

Name:

France Country Profile

Role in World War I

During World War I, France fought along with Great Britain, Russia, USA and other “Allies” against the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. After four long years of fighting, the war finally came to an end. France was devastated by the war. Casualties were tremendous; France lost over one and half million dead, second only to lives lost by the Russians. Since most of the fighting was done in France the country was also physically devastated. The French land had been destroyed, buildings were in rubble, and lives were in chaos (confusion). The French blamed Germany for the war so they sought out harsh punishment for the Germans. The French desire to make Germany pay became the driving force behind Treaty of Versailles negotiations.

Historical Background, 1918-1936

After World War I, French public opinion was strongly against getting involved in another war. The French, however, did not trust the Germans especially considering their long history of armed conflict going all the way back to the Franco-Prussian War. In the early 1930's Europe was weakened by the worldwide Great Depression. However its effects did not reach France until 1932 when the country saw a drop in tourism and a drop in exports including perfumes, wine, and foods. Unemployment in France rose to 15%. Even before the Great Depression, France knew that its population and its economy were too small to compete with Germany. If another war ever occurred, France understood that it would need allies. Because of opposition to communism, France was reluctant (unwilling) to seek an alliance with the Russians. The French looked to Czechoslovakia (with whom it signed an alliance) and other smaller Eastern European countries for support. However, when the German threat became clearer, France signed an alliance with the Soviet Union - the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935. The French also looked to their long time ally, the British, for assurances of support in the event of another German attack.

Foreign Policy

When the British government seemed reluctant to form a military alliance, France chose to emphasize a defensive strategy. The French built a series of fortifications along the border with Germany, the Maginot Line, beginning in 1930 and completed in 1939 at a cost of 3 billion francs. In spite of these military efforts, the French government was in disarray during the interwar years and its policies shifted frequently. As Germany became stronger, France hung to their defensive stance. Should a conflict with Germany emerge, France hoped the British would support them. Although they hoped to discourage German expansion, the French had no real desire to use military force to stop the Germans from attacking other nations.

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Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.