**Key Events Leading to the Defeat of the Central Power**

**Introduction**

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| **DATE** | **EVENT** |
| **1914** | Battle of the Marne – realisation that the Schlieffen Plan had failed. Germany now faced a war on two fronts. |
| **1915** | * Sinking of the Lusitania * Italy declares war on Germany & Austria-Hungary |
| **1916** | Battle of Jutland – British naval superiority established |
| **1917** | * Germany introduces unrestricted submarine warfare * USA declares war on Germany * British tanks used effectively for the first time at Battle of Cambrai * Russia sue for peace |
| **1918** | * Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Russia * German ‘Ludendorff Offensive’ A.K.A ‘The Spring Offensive’ * Turkish foces collapse, Turkey makes peace * Austria makes peace * Kaiser Wilhelm abdicates * Germany signs armistice |
| **1919** | Treaty of Versailles signed |

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|  | **Weaknesses of the Central Powers** | **Strengths of the Allies** |
| **Military** |  |  |
| **Political** |  |  |
| **Econ.** |  |  |
| **Cultural** |  |  |

**USE THIS GRID TO INTERPRET THE ARTICLE**

The humiliating surrender of Germany in 1918 was a shock for observers participating in the belief that German victory was imminent, based on the successes of the Spring Offensive earlier that year; however, from a retrospective standpoint, it is relatively easy to evaluate the basis of the German defeat. It is evident that a combination of military, socio-economic and political weaknesses led to Germany losing the war. German defeat manifested itself namely because of unsuccessful military tactics, inefficient planning, social unrest, and collapse of her allies; however, the ability of the Allied forces to successfully exploit the problems associated with Germany’s unstable government and declining economy was also a key aspect of Germany’s loss. In conjunction with this, the Allies possessed more reliable and superior resources which ultimately overpowered German ones. These contributed to their subsequent triumphs increased the inevitability of their victory - this dampened German enthusiasm. Therefore, the ensuing loss of faith in the war effort in Germany propelled the negotiations of an armistice for the defeated Germany.

On the political-diplomatic front, the German government was easily subdued by the Allied forces because of the establishment of what was essentially a military dictatorship in 1916. This was enacted after the control of the Reichstag was handed over to the army. In regard to the whether or not there was a sufficient priority on the necessities of the German people, the presiding leaders - Ludendorff and Hindenburg - were incompetent rulers. Their dogmatic convictions and overt militaristic aggression reinforced their reluctance to compromise on a realistically modest victory for Germany. Their approach to long-term goals disregarded a sense of pragmatism - for example, they were convinced that a direct outcome of the war should be total annexation of nearby unconquerable regions, as per the ‘Septemberprogramm’ drawn up by Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg in the first weeks of the war. Expectations of unrealistic concessions therefore contributed to German defeat, as they deterred focus from short-term pragmatic solutions.

Disintegration of the German political system also diminished the power of the military to carry across proposed action efficiently. Consequently, inadequate strategy was one of the main reasons for Germany’s lack of preparedness when dealing with complications during the later stages of the war. Most importantly, reliance on logistically impossible military plans - like the Schlieffen Plan - which assumed that the war would be short and Allied counter-attacks would predictably ‘fail’, directed the psyche of the German leadership: they believed resources could be exhausted quickly. For example, the government dedicated all labour forces to conscription duties, including farmers. In the short term, this would boost troop numbers and bolster German advantage in some battles - but in the long term, this led to famine and starvation as harvests were not tended to. The predominant effect of the German government’s lack of insight into constructing alternative plans because of the excessive faith in German supremacy was that, in the future, mobilizing resources would be exceedingly difficult. This factor would also be responsible for Germany losing the war.

Irreparable faults in tactical decisions also established an anti-German sentiment in the opposition, motivating them to push for the annihilation of German forces. Germany quickly generated the attitude of antagonism towards her through her failure to consider the possible repercussions of her doggedly aggravating actions. The invasion of Belgium breached the 1839 Treaty of London which stated that Belgium was to remain a perpetually neutral country; this undermined the integrity of German policy and proved to the Allied forces that Germany was not to be trusted. The Allies therefore found it prudent to mirror Germany’s lack of courtesy, as evidenced by Britain institution of a crippling naval blockade.

Defeat also stemmed from the surrender of Germany’s allies, which included Bulgaria, Turkey and the Austro-Hungarian empire. The weaknesses of the Central Powers reflected Germany’s own, and therefore exposed German vulnerability - especially since the Kaiser abdicated in November 1918. The collapse and capitulation of the Central Powers also provided input into German defeat as this cut off important supply lines - for example, essential oil stores in Bulgaria -  for a Germany which was already suffering from food deficits and had no access to imports from overseas.

Whilst Germany was losing her support base, the empires of the Allied forces were able to prevail because they could get assistance from their colonies. This meant that they could effectively carry out attrition warfare, as they faced little risk of dwindling resources. The Germans therefore made multiple strategic mistakes, because instead of intently concentrating on defeating these enemies, they focused on enraging the USA - a world superpower that would unequivocally hinder German victory. The crucial error that was provoking the USA into participating in the war was mainly instigated through the employment of U-Boats and unrestricted submarine warfare. Despite Britain’s introduction of a convoy system with naval escorts to limit the detrimental effects of the U-Boats, the USA was heavily affected by them - particularly during the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915. This, coupled with the Zimmerman telegram in 1917, justified USA’s entry to the war: the Germans had elicited a nationalistic response from the angered USA, who felt compelled to enter the war. Unfortunately for Germany, this came at a point when she could not afford it, as starvation (along with widespread discontent) was running rampantly. The formidable American troops replenished the Allied army and essentially secured the Allied victory by dissipating German morale through a multitude of battlefield successes, i.e. General Pershing’s attack on the St. Mihiel salient. Overall, the defeat of seemingly unassailable (according to German military mythology) German troops in battles such as the Battle of the Marne - this led to the failure of the Ludendorff Offensive - and failures in strategically important battles ie Battle of Jutland (which was supposed to weaken the British navy) led to a drop in German morale.

The military failures can be attributed to realization of the German public that the government was operating a dangerously optimistic game. Combined with the decline in German resolve, this prompted reproach towards the government - it was seen to be making questionable decisions that were disputable in guaranteeing German victory. Therefore, dissolution of the masses and army cannot only be connected to the widespread belief that additional war efforts would be pointless, but also to the newfound understanding of the artificial nature of the government. Cursory wartime strictures also increased social tension - for example, the War Board was seen to be only providing aid for industrial workers, creating discrepancy in the working class. Internal dissent was characterized by anarchy in not only the general public but also in the army, as evidenced by the Kiel Mutiny on the 29th of October, 1918. These domestic problems made the government realize that the war must be brought to be an end, otherwise unrest could develop into full-scale revolution or even lead to the unfavourable emergence of communism.

One of the most important reasons for the defeat of Germany was the imposition of a paralysing naval blockade by Britain. Germany had been importing one third of her food in 1913; therefore by the end of the war German population was on the brink of starvation. The required resources for the production of ammunition (i.e. magnesium and oil) were also not found within Germany, so the blockade was especially debilitating for the country’s wartime industries. In general, the Allies’ effective use of attrition warfare caused collateral damage in Germany; it led to a lack of control over the economic situation in Germany, and pushed the government to seek the end of the war. The only other option was to break the blockade to end the starvation causing resistance in the masses, but because Germany was failing in her offensive and defensive strategies - thus losing valuable land and troops - the government was obliged to pursue the only feasible option: surrender.

The most decisive determinant of the German defeat was the advantage of the Allies, because it allowed them to outnumber the limited strengths of the Central Powers. Compared to the inefficiencies of Germany, the Allies simply had stronger manpower, greater numbers of resources, a more efficient planning system, and most importantly, a willingness to acknowledge critical problems rather than blindly perpetuating nationalistic, propaganda-esque information and extreme patriotism. Another key factor was the entry of the USA, which was a turning point in the level of morale. Overall, all the collective aspects of Allied strength allowed them to capitalize on the successes of attrition warfare, while unwarranted focus on short-term targets in Germany eventually led to a magnification of German weaknesses and loss of hope in the war effort.

**Historiography**

**Use your notes and the above essay to complete the analysis table below :**