and American Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 88.

¹⁶ See “President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Delivered in Joint Session, January 8, 1918,” available at <https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Fourteen_Points>.

¹⁷ Eric D. Patterson, ed., *Ethics Beyond War’s End* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

