

Fourteen Points

- Date** ■ January 8, 1918
Place ■ Washington, D.C., United States
Type of Source ■ Speech
Author ■ U.S. President Woodrow Wilson
Historical Context ■ Even after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, President Wilson continued to press for “peace without victory.” The Fourteen Points were Wilson’s vision for the world after World War I. They pointed to a world where democracy, national self-determination, collective security, and open discussion would replace the secret diplomacy of the past. The German government rejected them in January. However, after defeat and revolution, the new German government hoped for peace along the lines of the Fourteen Points. The 1919 peace treaty rejected most of the the Fourteen Points. Many of the ideas presented in Wilson’s Points are now central to world politics.

We entered this war because violations of right had occurred which touched us to the **quick** and made the life of our own people impossible unless they were corrected and the world secured once for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. 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 programme of the world's peace, therefore, is our programme; and that programme, the only possible programme, as we see it, is this:

- I. Open **covenants** of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understanding of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
- II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.
- III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.
- IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that **national armaments** will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with **domestic safety**.

quick
soul

covenants
treaties, agreements

national armaments
a nation's weaponry

domestic safety
security of the nation's borders and population

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- V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.
- VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all **questions affecting Russia** as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and **unembarrassed** opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the **acid test** of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.
- VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the freedom which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.
- VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in **1871** in the matter of **Alsace-Lorraine**, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.
- IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.
- X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.
- XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

questions affecting Russia

Two months before Wilson's speech the Bolsheviks seized control of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and Moscow. Nationalities like the Poles and Finns were breaking away, and the Bolshevik government signed a peace treaty with Germany surrendering a sizeable piece of European Russia.

unembarrassed uninfluenced

acid test
most convincing test

1871

The year of the Franco-Prussian War. The Prussian/German victory resulted in the annexation of part of eastern France.

Alsace-Lorraine

Two wealthy provinces along the Rhine River annexed by Germany. The annexation had been a source of tremendous anger in France.

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- XII. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an **undoubted** security of life and an absolutely **unmolested** opportunity of autonomous development, and the **Dardanelles** should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.
- XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.
- XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike....

undoubted
absolute

unmolested
undisturbed

Dardanelles
the southern end of the waterway connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The northern end, the Bosphorous, was probably left out because the Ottoman capital was located beside it.

Source: Woodrow Wilson, "President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points (1918)" *Our Documents*, n.d., <<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=62&page=transcript>> (May 12, 2011).