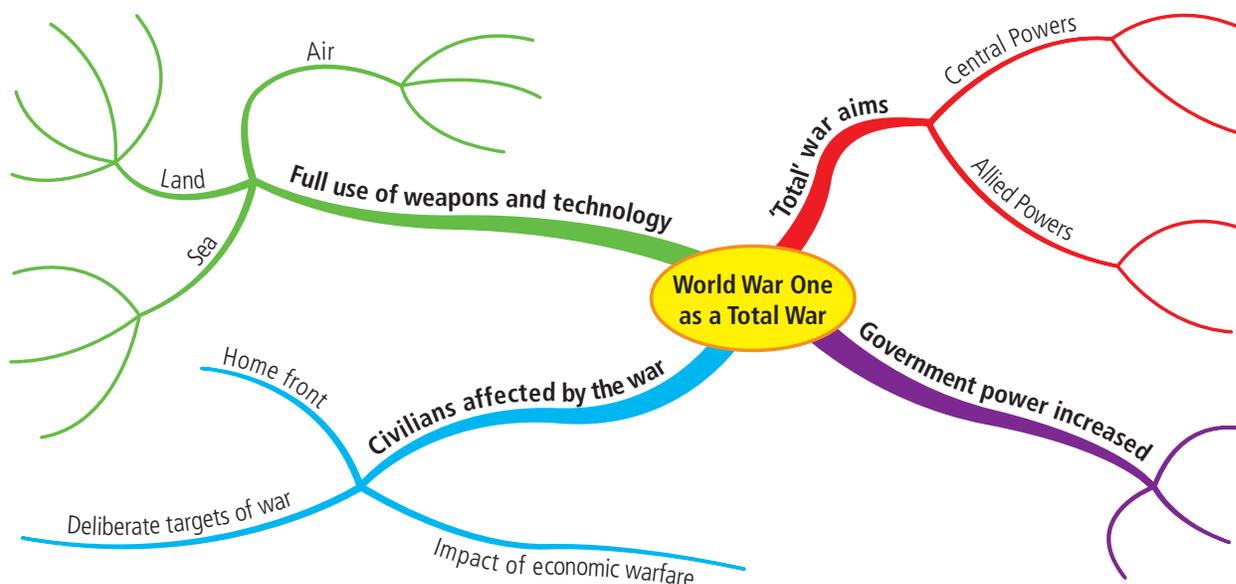


## In what ways was World War I a total war?

The diagram below highlights the key elements of World War I as total war.



### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### Review activities

Copy out this mind map/spider diagram. As you read through the evidence below, add details to your diagram to make it a useful revision tool on World War I as a total war. Also, add links between the different sections where you see overlap.

Mind-map – World War I as a total war.

World War I is considered to be the first total war for several reasons:

- Both sides fought the war, not for limited aims but for total victory.
- Governments used all weaponry that they had at their disposal in order to win the war. They also developed new technologies and weaponry as the war progressed.
- It involved all people of the major countries – not only soldiers but also civilians. Civilians were deliberately targeted during the military conflict and they suffered from the economic warfare carried out by both sides. Women also played a major role in the war effort at home.
- In order to fight the kind of battles waged in World War I, and to weld the state into a united, efficient war-making machine, nations developed new ways of controlling the economy and their own populations. In the process of trying to do this, the countries of Europe experienced major changes in government as well as in established social and economic practices.

These points are discussed in more detail below.

### The aims of the belligerents

The *aims* of the powers involved in the fighting were ‘total’ and made any negotiated peace very difficult to achieve. Germany’s aims in the September Memorandum have already been discussed on p.40. However, all the Great Powers developed ambitious war aims that they were reluctant to give up. France was determined to regain Alsace-Lorraine and both France

and Britain had committed themselves to crushing 'Prussian militarism'. **Propaganda** on both sides reinforced nationalist sentiment, justifying the war and demonizing the enemy. Governments would have had to do a serious turn around in terms of public opinion if they were to seek a compromise.

'A German "Peace"', from *Punch* magazine, 12 June 1918.

#### STUDENT STUDY SECTION



A GERMAN "PEACE."  
(FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF OUR PACIFISTS.)

#### Cartoon analysis

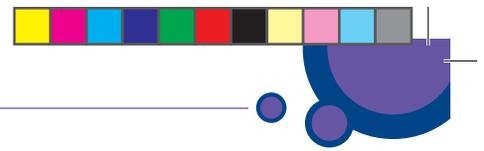
What is the message of this British cartoon?

In 1917, there were several calls for peace, coming from such divergent sources as the Pope, Lenin (the new Bolshevik leader of Russia) and Lord Lansdowne, a British **Conservative** and former Viceroy of India and Foreign Secretary. Pope Benedict XV called for a return to the territorial status quo of 1914 and a renunciation of all financial demands. Lenin also called for a peace without annexations or financial demands. Lord Lansdowne made the point that the war was costing more in terms of human and economic resources than could ever be regained, even by victory.

Yet both sides continued to believe that they *could* win. As P.M.H. Bell writes, 'Only victory would do, and only victory could justify the sacrifices made in the war' (*Twentieth Century Europe*, 2006).

### The use of weaponry

As you have read, both sides used the full arsenal of weapons at their disposal and also developed new technologies for land, sea and air warfare to try to break the deadlock and achieve total victory. This pursuit involved, in the case of gas, breaking international agreements; the Hague Convention of 1899 had prohibited the use of poisons as weapons.



## The role of civilians

### The impact of the fighting on civilians

As you have read earlier in this chapter, civilians were also affected by the actual fighting, and there were many casualties as a result of the new technologies available to both sides. Paris was shelled from a distance of 126km by the massive German gun known as 'Long Max', while first the Zeppelins, and later planes, made raids on Britain. British planes also inflicted severe damage on German factories and towns in the last year of the war.

On the Eastern Front, civilians were actually caught up in the battles. Because there was relatively little movement on the Western Front, civilians, after the initial battles, were able to keep away from the actual fighting and casualties only resulted due to inaccurate artillery fire. By contrast, the great advances and retreats that took place on the Eastern Front meant that civilians were involved in the violence, sometimes accidentally and sometimes deliberately. For example, Jews – viewed with suspicion by the Russian military – were actively attacked by advancing Russians. Other minorities also suffered: Germans, Gypsies, Hungarians and Turks were all deported from Russia's western provinces during the war. Ethnic violence also took place in the Balkans. As Niall Ferguson writes in *The War of the World*:

---

*The Western Front had revealed a new level of industrialization of warfare – had seen the introduction of machines of death comparable in their lethal effectiveness with those Wells had imagined in The War of the Worlds. But the Eastern Front had seen an equally important transformation of warfare. There the death throes of the old Central and East European empires had dissolved the old boundaries between combatant and civilian. This kind of war proved much easier to start than to stop.*

From Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World*, 2006

---

The lives of civilians in all countries were also affected by the huge losses of soldiers; all families and villages across Europe faced the consequences of the 'lost generation'. The enormous casualties in the early campaigns also led to the introduction of military conscription, in 1915 for France and 1916 for Britain.

### Genocide

World War I also saw the 20th century's first **genocide**. Turkish propaganda at the time presented the Armenians as saboteurs and a pro-Russian 'fifth column'. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians died from starvation and thirst when the Ottoman Turks deported them en masse from eastern Anatolia to the Syrian desert and elsewhere in 1915–16. There is dispute over the number of Armenians killed. Armenians say 1.5 million, while the republic of Turkey estimates the total to be 300,000. According to the International Association of Genocide scholars, the total was 'more than a million'.

### The impact of economic warfare on civilians

Both sides realized the advantages of cutting off supplies to their enemies. They tried to disrupt each other's trade routes, and prevent vital foods and raw materials getting through by laying minefields at sea or attacking merchant ships with submarines or warships. The British blockade had a devastating effect on Germany, causing desperate food shortages and contributing to Germany's defeat in 1918. The average daily calorie input for a civilian adult dropped from around 1,500 in 1915 to below 1,000 in the winter of 1916–17. Germany's use of submarine warfare also subjected British civilians to shortages, and Russia suffered from the blockade of the Dardanelles. Rationing was introduced in many countries.

Artwork by Käthe Kollwitz;  
'The Children are Starving'.



Women working in a  
munitions factory.



## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### Research activity

#### Artists in World War I

Käthe Kollwitz is one of the many artists who recorded different aspects of the war in their artwork. She was German; an ardent socialist and pacifist who also lost her own son in the war. In her artwork, she portrayed stark images of the suffering caused by conflict.

Research the lives and work of artists from both sides of the conflict. Find artwork that reveals different aspects of the war.

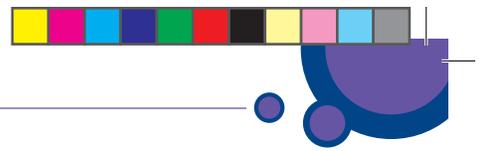
#### Civilians as part of the war effort

The war saw the rapid growth of industry in all countries as governments tried to keep up with the production demands of total war. In Britain, France and Germany, these demands also meant women joining the workforce as more and more men left to fight in the war. However, in all countries there was resistance to employing women, and it was not until

1915 that serious recruitment of women into industries began. Even then, there was little enthusiasm from employers and trade unions for women entering the workforce, and in Britain there had to be negotiations to reach agreements on women entering 'men's jobs' in munitions and engineering, e.g. that such arrangements were only to be temporary and that the women would not be trained up as 'fully skilled tradesmen'. Women were supposed to receive equal wages to men for similar jobs, but rarely did; their wages remained low, though higher than traditional women's work. This situation was despite the fact that the work in munitions in particular was extremely dangerous, with risks of TNT poisoning and accidental explosions. By 1917, one in four war workers was female, leading Joseph Joffre to claim that 'if the women in the war factories stopped for 20 minutes, we should lose the war.'

## The growth of government power

Other changes on the home fronts came with increased centralization of power in the hands of the governments of Britain, France and Germany. Citizens found themselves being subjected to much greater control from their governments as countries tried to ensure that maximum use was made of human and economic resources. In Britain, the government passed the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) in 1914, which gave the government wide-ranging powers to police many aspects of people's daily lives, such as restricting the hours of pub opening, preventing the use of binoculars and limiting the lighting of bonfires. In France, a 'state of siege' was proclaimed by President Raymond Poincaré, who placed eight departments of government under the control of the commander-in-chief, Joffre, and subject to military law. This number was later increased to 33 departments. In Germany, executive power was given to the deputy commanding generals of Germany's 24 military districts. The Tsar in Russia, meanwhile, used the pro-war atmosphere in 1914 as an opportunity to reassert autocratic powers and rule without the Duma (Russian parliament).



Government control was exercised in several key areas:

## Controlling manpower

To control manpower more effectively, conscription was introduced in most countries. In the UK it was introduced in 1916. This decision was taken not just because of the need for more men, but also because British industry could not afford to lose its skilled workers; so many miners had joined up, for example, that many had to be sent back in order to maintain the essential supplies of coal. The controlled direction of manpower was necessary to ensure that both industry and the armed forces were provided for; it has been estimated that it took three civilian workers to keep a soldier fighting in World War I. The government also took the lead in negotiating with the trade unions to get women to work in the munitions factories (see p.64).

## Controlling production

To increase the efficiency of production, governments started to exercise more control over industry. In the UK, this involved nationalizing key industries such as coal mining and shipping and also regulating wages and prices to ensure that inflation did not get out of hand. In Germany, industrialist Walter Rathenau also tried to bring industry under the control of the War Boards to oversee production, but he was never as successful at achieving this as the British government, and faced frustrating interference from the German military.

In Britain, involvement in the workplace by the government extended to intervention in areas such as canteens and child care, and the setting up of various committees such as the Health of Munitions Workers Committee.

---

*By 1918, the Ministry of Munitions owned more than 250 factories, administering a further 20,000 and the government employed 5 million workers. A huge experiment in 'state capitalism' was under way, and the significance of this was not lost on workers, employers, unions and Labour politicians. The change in attitude is aptly illustrated by Lloyd George's famous promise of 'habitations for the heroes who have won the war' the day after the armistice, and the subsequent establishment of the Ministry of Health.*

**From Ian Cawood and David McKinnon-Bell, *The First World War*, 2001**

---

## Controlling morale

In order to motivate the home fronts and keep up morale, governments also spent a great deal of time and energy on wartime propaganda. At first, propaganda was used to emphasize the defensive nature of the war; each side produced propaganda to show that it was simply defending its soil and national pride. Later, propaganda became more important to justify the length of the war and to counter opposition to its continuation. Propaganda portrayed the enemy as an inhuman force that must be defeated at all costs. The British government also created a Ministry of Information, making propaganda a key element of its war policy.

## Controlling the economy

In order to pay for the war, Britain increased direct taxation. It also abandoned its 19th-century policy of **free trade** by adopting tariffs on certain types of imported goods. All countries borrowed immense sums to pay for the war. The Russians, French and Italians borrowed heavily from the British and the Americans; the British also borrowed massive amounts from the USA. The governments of all combatants borrowed from their own people through 'war loans', which would be paid with interest after the war.

In Russia, borrowing led to rapid inflation as the amount of money in circulation increased; this contributed to the disastrous economic situation in Russia leading to revolution in 1917. In Germany, money for the war was raised almost entirely through loans and government **savings bonds**, which the government intended to repay when victory came. Only 6 per cent was raised by taxation as against 20 per cent in Britain. Germany planned to pay for the war through the imposition of severe treaties on its defeated enemies and did not plan for defeat. When defeat came, however, Germany was bankrupt and thousands of Germans lost their savings.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### Essay plan

Why did World War I last so long?

#### Introduction

Don't forget to put the question into context here. Explain expectations that the war would be over quickly and why there was this expectation. You also need to identify the key points that you will be covering in your essay and give an outline of your main argument.

#### Main body of the essay

Below is a list of points that you could consider in this essay. Look back through this chapter, and in pairs discuss how each of these factors contributed to the length of the war. (You may want to make some of these points whole paragraphs in themselves, or combine two or more into one paragraph.)

- The two sides were of similar strength
- The trench systems on the Western Front
- The tactics of the commanders
- Technological developments
- Failure of the Schlieffen Plan
- Failure to gain command of the seas
- Failure at attempts to negotiate peace
- Failure of diversionary fronts.

#### Conclusion

State your overall argument based on what you have discussed in the main body of your essay.

#### Student Answer

*The tactics of the generals were also a key reason why World War I lasted so long. World War I was a completely new type of war and one for which the generals had not been trained. It took a long time for the generals to adapt to trench warfare and the technological developments of the machine gun and artillery. Initially, for example, the French generals believed in 'élan' and forced their troops to wear red trousers even though this would cause huge casualties. Many generals, for example Haig and Falkenhayn, were and still are criticized for their tactics of 'attrition', resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths at the battles of the Somme and Verdun. They believed the only way of breaking the stalemate was to wear down the enemy until you were the last man standing. However, this would take a very long time which is why the war would last for so long.*

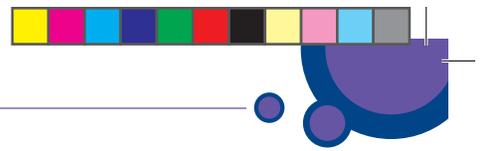
Annotate the above paragraph to indicate:

- The opening 'signpost' sentence (which should relate to the question and make it clear what the topic of the paragraph is going to be about)

#### ● Examiner's hint

Constructing good paragraphs in your essay.

As indicated by the essay planning guideline on p.36, each of your paragraphs should follow a certain structure. The paragraph opposite, taken from a student answer to the essay question, makes a good attempt at doing this.



- An explanation as to why this topic is relevant to the question
- Evidence to support the argument
- The final sentence linking back to the question and restating the relevance of the paragraph.

How could you improve on this paragraph?

Also, plan and write this essay: Why did the Central Powers lose World War I?

Look back at the discussion on pp.59–60 for material on this subject. You may want to structure your essay along the same lines, i.e. failures of Germany and then strengths/successes of the Allies. Alternatively, you could divide the factors into the following sections:

- War on land
- War at sea
- Total war and how Germany organized its resources compared to the Allies
- Economic factors and the collapse of Germany. (Do you consider economic or military factors to be the most important reasons for the Central Powers losing the war?)

