

French troops occupy the Ruhr, 1923.



THE PEACE OF PARIS APPLIED: THE 1920s

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The Paris peace settlement did not take instant effect at the treaty-signing ceremonies that began on June 28, 1919, in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. A number of complicated steps were required to implement the treaties. Plebiscites had been promised in two areas of mixed population on Germany's new borders: Danish-German Schleswig-Holstein and Polish-German Upper Silesia. The disarmament of the defeated Central Powers had to be completed, and their remaining armed forces inspected. A final reparations sum had to be fixed. The League of Nations had to be set up.

To complicate matters further, the peoples of Eastern Europe continued to fight over their new frontiers. Even after settlement of the Polish-Russian War in 1921, Polish irregulars held the city of Vilna, which the Peace Conference had awarded to Lithuania. Poles also fought with Czechs over Teschen until July 1920, and they contested the outcome of the plebiscite in Upper Silesia. Austrians and Hungarians fought over the Burgenland, a border area near Vienna, until late in 1921. Yugoslavia claimed the Adriatic port of Fiume, which was occupied by Italian volunteers in contravention of the Peace Conference's

decision. A Turkish nationalist movement under the army officer Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk) rejected the treaty terms that the sultan had accepted, overthrew the sultan, defeated a Greek army supported by the Allies, and won control over all of Anatolia by 1923.

The letter of the treaties, therefore, often mattered less than the ways in which they were interpreted and enforced. The treaties themselves were ambiguous. According to one possible interpretation, they were meant to produce open dealings and free trade among satisfied nation-states. According to another quite legitimate reading, they perpetuated the *status quo* of 1919 under the watchful eyes of the wartime alliance. The second interpretation tended to predominate as the peace settlement was put into effect. For one thing, the treaties were not self-enforcing. The German government accepted the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, under protest, only when the Allies threatened to renew the war. To most Germans, the peace settlement was a *Diktat*, and not a freely negotiated agreement. Only a continued application of force could keep Germany and Russia in the state of subordination to which defeat and revolution had reduced them. France was the nation most eager to perpetuate the *status quo* of 1919, and it was the nation with the largest armed force available on the European Continent to do so.

The first five years after the Peace Conference were years of coercion in which France, supported less and less willingly by its wartime allies, attempted to preserve its 1919 eminence by force. After 1924, the weary French and Germans accepted a degree of accommodation, and there followed five years of conciliation.

THE YEARS OF COERCION, 1919–24

The stage was set for the years of coercion by the election of conservative and nationalist majorities in the principal Allied countries. The exultation of victory, combined with fears of revolution at home, hardened public spirits. In the United States in November 1918, Woodrow Wilson's Democrats lost both houses of Congress to Republicans increasingly distrustful of entangling alliances in Europe. Having failed to involve the Republican leadership sufficiently in his personal diplomacy in Paris, Wilson faced powerful opposition when he returned. The Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and the League Covenant without reservations that Wilson would not accept. In the course of taking his case before the American people in a whistle-stop tour in September 1919, Wilson was incapacitated by a stroke. The American return to political isolationism was confirmed by the election of the Republican Warren G. Harding as president in November 1920. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George had enlarged his wartime coalition in the "khaki election" of December 1918, but the "hang the kaiser" nationalism of that election was soon transformed in British public

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opinion into a reluctance to be drawn into Continental entanglements by a vindictive France. Even before a Tory majority was elected in 1922, the British government had declined to enter into a defensive treaty with France.

These developments left France in effective charge of the European Continent. And in no other country was the set toward conservatism and nationalism more pronounced than in the French elections of November 1919. The new Chamber of Deputies, the most conservative since 1871, contained so many war veterans that it was dubbed the "horizon blue chamber," in reference to the color of army dress uniforms. Until the next election in 1924, the French parliament supported policies of traditional national interest, military strength, and alliance diplomacy.

Both the parliamentary majority and a military command with enhanced political influence helped formulate these policies, but it is Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré (1922–24) who has come to personify their spirit. A strong-willed lawyer from the traditionally nationalist French Lorraine, Poincaré was said to "know everything and understand nothing." He construed the treaties with a strict legalism, backed with the natural force of his character. Poincaré brought unusual prestige to his task, for he had been president of France from 1913 to 1920.

French Hegemony

The 1920s was the decade of French hegemony in Europe. France had the most powerful land army in the world. Its forces not only occupied the German Rhineland; they were also stationed in Eastern Europe and (briefly) in Russia. Since the League of Nations excluded the defeated powers from membership, that institution conformed more closely to the French concept of a perpetuated wartime alliance than to the Wilsonian concept of a world parliament. Moreover, detailed supervision of the treaties' application rested less on the League than on the Conference of Ambassadors, the "Big Four" Ambassadors in Paris, a kind of institutional offspring of the Peace Conference.

French dominance was almost devoid of confidence, however. Its fragility was apparent to all. Victory had been possible in 1918 only with Allied aid, and at a cost in men and matériel that could never be spent a second time. Soon Germany would again produce more steel and babies than France. In place of the Franco-Russian Alliance, the main prop of French security since 1892, there was now a cluster of shaky and squabbling successor states in Eastern Europe.

On the western front, the United States and Britain had left France the sole guarantor of its own security. The failure of the United States Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles also meant the lapse of the simultaneous treaties that provided for automatic United States and

¹This popular jibe contrasted him to his main political rival of the 1920s, Aristide Briand, who "understood everything and knew nothing."

British aid in case of German attack. French leaders felt betrayed, for they had moderated their demands on Germany at the Peace Conference in return for this promise of future outside support. Although the French government tried to negotiate a substitute treaty of mutual defense with Britain alone during 1921 and 1922, the negotiators were unable to agree on how automatic British support of the French along the Rhine should be, for British public opinion was increasingly fearful of being drawn into another war by French bellicosity. As for European frontiers further east, no British government would make any commitments at all until 1939.

French governments after 1919 attempted to make up for the deficiencies of their country's position by two lines of conduct. They tried single-handedly to apply the punitive features of the Versailles Treaty with punctilious rigor. And they cultivated their system of alliances in Eastern Europe to maintain the pre-1914 strategy of threatening Germany with a two-front war.

Those new states in Eastern Europe that France had favored in the Peace Conference became the links in a chain of alliances meant to reinforce the League and the Paris peace system with more traditional diplomacy. Three states that had everything to lose by a revival of Hungary and Germany—Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia—formed the Little Entente in 1920 and 1921. France later concluded military alliances with them and strengthened their mutual economic and cultural ties. Poland was the other essential nation in the new French alliance system. Even though Poland was divided from Czechoslovakia by the dispute over Teschen, it had the most to lose by German and Russian revival. French officers had helped the Poles stave off Soviet armies in 1920, and French diplomats helped Poland obtain generous settlements of the outstanding border questions: the main mining and industrial areas of Upper Silesia from Germany, and the city of Vilna from Lithuania. In 1921, Poland and France concluded a treaty of mutual assistance in which each promised to aid the other in case of attack.

This network of alliances was a poor substitute for the pre-1914 Franco-Russian Alliance. The only successor state with a strong industrial base was Czechoslovakia. The Little Entente was really directed more against Hungary than against Germany. And Poland and Romania had more to lose by Russian revival than by German revival. The eastern alliances actually complicated France's interwar foreign policy more than they strengthened it.

Another consequence of France's revival of alliance politics was the encouragement of a counteralliance among the outsider nations. The Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia was the first major step outside the Versailles political order. It came as a bombshell. While the European states, including Germany and Russia, were meeting at Genoa to discuss world economic problems and the

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Western nations' desire to get the Soviet Union to repay the tsarist debts to them, German Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau and Russian Foreign Minister George Chicherin slipped off to nearby Rapallo and signed a treaty establishing diplomatic relations and promising not to make any economic demands on one another. There were no secret military clauses, but soon thereafter General Hans von Seeckt was working out secret arms manufacture and training arrangements for German soldiers in the Soviet Union. One of the basic recurring patterns of interwar European alignments had been created: France and the Little Entente on one side, Germany and the Soviet Union on the other.

The Reparations Issue

The thorniest conflict raised by the Versailles Treaty was the reparations issue. It had long been normal practice for victors to impose a punitive fine on the loser, sheer financial booty without moral connotations. After Napoleon's final defeat in 1815, the victors had levied an indemnity of 700 million francs, about half the French annual budget in peacetime; it was paid off in five years. After the Franco-German war in 1871, France had been obliged to pay 5 billion francs to Germany; that took only four years. The reparations required of Germany after the First World War were not only far beyond any amount imagined before; they came clothed in a language of moral recrimination. "The aggression of Germany and her allies" had caused the war, asserted the famous Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, and so Germany should "make compensation for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allied and Associated Powers and to their property" (Article 232).

A hard-headed political calculation lay behind this demand. None of the belligerent states had paid for all the costs of the war by taxation. They had borrowed immense sums by selling bonds on which interest had to be paid after the war. They had also issued floods of additional currency to cover wartime budget deficits. The resulting inflation meant that the bondholders would eventually be paid back in money that bought less. A state might even default on its bonds, although that would make it more difficult to borrow again. Either inflation or default meant that the middle-class purchasers of war bonds would end up paying for the war by losing their investment. Governments hesitated to antagonize the bondholders to that extent. In addition, vast sums were needed to reconstruct destroyed buildings, railroads, and bridges, and to restore shell-strewn farmland to productivity. No government would find it easy to raise taxes to pay for all that.

The final difficulty was war debts. Both Britain and France owed large sums to the United States, while France owed additional war debts to Britain. Although the United States advocated a moderate reparations settlement (without actually participating in the work of the Reparations Commission), it adamantly refused throughout the 1920s to

consider waiving any part of these war debts. Without collecting reparations from Germany, however, Britain and France could hardly pay what they owed the United States.

The Peace Conference had been unable to agree on a reparations figure low enough for the Germans or high enough for the British and French. It left that problem to the Reparations Commission. In the meantime, Germany was supposed to start paying a preliminary 1 billion marks, plus deliveries of coal to compensate the French for mines that were flooded during the German retreat. The Reparations Commission, consisting of representatives of Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, and Serbia, labored through seven conferences in various European resorts before finally agreeing in April 1921 on the sum of 132 billion gold marks (\$33 billion), payable in yearly installments of 2 billion gold marks, plus 26 percent of the value of German exports.²

No German government believed it could accept such a burden on future generations and survive, but neither could a French government that failed to collect reparations survive. In March 1921, even before the final bill had been presented, French troops were sent to occupy three cities in the Ruhr industrial area—Düsseldorf, Ruhrort, and Duisburg—when it was charged that the Germans had fallen behind in deliveries in kind.

The payments posed enormous problems. Even assuming German willingness to pay, it was not simply a matter of raising the necessary sum each year by taxes or borrowing. The money had to be transferred into foreign currencies: that is, the German government had to buy the necessary francs or pounds for marks. Transfer on such a scale was not technically impossible, however, as some claimed at the time.³ One solution was for Germany to earn much more foreign exchange by increasing its exports, but the Allies did not intend to finance reparations by buying German exports. Another partial solution was to pay a larger proportion in kind—paying in goods and materials to replace similar goods and materials destroyed in the war—and in fact the brilliant German Jewish industrialist and technocrat, Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, worked out such an agreement in 1922. French industrialists disliked payments in kind, however, and Rathenau was assassinated soon after by German anti-Semitic nationalists for making such a concession. The solution adopted was to haggle and wrangle while the mark declined in value. Germany's runaway inflation had begun long before the first reparations payments were made, the result of wartime deficit spending, continued easy credit after the war, and the speculative pur-

²The proposed schedule of payments would have actually transferred less to the Allies, perhaps 108 billion marks. See Marc Trachtenburg, *Reparations in World Politics* (New York, 1980), pp. 210–11. The Germans made some payments in 1919–22, perhaps 13 billion gold marks, but estimates differ for both technical and partisan reasons.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 77–84, 342.

chase of gold and foreign exchange by wealthy Germans. Rather than adopt the internal austerity measures that might have stabilized the mark, German bankers and government financial experts blamed inflation solely on the effect of reparations payments. In this way they used the sufferings of inflation victims to bring further pressure on the Allies.

The Occupation of the Ruhr, 1923

When Poincaré assumed the prime ministry of France in January 1922, he decided to crack down on reparations. In early 1923, he announced that the Germans were in default in payments in kind. The default—55,000 out of 200,000 telephone poles—was trivial in itself. It provided a pretext, however, for cutting through the red tape of years of moratoriums, partial payments, and international study commissions. Poincaré occupied the Ruhr with troops.

Poincaré's original intention had, in fact, been more limited. He had sent a "technical control commission" (MICUM) to the offices of the



"Hands off the Ruhr!" This poster illustrates the adoption of nationalist themes by the German far left during the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923.

German Coal Syndicate in Essen, guarded by an armed force (two French divisions and a small Belgian detachment), to see to the strict delivery of coal. But an armed mission sent into hostile territory, even on a limited technical errand, easily grew into outright military occupation. The German Coal Syndicate abandoned Essen, and the German government ordered the German residents there to practice passive resistance, which left Ruhr industry and transportation at a standstill. The French eventually had to send in thousands of engineers and railroad men, as well as five divisions (plus a Belgian division), to run the coal mines and railroads. In this way, France actually received German coal from the Ruhr in 1923. Poincaré achieved his aim: payments in kind were extracted. But the price paid, in broader terms, far outweighed that victory. Poincaré won the battle over reparations and lost the war.

One cost was the paroxysm of anger and disorder that shook Germany in the last half of 1923. Although most residents of the Ruhr obeyed the order of passive resistance, there were acts of sabotage and clashes; in the most serious of these, thirteen Germans were killed. The mark plummeted to become worthless paper. The German Communist party revived in the Ruhr and took power in coalition governments in the states of Saxony and Thuringia. Hitler entered the German political scene with his abortive Munich "beer hall" *Putsch*.

Another cost was open opposition to French policy on the part of its allies. British opinion, in particular, had drifted away from the vengefulness of the "khaki election" of 1918. John Maynard Keynes's best-seller *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920) argued that French vindictiveness was damaging the European economy. The French, in turn, charged the British with a balance of power shift toward Germany in search of richer markets. It was the Ruhr occupation that made these bitter undercurrents public. The British delegate to the Reparations Commission, Sir John Bradbury, referring to the German deficit in delivering telephone poles, proclaimed that wood had not been put to such a use in international affairs since the Trojan horse. The British conspicuously failed to take part in the occupation. The Belgians did send token forces, and Mussolini's Italy gave Poincaré at least moral support. But it was clear that if France wanted to extract its pound of flesh from Germany by force, it would have to do it alone.

A more direct cost was financial. Although the French proceeds in coal were said to be larger than the cost of the expedition, the operation's expense set off another round of inflation in France. The franc had already lost much of its prewar purchasing power during the war. Now it lost even more. When financial stability was finally restored in 1928, the franc was worth about one-fifth of its prewar international value and about one-quarter of its prewar purchasing power. The Frenchmen who had prewar savings, or who had bought war bonds, came to believe that they had paid for the war after all, with the loss of their savings.

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Electoral

A new French government was formed in December 1923 as the result of the election. The government was a coalition of the Radical party and the League of Nations party. The ministry of Finance was held by a Radical, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by a Radical. The League of Nations party was represented in the cabinet by the Minister of War and the Minister of the Interior.

In France Poincaré (the *gauches*) replaced Herriot. The Radical party of

While it was a coalition affair. Lloyd George and Herriot, and Herriot, drew his appearance. The beginning

*See Chapter 8, "Labour Party" (London, 1923).
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THE YEARS OF CONCILIATION, 1924–29

The French occupation of the Ruhr produced a mutual exhaustion out of which emerged a more conciliatory European diplomacy. The French proved that they could not coerce Germany alone; the Germans proved that passive resistance demanded a kind of self-immolation. Out of this negative balance grew a normalization of European international relations in the later 1920s.

Electoral Shifts in Britain and France

A new mood was reflected in the elections of 1923 and 1924. When the British Conservative party was defeated in the general elections of December 9, 1923, Labour emerged for the first time ahead of the Liberals as the larger party of the opposition. So the first British Labour government was formed with Ramsay MacDonald as prime minister and foreign minister. It represented the triumph of the wartime liberal opposition that had been defeated in the jingoistic election of 1918. In the new ministry were parliamentary leaders of the wartime pacifist opposition, such as MacDonald himself, and nine members of the Union of Democratic Control.⁴ The government committed itself explicitly to “a policy of International Cooperation through a strengthened and enlarged League of Nations; the settlement of disputes by conciliation and judicial arbitration; . . . and disarmament, the only security of the nations.”⁵

In France, the elections of May 11, 1924, were a direct repudiation of Poincaré’s coercive policy toward Germany. A “left alliance” (*cartel des gauches*) of the moderate left (Radicals) and parliamentary socialists replaced the “horizon blue” majority of 1919 in parliament. Edouard Herriot became premier and foreign minister. Herriot was leader of the Radical party, which was no longer “radical” by then, but a center-left party opposed to big government, militarism, and clericalism.

While international relations was not the only issue in these elections,⁶ it was a prominent one. Both governments rested on liberal–socialist coalitions that found it easier to act in foreign policy than in domestic affairs. Both began with conspicuous symbolic acts abroad. MacDonald and Herriot extended their nations’ diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union, and Herriot, gratifying his anticlerical backers, started to withdraw his ambassador from the Vatican. More fundamentally, the two men appeared eager to set European international affairs off on a new footing, beginning with Germany and the reparations crisis.

⁴See Chapter 4, pp. 117–18.

⁵Labour party platform, 1923, quoted in Charles L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (London, 1955), p. 180.

⁶For domestic aspects of the British and French elections, see Chapter 9, pp. 251–60.



At the height of the 1923 inflation in Germany, bank notes quickly became worthless. A vendor sells apples for 300 billion marks per half pound.

Germany's Policy of "Fulfillment"

From the German side, too, came conciliatory signals. By late summer 1923, passive resistance in the Ruhr had gone as far as it could. As the mark lost its last vestiges of public confidence, it took more and more of them to buy anything. Prices leaped higher almost by the hour in a spiraling inflation quite unlike anything known before. A wholesale item that cost 100 marks in July 1922 cost 74,787 marks in July 1923 and, just a month later, in August 1923, 944,041 marks. Two thousand printing presses ran night and day to provide new banknotes.⁷ Separatism had revived in the western German borderlands, and the two political extremes—communism and Nazism—gained increasing numbers of adherents. In August 1923, therefore, a "Great Coalition" government, including all the major republican parties, from Social Democrats on the left to the Peoples' party on the center-right, was formed under Gustav Stresemann.

Gustav Stresemann became the outstanding figure in German politics and in European diplomacy until his death in 1929. Although Stresemann's own government lasted only three months (August to November 1923), it was a decisive "hundred days," during which he ordered an end to passive resistance, issued a stable new German currency, blocked a communist uprising in Hamburg and the Hitler *Putsch*

⁷Karl Hardach, *The Political Economy of Germany in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1980), p. 20.

in Munich, and made overtures for an understanding with France. Stresemann became foreign minister in the next government and held that position until his death nearly six years later.

Stresemann launched Germany on a policy of "fulfillment" (*Erfüllung*). He attempted to negotiate gradual changes in the Versailles system while carrying out its provisions. His new German foreign policy has received varying assessments. At the time, and even more in retrospect when Germany was under Hitler, Stresemann seemed the very model of international conciliation. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926. After the Second World War, however, the discovery of his private papers produced a harsh reassessment. It was clear that even though Stresemann was willing to live with Germany's west frontiers, he never accepted the eastern frontiers. One key document in Stresemann's papers was a secret memorandum of September 7, 1925, to the exiled crown prince of Prussia, in which Stresemann set out a kind of timetable for dismantling the Versailles system. First, resolution of the reparations issue. Then, the protection of Germans outside the national frontiers. Finally, the rectification of the eastern borders: regaining Danzig, the Polish Corridor, and parts of Upper Silesia; revising the frontier with Czechoslovakia; and perhaps eventually uniting with Austria. Stresemann thought all this could be achieved by cautious but ever more forceful steps. "First we must get the throttler from our throat"; then Germany could seek more active goals by "being crafty" (*finassieren*).

Stresemann never had time to carry out his grand design, but his private papers reveal him as a determined revisionist who sought many of the changes that Hitler achieved in the late 1930s, including expansion beyond Germany's 1914 borders in the east. Any comparison with Hitler must, of course, stress the total absence in Stresemann of territorial aims outside German-speaking areas, of overt racialist doctrines, or of Hitler's evident need to display force in his victories.

The Dawes Plan

Stresemann's first priority was reparations. That, after all, was the immediate issue behind the Ruhr crisis of 1923 that brought him to power. By November 1923, Poincaré himself was willing to accept the appointment of an international commission to review the whole question and to move reparations from the realm of moral censure to the more realistic realm of economic capacity. Charles G. Dawes, an American financier and later vice president of the United States under Calvin Coolidge, headed a commission that produced a new plan for reparations in London in July and August 1924.

The Dawes Plan was meant to put reparations on a businesslike footing. To begin, German payments must be based not on Allied moral indignation or even on Allied reconstruction needs but on German capacity to pay. The funds were to be raised in Germany by new taxes

and by income from the railroads, which were placed under international supervision. The transfer of the marks into foreign currencies was to be carefully regulated in order to avoid damaging the mark on international exchanges. Finally, the Dawes Plan recognized the need for a respite. Payments were to begin at a low level, assisted at first by foreign loans (the "Dawes loans"). Only by 1928 and 1929 would the payments reach the full two billion marks per year. Then another settlement must be agreed on, for the Dawes Commission had refused to set any total figure. In practice, the Dawes Plan worked very smoothly. The new German currency was firmly stabilized, and foreign loans flowed in to the reviving German business community to such a point that they far outweighed the reparations payments going out.*

Conciliatory Diplomacy: The Geneva Protocol and Locarno

In the new climate of 1924, Ramsay MacDonald and Edouard Herriot attempted to change the whole spirit of European diplomacy. European affairs had been run by a coalition of victors; they wanted to replace that with a family of nations. They began to work for the entry of both Germany and the Soviet Union into the League of Nations. Beyond that, they attempted to give the League of Nations a stronger role.

One difficulty with the League was the vagueness of its procedures for collective action against an aggressor. In practice, it was almost impossible to agree on a sufficiently unambiguous definition of aggression. MacDonald and Herriot proposed an arbitration device, by which any power involved in a dispute that refused arbitration would automatically be named the aggressor and be subject to sanctions by other members of the League. This project, known as the Geneva Protocol, was the last significant attempt between the wars to replace traditional power politics with some kind of legal procedure for the resolution of international disputes. The proposed arbitration machinery was probably unworkable. It was never even tested, however. The Conservatives who returned to power in Britain in new elections in September 1924 rejected the idea of an international arbitration device.

Although the domestic shift to the left had been temporary, the desire for more conciliatory relations with Germany remained. This attitude prevailed with both the British Conservative foreign minister, Austen Chamberlain, and the French foreign minister who replaced Herriot in April 1925, Aristide Briand. Once a young radical lawyer, Briand had drifted to the political center when he became prime minister (for the first of seven times) in 1909. In international relations, however, he emerged after 1921 as the foremost partisan of the view that French concessions to Germany would produce a "moral disarmament" on the

*Foreign investments in Germany in the late 1920s totaled 23 billion gold marks; reparations payments by Germany totaled 7.5 billion gold marks. (Pierre Renouvin, *Les Crises du XXe siècle*, vol. 1 [Paris, 1957], p. 257.)

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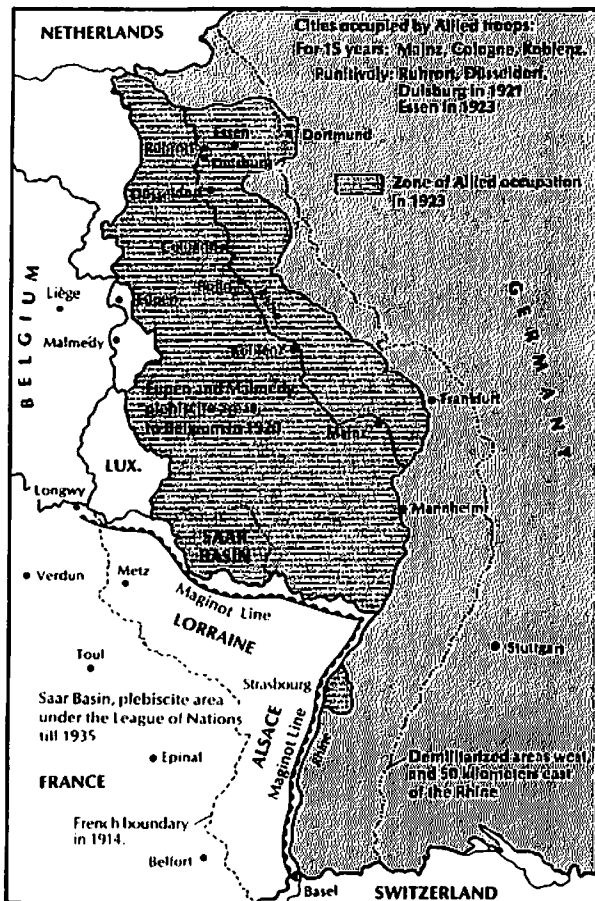
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German side. Where Poincaré was dry and legalistic, Briand was warm and effusive, and his emotional speeches at the League of Nations in the late 1920s won him a worldwide reputation as a man of conciliation. Actually, since he had to retain the confidence of a nationalist parliament, in private negotiation he generally conceded very little. Remaining in the French Foreign Ministry from April 1925 until his death in January 1932, Briand served as the French counterpart to Stresemann and the personification on the French side of the new spirit of international amity.

Into the vacuum that followed the demise of the Geneva Protocol, Stresemann introduced a very simple proposal: a mutual French-German agreement not to violate the Rhine frontier. Briand took up the proposal with alacrity. Together with Foreign Minister Chamberlain, after long months of negotiation, they met at the Swiss resort of Locarno, on Lake Maggiore, in October 1925 and concluded the Locarno

FRANCO-GERMAN SECURITY ISSUES, 1920s



Agreements, which launched a new era of European international relaxation.

The heart of the Locarno Agreements was a Franco-German promise to maintain the Rhine frontier as the Treaty of Versailles had settled it. France and Germany recognized their common border as legitimate. Britain and Italy promised to intervene if either France or Germany tried to send an army across that frontier, or if Germany sent troops into the demilitarized areas of the Rhineland. The German eastern frontiers were not guaranteed in the same way. To make that omission less threatening, Germany subsequently signed arbitration treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia. And just to make sure, France strengthened its ties with the Little Entente states by making even more binding treaties of mutual assistance among them in case of a German attack.

Each participant yielded something and gained something in the Locarno Agreements. Germany renounced any attempt to regain Alsace-Lorraine by force, or to remilitarize the Rhineland unilaterally. Those acts were far beyond Germany's military capacity for years to come anyway, given the embryonic state of its clandestine rearmament. In return, Stresemann won separation of the issue of the eastern frontiers from the western, was assured of French support for German admission to the League of Nations (1926) and persuaded France to begin withdrawing occupation troops from the Rhineland, a process which was completed in 1930 rather than 1935 and which effectively halted French efforts to detach that area from Germany.

France renounced the possibility of direct armed intervention in Germany, as had been attempted several times from 1920 to 1923. Those efforts had proven counterproductive anyway, as had French efforts to

Seated from left to right are Gustav Stresemann, Sir Austen Chamberlain, Aristide Briand, and German diplomat Karl von Schubert, in Geneva for a League of Nations meeting in September 1926.



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promote separatist sentiment in the Rhineland. In addition, the French accepted Germany as an equal diplomatic interlocutor, as symbolized by its entry into the League, and withdrew by 1930 the troops that were supposed to occupy the Rhineland until 1935. Briand also tacitly accepted a less settled status for the eastern frontiers. Of course, as long as the Rhineland remained empty of German troops in perpetuity, as was explicitly stated in the Locarno Agreements, France could still bring an effective threat to bear on Germany from the west in case Germany menaced Poland or Czechoslovakia.

Britain renounced its isolation and participated for the first time since 1919 in a Continental guarantee. That pledge was limited to Western Europe, however, and it applied equally to Germany and to France, so that the British public, exasperated by French intransigence, would have less fear of being dragged into a war by France. Thus the Locarno Agreements relieved the French pressures for a British treaty of assistance that both Briand and Poincaré had sought in vain.

The most significant feature of the Locarno Agreements was the spirit of hope they had awakened in Europe. When the accords were concluded, on October 16, 1925,

Austen Chamberlain, the British Foreign Secretary, trembled and wept with joy, as did the French Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand. Benito Mussolini kissed Mrs. Chamberlain's hands. Bands played, members of the assembled crowd danced in the square. . . . The next day the headlines in the *New York Times* read, "France and Germany Ban War Forever," and those in the *London Times* declared, "Peace at Last."

When the German delegates took their seats for the first time in the League of Nations in March 1926, Briand welcomed them with one of those orations that made his reputation as the "apostle of peace."

France and Germany are working together now for peace. . . . Down with cannons, machine guns, rifles; down the mourning veils. Make way for conciliation, arbitration, peace.

The League Assembly responded with a "delirious ovation."¹⁰ It was for that spirit, rather than for the concrete terms of the agreements, that Stresemann and Briand were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926.

In this heady mood, the major European states, the United States, and Japan concluded the Kellogg-Briand Pact on August 27, 1928.¹¹ The signatories promised to "renounce war as an instrument of national policy," although no means of enforcing this promise were included in the pact.

¹⁰Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West, 1925-29* (Princeton, N.J., 1972), p. 3.

¹¹Jacques Chastelet, *Les Années d'illusions* (Paris, 1960), p. 157.

¹²Frank B. Kellogg was the United States secretary of state.

On closer inspection, the Locarno spirit was far too optimistic. It rested on a transient balance struck briefly between French and German force. France had publicly revealed its inability to coerce Germany alone. Britain had publicly revealed its unwillingness to help France do so. Germany's clandestine rearmament had hardly begun, despite some Soviet assistance, yet any clear-sighted person could foresee the disparity of potential force between 60 million Germans and 40 million Frenchmen. Everything depended on Briand's gamble that concessions would disarm the Germans "morally," and that moderation would reconcile them to Versailles where force had failed.

Those hopes were not realized. The follow-up after Locarno was slow and grudging, for Briand was under constant pressure from his centrist majority. Moreover, Briand was a careless diplomat who promised more in his generous oratory than he could actually deliver. Stresemann, for his part, was never able to persuade German nationalists that the French concessions really amounted to anything, compared with the immense humiliation of Versailles.

When the temporary reparations arrangements of the Dawes Plan expired in 1929, a storm of German nationalist opposition arose over the successor plan worked out by the American businessman Owen D. Young. The Young Plan removed Allied tutelage from the German economy, but it provided for continued reparations payments far into the century. The howl of resentment over the Young Plan helped revive the Nazi party in the summer of 1929, even before the onset of the depression.

The Disarmament Issue

The Locarno spirit did not suffice to make disarmament possible. The League of Nations Covenant, borrowing the exact language of Wilson's Fourteen Points (Point 4), had called for "the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety" (Article 8). The Treaty of Versailles had stripped Germany of armed force as a "first step" toward a general reduction of armaments; Germany had promised to observe those limitations on the understanding that other states would also disarm. The World Disarmament Conference promised in 1919 was not seriously prepared for until 1927 and did not actually meet until February 1932, when it was already far too late. In the meantime, no government had felt confident enough of its national security to entrust its survival to anything except its own armed force.

With respect to land armies, the basic problems were the disparity between German and French military potentials, and the difficulty of verifying any artificial ceiling placed on German military power. The experience of German clandestine rearmament in the 1920s had shown that outside inspection teams could do very little to impose artificial limitations upon the armaments of a recalcitrant government that is

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backed by its public. The Allied Control Commission filed two long reports, one on January 5, 1925, and the other on January 31, 1927, stating that Germany "had never disarmed, had never had the intention of disarming, and for seven years had done everything in her power to deceive" the foreign inspectors.

Even if one accepts the later opinion of the British strategist Major Basil H. Liddell-Hart that the practical effects of German clandestine rearmament were "overrated,"¹² and that well into the 1930s the German Army was no match for the French, the long-term implications were clear then. The view from Paris was that Germany would eventually gravitate back toward a position of equality or better with the French, and given the resentments bred by Versailles, it would attack as soon as the chances of success became more or less even. French fears were greatly magnified by solitude; neither the United States nor Britain had been willing to conclude a bilateral defense pact with France. The French believed that general disarmament would make Germany more likely, not less, to commit aggression. As a result, France continued to spend a higher percentage of its national income on armaments in the late 1920s than any other European state except Soviet Russia.¹³ Even the moderate left leader Edouard Herriot said on January 28, 1925:

Remember that France has constantly to discuss peace with a dagger an inch away from her heart. Let us away with this dagger.¹⁴

Beginning in 1929, successive French governments, from right to moderate left, appropriated huge sums for the construction of the Maginot Line, a vast network of underground fortresses and armored turrets whose overlapped fields of fire were impassable to anything known in 1918. When completed at the end of 1935, the Maginot Line extended along the Franco-German frontier from the Swiss border north to the Ardennes Forest, at the Franco-Belgian border, and public opinion was urging the government, against military advice, to extend this steel womb all the way to the English Channel.

From 1927 until 1932 the Disarmament Preparatory Commission worked on preliminary drafts for an agreement. The German demands centered on equality of armament, which in practice meant leveling upward. When a Soviet delegate joined the commission in 1928, he urged the immediate liquidation of all armed forces. All Allied proposals foundered on unstated French assumptions that French survival depended on having a larger ground force than Germany. It was as the

¹²Basil H. Liddell-Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York, 1948), pp. 13-14.

¹³Figures for 1929: Russian military expenditures, 5.3 percent of national income; French, 4.5 percent; Italian, 4.4 percent; Japanese, 4.3 percent; British, 2.5 percent; American, 1.1 percent; German, 1 percent. When all states' military expenditures soared in the 1930s, France slipped to fifth place. (Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* [Chicago, 1941], pp. 670-71.)

¹⁴Quoted in Royal Institute of Internal Affairs, *Survey of International Affairs, 1925*, Vol. 2 (London, 1926), p. 15.

Spanish diplomat Salvador de Madariaga said in his parable of the disarmament conference of the animals: the lion proposed the abolition of all weapons except claws and teeth; the eagle, all weapons except beaks and talons; and so on.

When the World Disarmament Conference actually opened in Geneva in February 1932, the moment for agreement had long passed. The opening day of the conference was postponed by news of the Japanese bombing of Shanghai. The German delegation left the conference between July and September 1932, until the French accepted the principle of equality within a system of collective security. Hitler's delegate left the conference for good in October 1933. Indeed, as long as no larger sovereignty than the nation-state functioned in Europe, and as long as each state subordinated disarmament to its own definition of "the lowest point consistent with national safety," it is difficult to imagine any effective reduction of armaments in Europe by treaty.

There was some decline in the proportion of the national income devoted to armaments in the 1920s as compared with 1914 in all the Great Powers except the United States and Japan.¹⁵ But it had much more to do with internal budgetary restraints than with international negotiation. And after the depression of 1929, armaments expenditure would depend primarily on whether a state tried to balance the budget, as in Britain and France, or engaged heavily in deficit spending, as in Germany, Italy, and, under conditions of total economic isolation, the Soviet Union.

Naval disarmament offered more hopeful signs of progress in the 1920s than disarmament of land forces. That was because naval forces were easier to inspect, the conferences were held sooner after the end of the war, and the Franco-German conflict was less directly involved. The Washington Naval Conference of 1921 and 1922 managed to agree on ratios of tonnage in capital ships (battleships, aircraft carriers) among the five main naval powers as follows: the United States and Britain, 5; Japan, 3; France and Italy, 1.75. But the conference failed to deal with smaller ships, such as submarines, destroyers, and cruisers. When that effort was made at Geneva in 1927, it uncovered heated controversy between Britain and the United States and between France and Italy; neither Britain nor France accepted parity in cruisers with its Washington Naval Conference partner. A final attempt to settle naval force limits at the London Naval Conference of 1930 did produce agreed ratios for all types of ships on the part of Britain, the United States, and Japan (France and Italy refused to be bound by any such agreements), but the overriding importance of national self-reliance was made clear in the famous "Escalator Clause": any nation that felt threatened by a non-signatory power could unilaterally go beyond the agreed limits. In the

¹⁵Wright, pp. 670-71.

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world of 1930 and after, all nations felt threatened, and the whole enterprise of disarmament by conference failed by trying to alleviate symptoms rather than fundamental causes of that insecurity.

A NEW DIPLOMACY?

The more ardent Wilsonians of 1919 had hoped to replace the prewar methods of professional diplomats, working in secrecy and answerable only to kings or prime ministers, with the "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at" of President Wilson's Fourteen Points. "After that, there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view" (Point 1). No postwar leader, including Wilson, conducted his relations with other national leaders in this way. Nevertheless, the way in which the European states dealt with one another and with the rest of the world differed substantially from prewar diplomacy.

Public Involvement

Although statesmen continued to negotiate in secret, foreign affairs became a more and more public matter between the wars. Before 1914 it was still uncommon for foreign relations to become a major political issue in peacetime.¹⁶ Occasionally political oppositions formed around foreign and colonial policy, as they did in Britain during the Boer War (1899–1902) and in France at the time of the secret diplomacy of the second Moroccan crisis of 1911, but executive branches remained in full control of foreign policy. Even in parliamentary systems, the deputies' powers of review of treaties was incomplete. No one believed, for example, that a parliament could declare a past treaty invalid. As often as not, the executive powers themselves injected issues of foreign and colonial grandeur into partisan politics in order to strengthen their position. The German Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow won an enlarged government majority in the so-called Hottentot election of 1907. Bülow appealed for unlimited executive freedom to conduct foreign policy and colonial expansion among the African Hottentots or anywhere else the government chose, without the "unendurable meddling"¹⁷ of parliament. As Bülow hoped, his patriotic appeals helped reduce the anticolonial Social Democrats' representation from eighty-one seats to forty-three.

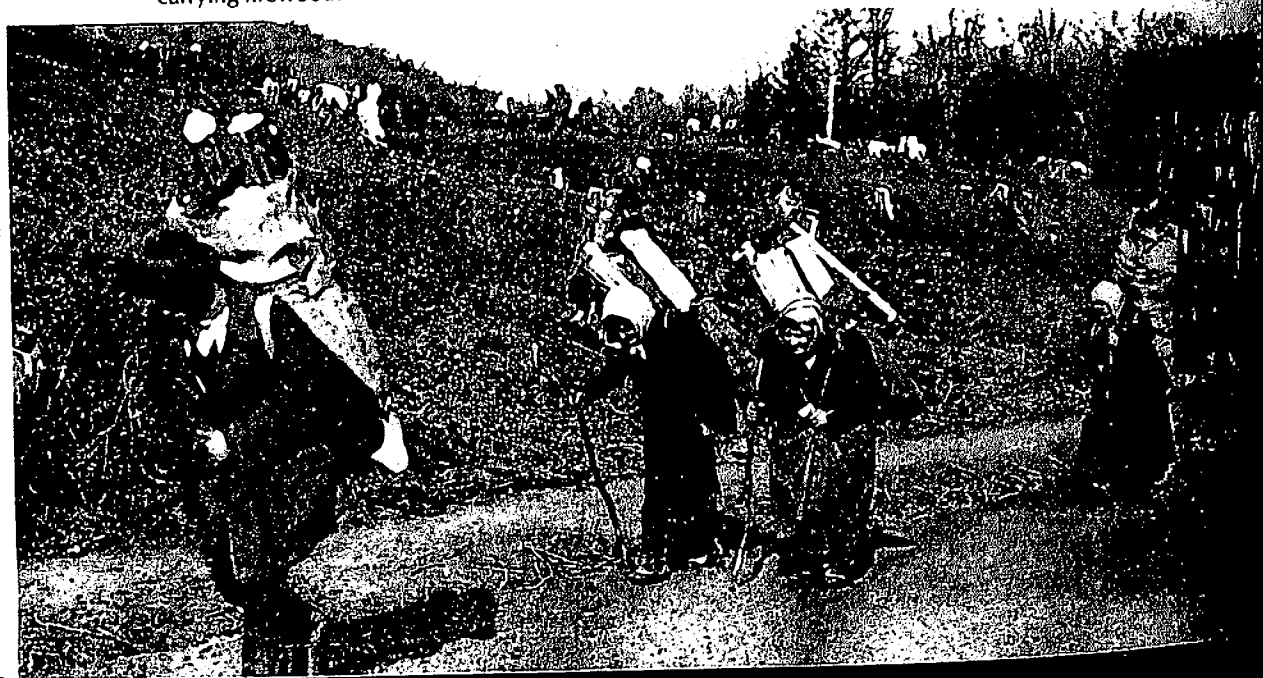
¹⁶One exception was the Turkish slaughter of rebellious Bulgarians in 1876 and the ensuing war between Russia and Turkey, which involved British public emotions for the first time in daily newspaper accounts of a distant war. The word *jingoism* entered the language from a British patriotic song of 1878: "We don't want to fight, but, by jingo, if we do, we've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too."

¹⁷Quoted in Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–17* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 60.

The passions of the First World War aroused public sensitivity and emotion concerning foreign policy. During the last year of the war, Wilson and Lenin heightened expectations with a propaganda duel about war aims and programs for reordering the world. The great gathering of world leaders in Paris in 1919 made the ensuing world system seem more man-made and less a natural inheritance than before. Thus the subsequent disillusionments about that system brought blame to political leaders, and elections turned more and more frequently on foreign policy issues. Aristide Briand lost office as prime minister and foreign minister in 1922 for seeming too compliant toward England, and was narrowly limited after Locarno in the concessions he could offer Germany. The elections of 1924 turned partly on foreign affairs in both France and England. Hitler's immediate predecessors struggled to win electoral support through foreign policy successes. In 1935, to look a decade ahead, British and French governments fell because they seemed to acquiesce in the Italian conquest of Ethiopia, and in the late 1930s the reaction to Hitler's expansionism was the dominant preoccupation of politics. Sustained public emotional involvement in foreign policy was not the guarantee of peace that the Wilsonians had expected, for public opinion turned out to be more jingoistic than rulers had been, and weak governments catered to that jingoism.

One major reason for public emotion over foreign relations was economic. Almost every European was touched in his pocket by international affairs in ways that seemed to him all the more frightening for

The defeated people suffered intensely from hunger and cold in the winter of 1918/19. The Austrians cut down the Vienna Woods for fuel, and the middle class as well as the poor were reduced to carrying firewood.



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being uncontrollable and beyond comprehension. Most Frenchmen knew that rising prices and decline of the franc in the 1920s were somehow tied to war debts to America and the failure of Germany to pay full reparations. Most Germans felt that the implacable Allied victors had somehow destroyed the mark in 1923. Most Englishmen were aware of the fact that the great coal and textile industries, the foundations of the British Empire, were somehow worth less in the postwar world and that Britain was now in debt to its offspring America. Popular emotions were closely tied to foreign affairs after 1918 because the purchasing power of one's money and the value of one's property were now more buffeted about by international fluctuations and influences than ever before.

The Communist Threat

Foreign relations took on a more ideological tone, too, now that the communist movement controlled the machinery of a state. World Communist parties intervened in interstate relations on two levels: through traditional diplomacy and through revolutionary parties. As a sovereign state, the Soviet Union sought normal diplomatic relations with other states after the expected world revolution had failed to materialize. The Weimar Republic was the first major state to exchange ambassadors with the Soviet Union, at Rapallo, in 1922. Britain and France and most other countries followed suit in 1924.¹⁸ The Japanese evacuated their last holdings in Siberia in 1925 and recognized the new regime. As the British Liberal politician Lloyd George said, one trades even with cannibals. Leaders on both sides recognized that even though the Bolshevik Revolution stood little chance in the 1920s of spreading outside Russia, the Communist party was in firm control there. The Soviet Union practiced its conventional interstate diplomacy in the 1920s under George Chicherin, a veteran tsarist diplomat but a Menshevik, or reformist socialist, by conviction.

Simultaneously, however, the Soviet Union was the major force in the Comintern,¹⁹ the global organization of pro-Soviet Marxist parties formed by Lenin in 1919 in the expectation of imminent world revolution and led through the 1920s by the old Bolshevik Gregory Zinoviev. Agents of the Comintern worked within foreign states to strengthen communist internal opposition. The Comintern's influence over Soviet foreign policy diminished through the 1920s as the exercise of state power in Russia and the protection of the homeland of communism came to prevail over the promotion of world revolution. Nevertheless, the noncommunist states' relations with the Soviet Union were always

¹⁸The United States did not exchange ambassadors with the Soviet Union until after the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, although there had been aid missions during the famine of 1921 and 1922, and some United States firms had negotiated contracts with the Soviet government.

¹⁹The Communist International, or Third International. See Chapter 5, pp. 163–64.

complicated by this ambiguous dual diplomacy. Allegations of Comintern activity in Britain brought about defeat of the Labour party in 1924 and suspension of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The British election of 1924 revealed how sensitive an issue the unofficial foreign activities of Communist parties remained.

Diplomatic Machinery

European diplomacy had been transformed, since 1914, by greater and more sustained public involvement in foreign affairs, by economic complications, and by the existence of a new communist state in their midst. But the basic techniques of interstate relations were not changed. The League of Nations did not provide effective machinery for resolving international disputes by organized international consultations and sanctions. The League had never been intended to have sovereign authority over its member states. While the League was effective in facilitating agreements in the 1920s in cases where the Great Powers concurred anyway, it could not coerce any major state against that state's will. This handicap was not immediately apparent in the calmer years after Locarno, and Geneva appeared to be bustling with preparations for disarmament, with the settlement of minor disputes, and with the tasks of the social agencies. The League's inability to do anything about the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 dealt the League its first conspicuous public humiliation, however, and it was one from which it did not recover.

Between the wars, sovereign states still dealt with sovereign states in Europe and in the wider world. Without a higher authority to appeal to, there was no way to adjudicate disputes other than by some mixture of bargaining and force. The main difference was that there were far more players in this game than before 1914. That meant international relations were less under the control of the former Great Powers of Europe than before. European diplomats struggled to adapt to a world filled with many more active sovereign states, some of which—notably the United States and Japan—could affect European lives more profoundly than Europeans could affect them. The new nation-states of Eastern Europe generated no fewer conflicts and problems than the old dynasties they replaced. Germany and Russia were both bound to reclaim some of their temporarily eclipsed power, and there was no effective machinery for making that process a smooth one. Thus European international relations under the Peace of Paris were at least as unstable as before 1914.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The removal of the last restrictions on 1920s French and British archives has made possible a new generation of studies of European security problems after the Peace of Paris, such as Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: Europe's International Relations, 1918-1933** (1976).

Among older works that retain their importance, Arnold Wolfers, *Britain and France Between Two Wars* (1940), remains a lucid statement of the two countries' differing priorities. There is much interesting detail in W. M. Jordan, *Britain, France and the German Question* (1943). The annual volumes published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London contain well-informed contemporary accounts of each year's main foreign policy developments.

Jon Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy* (1972), shows how little the Locarno Agreements resolved conflicts among the European states. It provides one of the most convincing accounts of Briand in action. Other important work on 1920s French diplomacy includes, in addition to the McDougall work on the Rhineland cited at the end of Chapter 6, Judith M. Hughes, *To the Maginot Line: The Politics of French Military Preparations in the 1920s* (1971), which shows that politicians and generals approached the insoluble problems of preserving French hegemony with the same inadequate solutions; and Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925* (1962; reprint ed., 1974). Jacques Néré provides a useful summary in *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945* (1975).

The most authoritative analysis of British security problems after the Peace of Paris is Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (1972).

German foreign policy in the 1920s is virtually synonymous with the career of Gustav Stresemann. Hans W. Gatzke revealed Stresemann's revisionist aims in *Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany* (1954). German-Russian secret ties in the 1920s are the subject of Alfred G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: German-Soviet Relations 1918-41* (1953; reprint ed., 1971), and Lionel Kochan, *Russia and the Weimar Republic* (1954; reprint ed., 1978).

On the Russian side, Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1943*, 2nd ed. (1974), is critical but very solidly informed. Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (1970), is the most useful study of Italian diplomacy in the 1920s.

An important new trend is the study of the economic dimension of European foreign and defense problems since 1918. Stephen A. Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe: The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan* (1976), shows the central role played by international bankers. Marc Trachtenberg has made the French appear less unreasonable in *Reparations in World Politics* (1980), which supersedes all past work on this complex issue.