

Account for the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War

On November 11, 1918, an Armistice document was signed by Allied and German officials. The Central Powers had admitted their defeat, and the Allies had come out victorious. The reason for the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War are many and varied, however this essay will aim to summarize the main arguments; the failure of the Schlieffen plan, the failure of the economy of the Central powers as well as the economic differences between The Allied Powers and the Central Powers (especially after the USA joined the war), the allies having control of the sea, and Germany's weak allies. This essay will aim to account for the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War.

The First World War took place mainly in Europe and spanned over four years from 1914 to 1918. The main countries involved can be put into one of two alliances: the Allied Powers and the Central Powers. The Allied Powers encompassed Britain (including the British Empire), France and Russia, though Russia surrendered due to internal conflicts in March of 1918. The Central Powers were made up of Germany, which was the main power, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

The first argument is that the Central Powers lost due to the failure of the Schlieffen plan. The Schlieffen plan was a tactical plan created by the German field marshal and strategist Count Alfred von Schlieffen, in order to fight off both France and Russia. The plan was to invade France through Belgium before Russian troops had time to mobilize and then return to the Eastern border and defeat Russia. There were many things that went wrong with this plan. First, Germany had assumed that the Belgians would not fight back when German soldiers traveled through the country. They were wrong, and this meant that the Germans were slowed down by the Belgians. This also caused Britain to join the war since they had promised to protect Belgium. The other major problem with the plan was that the Germans had assumed that it would take a long time for Russian troops to mobilize. This, again, was wrong, and it meant that the Germans had to send more troops than planned to the Eastern border. It forced the Germans to fight a two front war, one on the west with Britain and France, and one on the East with Russia, weakening the troops. Additionally, the Schlieffen plan brought Britain into the war, though it could be argued that they would have joined anyway, which further lowered their chances of winning the war. The failure of the Schlieffen plan meant that the Central Powers could no longer have the swift victory which they had hoped for.

Many argue that the main cause for the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War was the economic struggles of the Central Powers, and the unbalance between the GDP and population of the Allies and Central Powers. The Allies had a much larger population, and therefore had more money and a greater amount of resources, especially after the USA joined the war on the side of the Allies in April of 1917. America, with their massive resources of weapons, men and technology, were able to support the Allies with a new fresh set of resources. In 1918, the Allies had ten times the population of the Central Powers, and roughly

four times the GDP. This meant that the Central Powers could make fewer weapons and resources and heavily exhausted every possible resource. The population of the country suffered famine and food shortages which weakened the home front and country as a whole.

The detrimental economic situation in the Central Powers was intensified by the fact that the Allied Powers had control of the sea. The Allies could control which resources and ships went where, and used this to their advantage both defensively and offensively. The allies were able to use their control of the sea to make sure that resources were delivered safely to their shores. Not long into the war, the Allies created a naval blockade of Germany. This led to that Germany, whose citizens were already beginning to suffer the effects of the war, could not import the valuable resources that they needed. Towards the end of the war the situation in Germany was so bad that many knew that it was only a question of time until the Central Powers would surrender. But for a while, right after the Russians had left the war, it seemed as if the Central Powers could possibly win. However, after the defeat at the Battle of the Marne, the forces were so weakened that they could not continue. Due to the lack of resources and men, the troops were unable to push back, and the Central Powers, and Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II, were forced to admit defeat.

In addition to this, Germany, which was the main power of the Central Powers, had very weak allies. There were many internal conflicts going on in Austria-Hungary, and the economies of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria and the Hungarian half of the Hapsburg Empire were incredibly weak. This meant not only that these countries could not offer as much support as may have been necessary, but German troops were often forced to leave the front lines in France and at the border with Russia, in order to protect their allies. It has been argued that in some ways Germany's allies held Germany back more than they supported them. This was in major contrast to the allies who, though also struggled with some internal economic problems, overall consisted of many strong nations and armies.

It is most likely that the defeat of the Central Powers was due to a combination of several factors, and can not be condensed to one main reason. The Schlieffen plan was the reason why the Central Powers did not win immediately and did not have a swift end to the war. The economic failure of Germany and its allies, combined with the naval blockade which left Germany stranded, is often argued to be the reason why Wilhelm II was forced to surrender after the Battle of the Marne, and why the Central Powers were too weak to continue. Had it not been for this, it is very likely that the Central Powers could have won. Before the Battle of the Marne many people thought that Germany was on its way to victory. On the other hand, with the involvement of the USA and its vast resources, it is very probable that the Allies would have completely outnumbered the German troops either way. It has been said that the outcome of the war was inevitable, simply due to the smaller population and economy of the Central Powers.

In conclusion, the defeat of the Central Powers in the First World War can be explained by a combination of different reasons. In this essay I have discussed four of those reasons, the

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failure of the Schlieffen plan, the economic differences especially after the USA joined, the naval blockade of Germany which blocked supplies from getting to the country, and that Germany's allies were weak and not of much help to the Germans.

Overall, it could be argued that the failure of the Schlieffen plan was the reason why the Central powers lost their opportunity of a short and swift victory, while the internal economic struggles and unbalanced populations and economies meant that the Central Powers were fated to eventually lose the war in the long run.