



Historical Committee: Peace of Westphalia

Members of the Dais: Javier Sadurní and Isabel Báez

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I. Historical Background (Thirty Years War and Eighty Years War)

The Thirty Years War was a religious and political conflict fought in 17th century Europe. Although it that started as a mainly local and religious conflict between the Catholic and Protestant states in The Holy Roman Empire, it later evolved to a more political war concerning the **balance of power** in the continent. The conflict lasted from 1618 to 1648, with its culmination being *The Peace of Westphalia*¹. Evidently, it remains as one of the longest and most catastrophic wars, claiming more than 8 million lives. Historians divide the war into 4 different phases: Bohemian, Danish, Swedish, and French; the first two being more religious and locally based, while the later two are considered to be more political and continental.

Bohemian (1618-1625): Bohemia had a catholic ruler, but the majority of its citizens were protestants. Ferdinand II's predecessor, Holy Roman Emperor Matthias, had granted the protestants religious toleration through the *Letter of Majesty*²; however, Ferdinand II revoked the letter, which caused anger from the protestants, leading to the *Defenestrations of Prague*.³ Said occurrence took place when Ferdinand II sent messengers to negotiate with the Protestants, who then proceeded to throw the messengers out of the windows of a 70-foot-tall building. This action sparked the *Bohemian Revolt*⁴ and the *Battle of White Mountain*⁵, which were both decisive catholic victories.

Danish (1625-1630): Since Denmark is directly north of Bohemia and ruled some parts of the Holy Roman Empire, the Protestant King of Denmark, Christian IV, decided to join the protestants fighting in Bohemia. He feared that the recent Catholic victories threatened Denmark's **sovereignty** as a Protestant nation. However, he was defeated by Albrecht Von Wallenstein, a Bohemian military leader, and the Danish were forced to return to Denmark.

Swedish (1630-1635): In a similar effort as Christian IV's, Gustavus Adolphus, the king of Sweden, decided to aid the German Lutherans in order to forestall the Catholic dominion in

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peace-of-Westphalia>

² http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4501

³ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Defenestration-of-Prague-1618#ref182269>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemian_Revolt

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_White_Mountain

recent battles. He was also concerned about the growing power of the Habsburg monarchy. At the *Battle of Breitenfeld*⁶, Gustavus Adolphus was able to defeat the Catholics through the use of mobile artillery. While the Swedish were fighting, France (a Catholic country) was funding the weapons they used. Cardinal Richelieu, the chief minister of Louis XIII of France, was worried about the balance of power in the continent and, since he feared that the House of Habsburg would dominate all the other European nations and empires, he decided to set aside his country's religious affiliation, and aid the Protestants as a political move. Ultimately, with the death of Gustavus Adolphus, came the end of the Swedish direct involvement in the war.

French (1635-1648): As Sweden withdrew its direct participation in the war, France decided to get directly involved. This time, Sweden would fund France and France would fight. France declared war on Philip IV's Spain and Ferdinand II's Holy Roman Empire opening offensives against the Habsburgs in Germany and the Low Countries. Emperor Ferdinand II died in 1637 and was succeeded by his son Ferdinand III, who was strongly inclined toward ending the war through negotiations. Nevertheless, the French military efforts continued. The Spanish and the French fought but neither could gain an advantage by 1640. However, by 1643, the French campaign against the Spanish forces in Flanders culminated with a decisive French victory at the *Battle of Rocroi*⁷. At this time, many negotiations for peace between the belligerent countries took place because the war was dragging on for too long. The phase and, consequently, the war ended with The Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Another important part of the Peace of Westphalia is that it also ended the Eighty Years War⁸, otherwise known as the Dutch Revolt. The Eighty Years War is one of the longest conflicts in history, lasting from 1568-1648. It was a revolt of the *Seventeen Provinces*⁹ against the political and religious authority of Philip II of Spain, the sovereign of the Habsburg Netherlands.

With the *Reformation*¹⁰, Protestantism made significant gains in Europe with it being recognized by the Holy Roman Empire and slowly being adopted by people of different European nations. Calvinists became a significant minority in the Low Countries, but they were

⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Breitenfeld_\(1631\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Breitenfeld_(1631))

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Rocroi

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Eighty-Years-War>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeen_Provinces

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Reformation>

under King Philip II's strict Catholic rule. He had no tolerance for people that were not Catholic, especially people in places he ruled, and looked for ways to convert them into Catholics. That action only angered the Dutch and eventually William of Orange, a Dutch noble, began to openly criticize the Spanish king for his policies. In 1566, a group of Dutch nobles drafted *The Compromise of Nobles*¹¹, asking Philip II for a moderation of his policies. Philip II refused to do so, and caused tensions to rise even more

After the beginnings of the war, Philip II deployed his armies, thus re-establishing control over most of the rebelling provinces. Nevertheless, the northern provinces, lead by William of Orange continued their resistance. After finally ousting the Habsburg armies, they established the *Republic of the Seven United Netherlands*¹² in 1581. Regardless, although the heartland of the republic was no longer threatened, the war continued in other areas; this included the beginnings of the Dutch Colonial Empire, which found itself engaged in naval warfare against Spain. Although they experienced a 12-year truce, in which the Dutch Republic achieved de facto recognition, war re-emerged around 1619, coinciding with the Thirty Years War. Due to this, the resolutions to both conflicts were merged within the Peace of Westphalia.

II. **Peace of Westphalia**

The Peace of Westphalia consisted of three treaties that marked the end of the Thirty Years War and the Eighty Years War in 1648. Nevertheless, the peace negotiations from which they sprouted began back around 1641. Said peace is often referred to as the "Peace of Exhaustion", given that its existence is, in some part, due to the War's different parties' lack of motivation to continue battling amongst each other. The treaties targeted multiple conflicts, both religious and political/territorial. Although divided into three treaties, the peace negotiations involved nearly 109 delegations, of which the Holy Roman Empire (including its emperor and his princes), Spain, France, Sweden, the Dutch Republic, and a few free imperial cities were included.¹³

The Peace of Münster was the first document presented at the Peace of Westphalia. Signed on January 30th in 1648, this treaty attempted to set the peace disrupted by the Eighty

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compromise_of_Nobles

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dutch-Republic>

¹³ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory/chapter/the-peace-of-westphalia/>

Years War, also known as the Dutch Revolt, between the Lords States General of the United Netherlands and the Kingdom of Spain.

The roots of the negotiations for the treaty began within peace-talks in 1641, between the Spanish and the Dutch. Although the Dutch State was not recognized by other nations, its sovereignty was recognized by Spain, which allowed its participation in the peace-talks. The official negotiations of 1646 occurred in Münster between eight Dutch representatives, two of which were from Holland (the rest were from each of the other provinces), and Spanish envoys sent by Philip IV. Through these, the Dutch Republic was recognized as an independent state. After the treaty was signed on January, it was sent to the Hague and Madrid for approval. Later on, the Spanish and Dutch delegations ratified it on the 15th of May. Finally, it was approved by the States General on June 5th of 1648.¹⁴

The main conflict (the Thirty Years War), however, was put to an end by two other treaties, which settled the peace between the French-Swedish Alliance and the Holy Roman Empire. Said treaties were the Treaty of Münster and the Treaty of Osnabrück.

The Treaty of Münster ended the conflicts between France and the Holy Roman Empire, and was signed in the Catholic city of Münster. Said treaty mainly dealt with local issues and territorial disputes between both nations, all attributed to the balance of power, rather than the international issue at hand. The majority of the peace terms can be attributed to Cardinal Mazarin, given that Louis IV was still a child at the time of the treaties signing. Therefore, it is no surprise that France came out as one of the prominent European nations after the treaty.

Within said treaty, France won control of the Bishoprics of Metz, Toul, Verdun in Lorraine, the Habsburg lands in Alsace (the Sundgau) and the cities of the Décapole in Alsace, without including Strasbourg, the Bishopric of Strasbourg, or Mulhouse.

Additionally, the Imperial Estates went through a process of restitution. Within said process, the Palatinate was divided between the re-established Elector Palatine Charles Louis (son and heir of Frederick V), who obtained the Lower Palatinate, along the Rhine, and Elector-Duke Maximilian of Bavaria, who kept the Upper Palatinate, to the north of Bavaria. This meant that the power was divided between Protestants and Catholics.¹⁵

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Münster

¹⁵ https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssbi/pdf/treatyofwestphalia_bi.pdf

Additionally, the treaty dealt with defining the rights of the Imperial Estates. Among these was the abolishment of the barriers to trade and commerce erected during the war between nations, as well as the eradication of the navigation rights established on the Rhine. Moreover, the right to independent ratifications of treaties with foreign states was given to the hundreds of German principalities, as long as the treaties in questions would not have a negative impact the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁶

Besides territorial issues, a variety of religious elements were also addressed. Among these was the prohibition of any additional delay to the establishment of a Religious Peace, which's officiating date had been back in January of 1624. Additionally, the treaty banned any kind of majority vote when it came to religious matters, as that could bring a disadvantage to the Augsburg Commission, the Princes, and the Estates. Curiously, any archbishop, bishop or prelate elected within the Augsburg Commission that was to have a sudden change in religion, would be stripped off of their title and required to immediately forfeit of their rights, usufructs, and incomes. All in all, the Treaty of Münster was signed some time after its redaction on October 24, 1648.

The Treaty of Osnabrück settled the peace between Sweden and the Holy Roman Empire. It took place in the city of Osnabrück as a request from the Queen Christina of Sweden, who wished to negotiate in a Protestant city, not a Catholic one such as Münster. Said treaty dealt with the main conflicts surrounding the war, and were not as nationally-based as the previous ones dealt in Münster. First of, it confirmed the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, which established the principle of "Whoever reigns, their religion", meaning that each state's King would determine the religion of the territory. Nevertheless, at the time, the only two accepted religions were Catholicism and Protestantism. In 1648, however, a third religion called Calvinism was also approved. Besides this significant change, it also further improved the Peace of Augsburg by creating a confessional parity in collegial institutions of the Imperial estates and replacing majority rule in the Diet with two confessional caucuses of estates. Besides this, it also recognized the ownership of confessional lands and incomes. Although the "Whoever reigns, their religion" principle was maintained, the ruler could no longer impose his or her subjects to choose between religious conformity and emigration.

¹⁶ <https://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/301ModernEurope/Treaty%20of%20Westphalia%20%5BExcerpts%5D.pdf>

Another main point in the treaty was the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire. Now, the Empire's Imperial Estates adopted a new kind of sovereignty, in which their princes also had a right to adopt their own religion, and where they now indulged in new foreign policy liberties. Additionally, although still belonging to the Empire, the Imperial Estates were now allowed international expansion, with the admission of Sweden.

Sweden, on the other hand, received some powerful gains. They acquired the West half of Pomerania and other lands as territorial reparations. The East half of Pomerania was granted to Brandenburg, as well as the prince-archbishopric of Magdeburg. Additionally, through the treaty, Bavaria maintained control of the Upper Palatinate and, with it, its electoral title from the Pataline line of the Wittelsbachs. Besides this, the dissociation of the Swiss Confederation with the Imperial corporate order was officialized¹⁷, thus meaning the recognition of the Swiss Confederation as an independent republic.

Moreover, the treaty shed some light of the reestablishment of the Imperial Estates. It was concluded that the Prince-Bishopric of Osnabrück would alternate between Protestant, which's bishops would be chosen from cadets of the House of Brunswick-Lüneburg, and Catholic powers. Another topic in questions was the succession to the Dukes of Jülich-Cleves-Berg, after his death 1609. Cleves, Mark and Ravensberg went to Brandenburg, and Jülich, Berg and Ravenstein were given to the Count Palatine of Neuburg.¹⁸

The Treaty of Osnabrück, along with the previously drafted Treaty of Münster, were signed on October 24, 1648, thus encompassing the Peace of Westphalia.

III. Legacy

The Peace of Westphalia, considered the beginning of the modern international system by many political scientists, follows a mentality in which external powers should do their absolute best to avoid interfering in another country's domestic affairs. Essentially, it brought the principle of *Westphalian Sovereignty*¹⁹ to the table, which states that each nation state has exclusive sovereignty over its territory. The principle is the basis for the modern international system of sovereign states that has been adopted and preached in the United Nations Charter, stating that "nothing should authorise intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of

¹⁷ http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3778

¹⁸ https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssbi/pdf/treatyofwestphalia_bi.pdf

¹⁹ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory/chapter/the-peace-of-westphalia-and-sovereignty/>

any state." Every state, regardless of size, has an equal right to sovereignty. Westphalian sovereignty continues to be used for the basic legal principles the encompass the modern state system. Nevertheless, the principle has been put to question throughout history. Said debates have been fomented by the ideas of internationalism and globalization, which conflict with Westphalian sovereignty. Take for example the end of the Cold War, where increased international integration and, some say, the erosion of Westphalian sovereignty was present. Nonetheless, the principles established by the Peace of Westphalia continue to be held in consideration when it comes to foreign affairs and remain as the basic legal principle in the modern state system.

IV. Guide Questions:

1. Which nation or empire does your delegation mainly seek to establish peace and make arrangements with? Explain.
2. Who were the allies of the nation that your delegation represents in the Thirty Years War?
3. What territorial/continental measures should be taken when solving the conflicts presented in the Thirty Years War?
4. Does your delegation see any need to incorporate other European nations, such as England, Poland, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, within future peace assemblies? If so, how?
5. Should the Imperial Estates be reestablished and granted autonomy? If so, how does your delegation propose to do so?
6. What measures should be taken in resolving the religious affairs of the nations at hand?
7. Does your delegation feel that the inclusion of resolutions targeting the Eighty Years War is necessary within future peace assemblies? If yes, which resolutions could be adopted?

V. Message from the Dais

We hope you are as excited to be delegating in this committee as we are to be chairing it. The treaties within the Peace of Westphalia, discussed and “resolved many conflicts”, both, religiously and politically. Nevertheless, despite the fact they are all crucial, we exhort delegates to focus on the political/territorial aspects of the negotiations, specifically the principles of

balance of power and national sovereignty. Although we wish to keep historical accuracy, we encourage delegates to go beyond past events, and not limit themselves when proposing plans that would change the results of the treaty. Nevertheless, said propositions should be done keeping each delegation's policy in check.

Position papers are to be handed in by **11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, October 17**. These should be written in **Times New Roman, size 12, double spacing, and in the justify format**. Additionally, they should be **between 2 to 3 pages** in length, without including the **works cited**. The **delegation and committee must be stated at the top of the paper**. Points will be deducted in the case of tardiness and/or lack of compliance with the established format.

The committee will start on **October 15th, 1647**, in the midst of peace talks and negotiations between nations, and treaty drafting. Although the war has not technically ended by this time, it had pacified. Due to this, **any event happening after this date is not to be discussed within position papers**, as they are meant to be drafted within this timeframe. Proposed resolutions in the position paper must also have the time constraints in consideration. **We've included information previous to this date for the sole purpose of enlightening delegates and allowing them to understand each treaty's structure and components, as well as its effects. Nevertheless, we exhort delegates to change the course of history in a viable manner.** All in all, we are very excited for this committee, and we hope to witness good quality of debate and innovative, viable resolutions. If you have any questions, please feel free to email either of us. Good luck and we'll see you in committee!

Isabel Báez Alicea
ibaezalicea@gmail.com

Javier Sadurní Marqués
javisadurni6@gmail.com

VI. Resources

- <https://www.history.com/topics/reformation/thirty-years-war>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B18zwAVO4q0>
- <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/thirty-years-war>
- <https://www.britannica.com/event/Eighty-Years-War>
- <https://cacm.acm.org/magazines/2018/9/230559-the-peace-of-westphalia/fulltext>
- <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peace-of-Westphalia>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1AMiQmApQQ>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppoKyDh4VK8&t=208s>
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- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Münster