

Topic 7.5: Unresolved Tensions After World War I

Standards Table

Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept(s)	Historical Thinking Skill(s)	Standards Alignment
Governance (GOV)	Explain continuities and changes in territorial holdings	KC-6.2.1.B	CCOT, Comparison, Sourcing, Contextualization	AP World History: Modern Unit 7

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify changes and continuities in territorial control after World War I
- Explain how imperial powers maintained or expanded control
- Analyze historical documents using sourcing and evidence
- Evaluate the impact of unresolved tensions on global stability

Lesson Overview

Although World War I resulted in the collapse of several empires, it did not bring an end to imperialism. Instead, territorial control was often reorganized rather than eliminated. European powers retained many of their colonies, while new forms of imperial control emerged through mandates and treaties. Japan also expanded its influence in East Asia, taking advantage of shifting global power dynamics.

In this lesson, you will analyze documents that explore how territorial control both changed and remained consistent after World War I. You will evaluate different perspectives, including imperial governments and colonized peoples, and use these sources to construct an argument about continuity and change. This will strengthen your DBQ skills and deepen your understanding of global tensions in the interwar period.

Essential Vocabulary

- **Mandate System:** A League of Nations system placing former colonies of defeated powers under the administration of victorious nations
- **Self-Determination:** The principle that nations have the right to govern themselves
- **Anti-Imperialism:** Opposition to colonial rule and foreign domination
- **Protectorate:** A territory controlled by a stronger state but retaining some local authority

- **Territorial Revisionism:** Efforts by states to change existing borders or reclaim lost territories

Background Reading

The end of World War I led to significant territorial changes, particularly with the collapse of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires. New nations emerged in Europe and the Middle East, often based on the principle of self-determination promoted by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. However, this principle was inconsistently applied. While European nations gained independence, many regions in Africa and Asia remained under colonial control. This reflects a key continuity in global imperial systems.

The League of Nations established the mandate system to administer former Ottoman and German territories. These territories were governed by European powers such as Britain and France, who claimed to be preparing them for independence. In reality, mandates often functioned as extensions of empire. For example, Britain controlled Iraq and Palestine, while France governed Syria and Lebanon. These arrangements demonstrate how imperial control adapted rather than disappeared.

At the same time, Japan expanded its influence in East Asia and the Pacific. It gained former German territories in China and the Pacific Islands through the Treaty of Versailles. Japan's expansion reflected both continuity in imperial competition and change in the balance of power, as non-European nations began to assert influence. This shift challenged the traditional dominance of Western powers.

Anti-imperial resistance also increased during this period. Movements in India, Egypt, and China demanded independence and challenged colonial rule. Leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi used nonviolent resistance, while others pursued more direct confrontation. These movements highlight the growing pressure on imperial systems and foreshadow the decolonization movements that would follow World War II.

Comparing the interwar period to earlier eras reveals both continuity and change. While imperial powers maintained control over colonies, the rise of nationalist movements and new political ideologies began to undermine imperial authority. This tension between continuity and change contributed to global instability and set the stage for future conflicts.

DBQ DOCUMENTS

Document 1

- Type: Political Speech
- Author: Woodrow Wilson
- Date: 1918

“We believe that all peoples have the right to determine their own destiny, and that no nation should impose its will upon another without consent. The peace we seek must be founded upon justice and respect for the rights of nations, large and small alike. Only through such principles can lasting stability be achieved. Yet this vision requires the cooperation of all powers and a commitment to fairness that transcends narrow interests.”

Historical Situation: Wilson’s Fourteen Points after WWI.

Perspective/Limitation: Idealistic; inconsistently applied.

Use in Argument: Shows push for change.

Questions:

1. What is Wilson’s purpose in promoting self-determination?
2. What evidence reflects his vision for global order?
3. How does this document relate to changes in territorial control?

Document 2

- Type: League of Nations Report
- Author: League Mandates Commission
- Date: 1922

“The territories formerly under Ottoman control are to be administered by advanced nations until such time as they are capable of self-governance. These mandates are not to be considered colonies, but rather a sacred trust of civilization. The administering powers are responsible for guiding political and economic development, ensuring stability and progress in regions that have yet to achieve full independence.”

Historical Situation: Creation of mandate system.

Perspective/Limitation: Justifies imperial control.

Use in Argument: Shows continuity of imperialism.

Questions:

1. How does the League justify the mandate system?
2. What evidence suggests limited independence?
3. How does this reflect continuity in imperial control?

Document 3

- Type: Nationalist Speech
- Author: Egyptian nationalist leader
- Date: 1920

“We are told that foreign rule exists for our benefit, yet we see our resources controlled and our voices silenced. The promise of self-determination rings hollow when applied only to certain nations. We demand the same rights that have been granted elsewhere. Independence is not a privilege but a right, and we shall not cease in our efforts to achieve it.”

Historical Situation: Egyptian resistance to British control.

Perspective/Limitation: Anti-imperial; focused on local struggle.

Use in Argument: Shows resistance.

Questions:

1. What is the author’s main argument?
2. What evidence shows dissatisfaction with imperial rule?
3. How does this reflect anti-imperial resistance?

Document 4

- Type: Treaty Excerpt
- Author: Treaty of Versailles
- Date: 1919

“Germany renounces in favor of the Principal Allied Powers all its rights and titles over its overseas possessions. These territories shall be administered under the supervision of the League of Nations, with the objective of ensuring their development and eventual self-governance. The distribution of these territories shall be determined by the Allied Powers.”

Historical Situation: Redistribution of German colonies.

Perspective/Limitation: Reflects victor control.

Use in Argument: Shows territorial change.

Questions:

1. Who benefits from this treaty provision?
2. What evidence shows redistribution of territories?
3. How does this illustrate change after WWI?

Document 5

- Type: Government Statement
- Author: Japanese official
- Date: 1921

“The acquisition of former German territories in the Pacific represents not only a strategic necessity but a recognition of Japan’s rightful place among the great powers. Our presence in these regions will bring stability and development, ensuring that they are not left vulnerable to disorder. As a nation that has embraced modernization, we are well-positioned to fulfill this responsibility.”

Historical Situation: Japanese expansion after WWI.

Perspective/Limitation: Justifies imperialism.

Use in Argument: Shows non-Western imperialism.

Questions:

1. How does the author justify expansion?
2. What evidence shows Japan’s goals?
3. How does this reflect continuity in imperialism?

Document 6

- Type: Letter
- Author: Indian nationalist
- Date: 1930

“The promises made during the war have not been fulfilled. We were told that our loyalty would be rewarded, yet we remain under foreign rule. The continued presence of imperial authority undermines any claim that this system is just. Our struggle is not only for independence but for dignity and recognition as equals.”

Historical Situation: Indian independence movement.

Perspective/Limitation: Anti-colonial perspective.

Use in Argument: Shows growing resistance.

Questions:

1. What is the author criticizing?
2. What evidence shows broken promises?
3. How does this reflect continuity and change?

Document 7

- Type: European Diplomatic Memo
- Author: British official
- Date: 1925

“The maintenance of order in our overseas territories remains essential to both economic stability and international prestige. While there is increasing agitation among certain populations, it is imperative that governance remain firm. Gradual reforms may be considered, but any rapid withdrawal would risk instability and undermine the benefits that imperial administration provides.”

Historical Situation: British imperial policy.

Perspective/Limitation: Pro-imperial; defensive.

Use in Argument: Shows continuity of control.

Questions:

1. What is the author’s main concern?
2. What evidence shows justification of imperialism?
3. How does this reflect continuity in territorial control?

Continuity vs Change

Category	Examples
Change	New nations in Europe, mandate system
Continuity	Continued colonial rule in Africa/Asia
Expansion	Japanese territorial gains

Historical Reasoning

Change Over Time

After WWI, major empires collapsed and new nations formed. Borders were redrawn in Europe and the Middle East. However, these changes were uneven. Some regions gained independence while others remained controlled. This shows partial transformation.

Continuity Over Time

Imperial powers maintained control over many territories. Colonies in Africa and Asia remained under foreign rule. Economic and political dominance continued. This continuity limited the impact of change.

Comparison

Western powers maintained empires, while Japan expanded its own. Both justified control as beneficial. However, resistance movements grew stronger. This comparison highlights global patterns.

Key Takeaways

- WWI led to both territorial change and continuity
- Imperialism continued through new systems like mandates
- Non-Western powers like Japan expanded influence
- Anti-imperial movements increased
- Tensions remained unresolved

DBQ Practice

Prompt:

Evaluate the extent to which World War I changed global territorial control between 1918 and 1939.

Task Instructions:

- Develop a thesis
- Use at least 4 documents
- Include outside evidence
- Explain sourcing for at least 2 documents