iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 12 **Issue:** III **Month of publication:** March 2024

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2024.59191

www.ijraset.com

Call: 08813907089 | E-mail ID: ijraset@gmail.com

International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 12 Issue III Mar 2024- Available at www.ijraset.com

The Shift of Global Political Power from London to Washington (1919-1945): Geopolitics of the Inter-War Period

Mr. Vansh Negi[1], Dr. Aparna Shrivastava[2]
[1]*B.A. Political Science (Hons.),* [2]*Assistant Professor, AISS Amity Institute of Social Science Amity University Utter Pradesh, Noida*

Executive Summary: ***The current international order is based on the historical factors that unfolded in the past, one such major historical factor that shaped our current world is the shift of global power from the British Empire to the United States of America. The shift took place in the 20th century due to the unstable and ever-changing circumstances in the geopolitical realm. A host of different factors formed the rise of nationalism in Europe, anti-imperialist sentiments in colonies, and the First World War amongst others had a role to play in the unfolding of the event in question. The inter-war era i.e. the period of 1919-1945 which was the period of peace between the two World Wars could be said to be the most crucial period in this regard. The objective of this paper is to study the shift of political power from London to Washington in the inter-war period and to understand the effects of this seismic geopolitical change on the world at large.***

This paper will try to examine the shift by analyzing the economic, political, social, and geopolitical realities of the time. The various important events that occurred in the period like the Treaty of Versailles, humiliating conditions placed on Germany, formation of the League of Nations, etc. to understand their direct or indirect impact on the establishment of the United States of America as the global powerhouse that it today and how it first became a contender and them the victor of the cold war. The research uses several different research methods ranging from primary research, secondary sources, and comparative analysis of a few reliable sources that offer insight into the subject.

Keywords: Disarmament, inter-war, hegemony, Pax Americana, Pax Britannica, Anacyclosis

I. INTRODUCTION

The inter-war period begins at the end of World War I. The Treaty of Versailles was amongst the many provisions that officially concluded the year conflict named the Great War – The First World War. Treaty of Versailles outlined the terms of peace between defeated Germany and the victorious allies, which were led by the USA, France, and the United Kingdom. Central Powers Austria-Hungary signed various treaties with the Allied Powers.

The Treaty of Versailles is amongst the most controversial armistices in history. The so called "war guilt" clause of the treaty forced Germany and other Central Powers to accept full responsibility for The First World War . This meant the loss of territory, the reduction of military forces, and compensation payments to the allied countries. Some historians believe that the Treaty of Versailles was, in the words of the British economist John Maynard Keynes, "one of the most important acts of political folly for which statesmen have ever been responsible." They say that this contributed to the economic and political instability of Germany, which allowed the formation of the National Socialists (Nazis) just one year later.

Other historians note that the Treaty of Versailles was very restrained - Germany and other Central European countries There were no authorizations. occupied by the Allied forces after the war. In Germany, however, it would take several decades to pay reparations. The treaty was also much milder than the armistice (Treaty of Brest-Litovsk) that Germany imposed on Russia when that country negotiated its exit from the war a year earlier.

The treaty imposed severe sanctions on Germany.

Germany was made to return its African colonies, which were occupied in the late 1880s, It had to return to Alsace and Lorraine, which the country had captured from France, Germany further had to reduce its armed forces from 900,000 all the wat to 100,000, They were also made to abandon their submarines and limit the capabilities of its fleet to six warships of less than 10,000 tons each and It was also asked to have only 12 torpedo boats and 12 destroyers.

Although the US President Woodrow Wilson was quiet involved in the negotiation of the treaty, which echoed his vision of the post-war world, the isolationists back home in the United States proved to be a huge road block to its ratification in the congress.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved

The so-called "non-aligned", mostly Republicans but also some Democrats, opposed the treaty, especially Article 10, which obliged members of the League to go to war with each other in the case of unprovoked aggression. Non-aligned viewed this as a violation of American sovereignty, some even believed it would tie up the American alliance system, possibly leading to another war. Due to non-aligned opposition, Congress never ratified the Treaty and the United States of America never became a member of the League.

The Treaty of Versailles was violated by Adolf Hitler's government when he became the leader of Germany in addition to declaring a moratorium on all debt payments and discontinuing the payment of reparations, Hitler also initiated armed forces in Germany. According to some historians, the treaty's stringent conditions provided an ideological and financial foundation that enabled the NSDAP to gain ground by exploiting German animosity towards the American demands after World War I.

Alongside Nazism in Germany, Italy also saw the rise of fascism. Which was a totalitarian political movement funded by Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini that crushed political opposition and promoted the ideas of economic modernization, promotion of traditional Italian values, and a rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Treaty of Versailles was signed during the Paris Peace Conference. in 1919 and included the Treaty of the League of Nations, which sat at its first Council meeting on January 16, 1920.

It included a General Assembly, with representatives from all the member states and accompanied by an administratively appointed permanent secretariat. , and an executive council whose members included only the great powers.

Four permanent members and four non-permanent members were in the council, which was composed of Britain, France, Japan, and Italy. The highest point of membership in the League of Nations was at 58 countries. In 1934, the Soviet Union was established, but it was expelled in 1939 after being invaded by Japan.

The League of Nations members were obligated to acknowledge the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nation-states and to reject the use or threat of military force as a means of resolving international disputes. The union endeavored to settle territorial disputes among its members in a peaceful manner, and it was sometimes highly productive. As an example, the League overcame a dispute between Iraq and Turkey over Mosul in 1926 and played coordinating roles for Colombia and Peru during the early 1930s.

In the end, the League was unable to prevent an explosion. From World War II, because such historians mostly saw it as weak, ineffective, and ineffective. The organization is essentially powerless. In addition to the lack of strong enforcement mechanisms, many countries join and therefore are not bound by the rules. and membership duties.

The Fourteen Points was first announced by US President Woodrow Wilson in January The Fourteen Points presented a comprehensive vision for changing world politics. According to Wilson, international relations should be conducted without restrictions, based on self-determination and the principle of free political choice among all nations. Additionally, they advocated for the avoidance of military intervention. came Wilson's vision of the post-war world, which greatly influenced the creation of the League of Nations.

Republican Senator William Borah and isolationist President Wilson were staunch advocates in Congress, despite their efforts to convince the American people that membership in the League of Nations was necessary. and Henry Cabot Lodge. The League Convention's Article X, which requires all League members to assist any member in danger of being attacked by a foreign power, was the most significant point of contention. If an attack occurs, Article X mandates that the United States must protect all members of the League. Isolationists in Congress opposed US involvement in international conflicts and viewed Article X as a direct violation of US sovereignty. Consequently, the Senate withheld its ratification of the treaty, and the United States never joined the League of Nations.

Although the League could not prevent the outbreak of World War II, it continued to function until 1946. when it was officially dissolved. Before that time, the allies had already begun discussions on the creation of a new successor organization, the United Nations.

The UN, which still exists today, was based on many of the same principles as the League of Nations but was specifically designed to avoid excessive weakness. The UN has much stronger enforcement mechanisms, including its peacekeeping force, and even at its peak, UN membership is considerably larger than that of the League.

From the above section, we can discern that the influence of the United States of America had started to increase from the end of the First World War due to the increasingly significant role the country began to play on the global stage.

The establishment of the League of Nations more than anything else tells the story of the rise of the US. Although further geopolitical developments during the Second World War and the Cold War would cemetery the assertion the foundation could be witnessed at this time.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the wide debate of the geopolitical complexities of this period, different aspects of the political power shift from London to Washington have been examined by scholars. A central theme in these debates is the profound influence of the Peace of Versailles upon the renewal of the post-war landscape. Margaret MacMillan and other historians have emphasized the contentious and multipolar nature of the treaty, which subjected Germany to substantial territorial and economic pressure. Unexpected consequences resulted from the punitive policy that aimed to blame Germany for starting World War I. Nationalist sentiment in Germany and a widespread feeling of victimhood were both fueled by the treaty's harsh terms. The resulting outrage provided fertile ground for the spread of extremist ideologies that ultimately fueled the rise of Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP. Academics such as Niall Ferguson have carefully traced the complex connections between the Treaty of Versailles and the geopolitical convulsions that followed, explaining how its provisions catalyzed events that fundamentally changed the global order.

Scholars have produced in-depth analyses of the economic consequences of the First World. War. and their deep echo in the great powers around the world. Economic historians, notably Eric Hobsbawm, have carefully described the unprecedented disorder and suffering caused by the conflict. The protracted and extensive nature of the war took a significant toll on the economy, leaving behind a devastated landscape of destruction, scarcity, and disorder. The war weakened treasury stocks, depleted industrial capacity, and disrupted established trade networks on an unprecedented scale. The resulting economic disintegration had profound social and political consequences, deepening the discontent and disillusionment of a population struggling with unemployment, inflation, and poverty. In this environment of economic insecurity and social disorder, extremist ideologies have found fertile ground to thrive, exploiting widespread grievances to gain support and influence. By examining economic indicators, social trends, and political developments in the interwar period, researchers have made clear the complex relationship between economic hardship and politically radicalized society.

III. RESEARCH GAP

The topics related to the World Wars and the 20th century at large have already been researched at length by numerous social scientists as they are some of the most consequential events in one of the most consequential periods in world history, and the rise of the United States has also been studied after the Second World War and during the Cold War but not as many studies have been conducted on understanding the shift of power in the inter-war era. This era saw some of the most significant events of modern world history for example the formation of the League of Nations, the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Germany and Italy respectively, and the Great Depression.

With this intention, the research is being conducted. This research can be useful when we try to conceptualize history and try to track the correct order of events and when we try to find the catalyst of long-term changes with monumental global implications.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this research was to explore the shift of global power from the British Empire to the United States of America in the period between 1919 and 1945 i.e. the Inter-War era. The research questions for this paper are –Did the shift take place in the period in question?

What was the significance of the period in question (1919-1945) in that regard?

What were the indicators of the shift of global political power from London to Washington?

What were the causes of the shift of global political power?

This paper aims to find the answers to the above-stated question.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted over a period of 10 weeks i.e. two-and-a-half months. For ease of time management, the researcher decided to divide the total period into 10 segments each of 1 week in length. The work was divided into each segment according to the research plan. The research was primarily conducted through a review of the primary sources, secondary sources, and meta-analysis of a host of tertiary sources that were relevant to the topic at hand. The tasks were divided equally for all the weeks. The initial weeks were spent outlining the research followed by examining and analyzing the material. The crucial information, facts, and figures from the research material were collected and organized. The next couple of weeks were spent analyzing the collected data and organizing them into sections and segments that could be incorporated into the research paper. The final few weeks were spent finalizing the research paper and framing and formatting it. Once the research questions were answered to the satisfaction of the researchers, the paper was written and the research was concluded with the submission of the said paper.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The conclusion of the research resulted in the answer to the research questions. The extensive and rigorous research was sufficient to find adequate answers to the questions that were posed by the researchers. The findings are as follows –

Did the shift take place in the period in question?

No, the shift of the political power took place after the conclusion of the Second World War due to which the United States and the USSR entered into the Cold War. As the new di-facto leader of the Western block, the United States was the natural contender for the pro-capitalist faction in the Cold War.

However, this period is significant because the process of the shift started right after the First World War i.e., the period in question.

What was the significance of the period in question (1919-1945) in that regard?

The period between 1919 and 1945 comprises the inter-war era. With the end of the First World War, many existing world powers faced a decline in their influence and were weakened by the consequences of their environment in the war. On the other hand, the countries that were able to gain/ maintain political and military strength became the key players in the Second World War as well as in the future. Although this period did not witness the absolute ascension of the United States as the sole superpower it certainly laid the groundwork for the same. The rise of Nazism in Germany and fascism in Italy, the slow collapse of colonialism, and the strengthening of the USSR were some of the major reasons for the delaying of the ascension.

What were the indicators of the shift of global political power from London to Washington?

The end of the First World War was contingent on the Treaty on Versailles and the conditions of peace and armistice that it proposed. The treaty was signed in The Paris Conference of 1919, the then-president of the United States Woodrow Wilson gave a Fourteen Point plan for peace that resulted in the treaty. The elements of the Fourteen Points plan included disarmament, national self-determination, free trade, etc. The United States was on the winning side of the First World War i.e. Allied Powers, the negative impact of the war would have been significantly less when compared to the Axis powers

The decisive role of the United States in the formation of the League of Nations was a further indicator of the pull the country had developed in the international realm. American Presidential Woodrow Wison gave a Fourteen Point plan that highlighted the principles on which the League of Nations was founded. The principles such as disarmament, self-determinism, and free trade were all included in the charter of the League of Nations.

The decline of the influence of the European powers further cemented the strength of the United States. Emerging from the Great War the European countries faced the action firsthand, the war happened on their borders and territories hence they bore the brunt directory. Their cities were attacked and economies were destroyed when the United States was protected by the colossal bodies of water on both sides. The European countries were all facing many challenges that the United States was immune to; the 20th century was a time of rapid de-colonization due to the pushback the practice created in the world as well as inside the borders of these colonizing countries. Such social churn alongside the diplomatic pressure created a tough condition for the European powers. The increased role of the United States in the world is an indicator of the rising of the country on the world stage.

What were the causes of the shift of global political power?

The shift of global political power happened due to the following reasons:

1) The weakening of the European powers for example Britain and France gave the opportunity to a new power to replace them, the United States took this opportunity and began to fill the void. The less disadvantaged position that the United States was in after the First World War gave it an advantage over others.
2) The increase in the hard and soft power of the United States also played a role. Due to the rapid industrialization and modernization of the manufacturing sector in the country production of goods became easier, and this gave a boost to the country's economy. The ease of production also played a role in the increase in the supply of arms and ammunition for the use of the American military as well as for exports to other countries. The increase in the influence of the United States could also be witnessed by the major role they played in The Paris Conference of 1919, the Treaty of Versailles, and the formation of the League of Nations.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study raised the shift of political power from London to Washington in the inter-war era (1919-1945). The researchers found that the shift did not entirely take place in the period but over a much larger span of time. It would be best to say that the shift took place in the 20th century at large as a number of consequential events from the First World War, The Great Depression, the Second World War, and The Cold War took place in the time period.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved

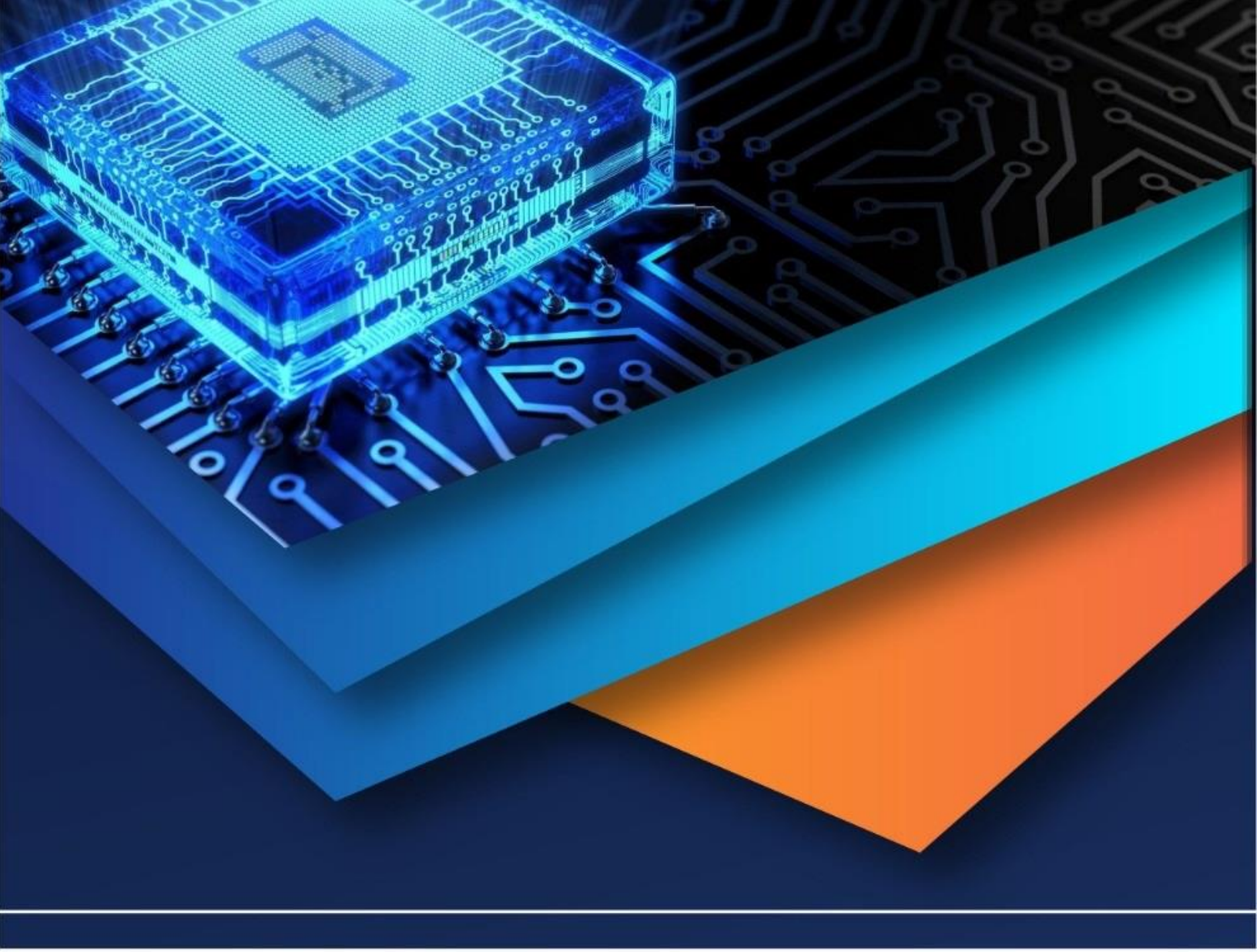
However, the inter-war period did suddenly witness the beginning of the shift as the decline of the European powers as well as the increase in the influence of the United States all took place in the period. The inter-war period also set the stage for numerous events of the future and shaped the modern world as we know it. The beginning of the Pax Americana would eventually replace the Pax Britannica that prevailed over the majority of the world for centuries.

The contemporary world has seen certain events that suggest yet another major reshaping of the world order that can make many changes to the geo-political landscape. This proves the Greek principles of Anacyclosis which says that governments never last for a long period of time. Hence, the shift in global political power is a constant feature of international relations, at times the shift can be swift and clean or it could be slow and painful. The shift of the political power from London to Washington was one of the latter kind .

REFERENCES

[1] MacMillan, Margaret. "Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World." Oxford University Press, 2003.
[2] Ferguson, Niall. "The Pity of War: Explaining World War I." Basic Books, 1999.
[3] Hobsbawm, Eric. "The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991." Vintage Books, 1996.
[4] Keynes, John Maynard. "The Economic Consequences of the Peace." Oxford University Press, 2018.
[5] Wilson, Woodrow. "Woodrow Wilson and the World of Today: Addresses Delivered Between 1919 and 1924." BiblioLife, 2009.
[6] Lodge, Henry Cabot. "The Senate and the League of Nations." Greenwood Press, 1968.
[7] Borah, William. "The League of Nations: Its Life and Times." Arno Press, 1969.
[8] Mussolini, Benito. "The Doctrine of Fascism." Forgotten Books, 2012.
[9] Council of the League of Nations. "Official Journal of the League of Nations: Special Supplement." League of Nations, 1934.
[10] Wilson, Woodrow. "The Papers of Woodrow Wilson: Volume 66, January 1, 1920-July 15, 1920." Princeton University Press, 2008.

©IJRASET: All Rights are Reserved | SJ Impact Factor 7.538 | ISRA Journal Impact Factor 7.894 |



10.22214/IJRASET

45.98

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.129

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.429

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Call : 08813907089 (24*7 Support on Whatsapp)