

Organizing a peace conference. Negotiation framework at the Paris conference (1919)

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Abstract¹: The Paris Conference (1919) was the first experiment by states on five continents to develop a multilateral negotiation framework in the aftermath of the First World War. The old diplomacy was trying to adapt to an international system with several actors, in which the principle of balance of power changed its logic, and the great pre-war actors left seats to others. What was blamed on the Conference was the negotiation procedure, which reflected the differences in the rank of the participating states. This article presents the way in which this transformation of international politics has taken place. Without describing the Paris negotiation files, this paper will focus on how the framework for the negotiations that defined the Paris Conference was created.

Keywords: *Conference of Peace, International Negotiations, League of Nations, old diplomacy, open diplomacy*

The characteristics of a peace conference

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A CONGRESS AND A CONFERENCE was emphasized by Coleman Phillipson and Ernest M. Satow. In essence, the differences are minor. Reviewing the definitions given by the end of the nineteenth century, Phillipson noted that a congress has a more solemn character, benefiting from greater political authority, while a conference has technical issues on its agenda (Phillipson 1916: 121). Satow noted that "the term *congress* has in the past been more frequently applied to assemblies of plenipotentiaries for the conclusions of peace" In the past, congresses were held in places considered neutral or "expressly neutralised for the purpose of the meeting." (Satow, 1932: 284) These congresses often had mediators. In the nineteenth century, congresses were held in the capital of one of

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the states involved, and the head of government or the minister of foreign affairs was the one who chaired them. Some authors before the nineteenth century saw in congress a kind of "court of conciliation." (Satow, 1932: 284)

In the case of the conference (the first taking place in London, in 1827), it took place in the capital of one of the states involved, the neutral space no longer being one of the characteristics of the meeting. The foreign minister of the host state also chaired the conference, and the other members were diplomatic representatives in that state. Satow notes that "[a]t the present day the term "conference" is habitually used to describe all international assemblages in which matters come under discussion with a view to settlement" (Satow, 1932: 285)

According to Phillipson (1916: 122), there is no clear line between conference and congress. The former term seems to replace the later one. International conferences between sovereign states can be divided into two major categories: (a) peacetime conferences aimed at maintaining peace through international agreements, such as the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, and (b) conferences of peace, ending a war. (Potter, 1922: 336) The Paris Conference (1919) ended a generalized war, different from a classic one between two belligerents, as was the case with the Franco-Prussian War, concluded by the Congress of Berlin (1871). It could be seen that, as a result of such a general conflict, neutral states were included in the peace negotiations, given that the general agreement contained issues relevant to their interests. Previous cases in Westphalia (1648), Vienna (1815) and Paris (1856) confirmed this new trend. (Potter, 1922: 339; Phillipson, 1916: 120).

Usually, peace conferences are not as well organized as peacetime conferences. Potter believes that the former gather "diplomats in the narrowest sense of the word and the personal element plays a very great part in the negotiations." (Potter, 1922: 344)

A peace conference is preceded by the conclusion of "peace preliminaries" or "armistices" between the belligerents. Ideally, a peace conference should previously define its scope of negotiation in order to provide a clear basis for negotiation. (Seymour, 1928: 286) The plenipotentiary representatives participating in the conference shall form the delegation of that State. This team has a head and can also include technical advisors. Plenipotentiaries have full powers from the head of state or government they represent to negotiate and conclude the treaty. The names of the plenipotentiaries shall be communicated in advance to the Government of the State hosting the conference or congress. The discussions and documents of the conference were held in French and English. The predominance of the plenipotentiaries followed the alphabetical order of the states in French. The order, in the conference room, is from the right to the left of the president.

The chair of an international conference is the main representative of the host state, if he is also a participant in the meeting. The functions of the President

of the Conference may include: (a) the presentation in plenary of a speech opening the procedures / papers setting out the aims and objectives of the conference, (b) the nomination of members of the secretariat who have been previously approved by delegations, (c) conducting the proceedings of the conference, (d) declaring the closing of the conference. (Potter, 1922: 289-290)

An international conference may set up committees to discuss specific topics on the agenda, and a rapporteur shall be appointed to draw up and present a report to the plenary. The first meeting of the plenary assembly aims to organize the general framework of the conference: the election of the president, the secretary, the appointment of commissions, the establishment of working procedures. In general, plenary sessions are held to present, for approval, the reports prepared by the specialized committees. The results of all discussions are contained in a treaty, the text of which is then submitted to successive readings so that the agreed text can be eventually signed by the plenipotentiaries of the participating states.

During the conference, the secretariats prepare minutes recording the discussions in the committees and plenary sessions. These documents are signed by the plenipotentiaries participating in the discussions, usually at the meeting following the one recorded in the document and following a vote to accept their content. All original documents are to be kept by the government of the host state.

Awaiting the Paris Conference

Initially, the opening of the preliminary conference was expected to take place on December 17, 1918, Woodrow Wilson himself, the President of the United States, arrived in Paris on December 14 for this purpose. However, the meeting was postponed to January 1919, due to parliamentary elections in Great Britain, but also due to the desire of French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau, to temper the atmosphere in the National Assembly of France. While waiting for the Conference, Wilson attempted to prepare a negotiation environment as favourable as possible through public speeches meant to strengthen his prestige, but also through visits to Great Britain and Italy. Clemenceau was concerned with obtaining, through the Peace Conference, the necessary guarantees for the security of France, while the project of creating the League of Nations remained a luxury, which could even become dangerous. In this regard, Wilson began to focus on making the League of Nations the central topic of the Conference. (Seymour, 1928: 251-252)

It was not until January 12, 1919, that the Peace Conference was convened. Paris was filled with heads of state, diplomats, experts, journalists. By April 1, 1919, the total number of delegates from the participating states had reached 1037. (Temperley, 1920: 238-241) When he attended the Congress of Vienna (1815), Lord Castlereagh led a British delegation of 14 people. A century later, David Lloyd

George was at the head of a delegation of about 200 people, including officials and editors, occupying five hotels. (Temperley, 1920: 238-241) Even the delegations of the smaller states numbered 50-60 participants.

Each government has created its own technical team of experts in history, geography, and politics to prepare for participation in the peace negotiations. For example, a Commission of Historians and Publicists was set up in France. Each government department set up its own consulting teams, but the lack of cooperation between them led to an excessive accumulation of information that did not always seem to reflect reality. The chance of the French delegation to the Conference was that it had people with experience in international conferences, who were able to adapt the large amount of information provided by government experts to the dynamics of the negotiation. Suffice it to mention Léon Bourgeois who attended the two conferences in The Hague (1899, 1907) and Georges Clemenceau, who since 1871 was an active presence in the national and foreign policy of France.

The experts hired by the United States government were academics and lawyers, as well as journalists and businessmen. Their research focused on the geography, ethnography, and economic conditions of Europe and the Middle East that helped Woodrow Wilson establish the negotiation guidelines for the US delegation. In the United Kingdom, the Foreign Office was an organization designed to prepare plans, but also to develop geography, history, and economics textbooks about almost every part of the globe.

Such concerns, on a small scale, could be observed in the case of Italians, Yugoslavs, Czechoslovaks, or Romanians. However, unlike the French, American and British works, those written by experts from smaller states were motivated by the promotion of their own state interests. (Prothero, 1917)

Wilson's error

President Woodrow Wilson would have preferred to come to the peace negotiations as an arbitrator, and not as an American delegate with the same rights as the delegates of the other great powers. The main condition for this wish to become a reality would have been the organization of the conference in a neutral place. Colonel House, the US President's personal envoy to Europe at the end of the war, had confessed to him since November 14, 1918, that Georges Clemenceau would have preferred Wilson's absence from the Conference because "no head of state should attend." (Seymour, 1928: 212-213) Wilson's dramatic statement in his November 16, 1918 reply to his adviser was that "French and British leaders desire to exclude me from the Conference for fear I might there lead the weaker nations against them ..." (Seymour, 1928, 213)

After all, it was his personal presence at the Peace Conference that weakened his bargaining power. Wilson wanted to play a central role and directly influence the negotiation. In fact, he was making a fundamental mistake that every negotiation manual recommends being avoided. In the multilateral negotiations, the direct presence of leaders is not recommended. Through his presence and under the influence of his own personality, Wilson weakened the negotiating capacity of the United States delegation. With a dominant personality, unable to accept criticism or delegate tasks due to his suspicion and distrust of people, Wilson blocked his collaborators from being able to prepare negotiation files. The US President preferred to have personal meetings with the delegations of all States participating in the Conference to find out their views, despite the exhaustion of such an approach that could be taken by his advisers. (Lloyd George, 1938: 221-241)

Clemenceau's diplomatic flair led him to intuit in Wilson's presence at the negotiations a real opportunity to diminish the international prestige he had gained only by transmitting messages and principles from across the Atlantic. (Seymour, 1928) Lloyd George recalled the French leader's distrust: "Clemenceau followed his movements like an old watchdog keeping an eye on a strange and unwelcome dog who has visited the farmyard and whose intentions he is more than doubtful." (Lloyd George, 1938: 222-223)

House blamed Wilson for his inability to secure a favourable negotiating environment with the United States Senate when he decided to make up the US delegation in Paris. The President rejected the advice of his advisers to include in his delegation two members of the Republican Party, a gesture that would have secured a favourable vote in the Senate to ratify any treaty he was to negotiate in Paris. (Seymour, 1928, 226)

The end of 1918 was not at all conducive to Wilson's bargaining power at the forthcoming Conference. The US President's visit to London put him in front of a British prime minister reconfirmed in office following an election campaign based on slogans such as "Hang Kaizer!" or "Let Germany pay to the last pfenig!" In Paris, Clemenceau gave a speech to the Chamber of Deputies on December 29, 1918, in which he openly stated that he was attached to the balance of power as a principle of the old international system that favoured alliances between states. These were the means by which the French Prime Minister saw it possible to guarantee the security of France, and not the "noble candour" of President Wilson. In Washington, the by-elections gave Republicans a majority in the United States Senate. (Seymour 1928, 254-255)

Lloyd George, a decade after the publication of House's notes, noted in his own memoirs of the Peace Conference that President Wilson came to the European continent without a draft, but only a few statements. The former

British Prime Minister also wanted to explain that the League of Nations project was neither the idea nor the merit of the US President, who only tried, through the 14-Points Declaration, a mix between the Report of Lord Phillimore (Egerton, 1978: 37-38) and that of Bourgeois (Lloyd George, 1938: 604-642).

Supreme Council - master of negotiations

The negotiation procedure at the Peace Conference was decided within the Supreme Council, a structure created in the second half of the war, and which proved effective in achieving the Allied victory. (World Peace Foundation, 1918a)

Determined by the defeat suffered by Italy at Caporetto (November 1917), but also in the context in which the Bolshevik revolution permanently removed Russia from the Allies, leaving the Eastern Front uncovered, the Allies met at Rapallo in early November 1917, creating a Supreme Council. It was considered necessary for the Allied military forces to benefit from unitary political coordination. Although supported by political and military arguments by the British Prime Minister, the idea of a Supreme Council of War provoked, at that time, a political crisis in London, as British MPs feared that the new decision-making structure created by the Rapallo Agreement would restrict the freedom of decision of the British military state.

This Supreme Council, created by the Rapallo Agreement (November 1917), was known by various names: the Inter-Allied Council, the Inter-Allied Commission, the Inter-Allied Supreme Council. Although distinct from the Council, but guided by it, the Inter-Allied Conference also functioned. (Fenwick, 1919: 199-202) Its first meeting took place in Paris (Versailles) between November 29 and December 3, 1917. The high-level participation of 17 states* demonstrates not only the *de facto* recognition of this structure of negotiation and coordination, but also the availability of these international actors to participate in the construction of a new type of international cooperation. Within the Inter-Allied Conference, sub-councils and commissions (e.g. the naval council, the maritime transport council, the war procurement and finance council) were set up. This structure continued to operate in 1918.**

At the meeting of October 29-30, 1918, the Allied Powers agreed on the terms of the armistices to be concluded with Austria, Turkey, and Germany. By the fall of that year, French and British leaders had given little importance to the

* France, Great Britain, United States, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Serbia, Romania, Greece, Portugal, Montenegro, Brazil, Cuba, Russia, Siam, China, and Liberia (cf. World Peace Foundation (1918b): 370-372).

** January 30-February 2, 1918 (Paris), March 14-16, 1918 (London), May 1-2, 1918 (Paris, Versailles), June 3-4, 1918 (Versailles), July 2-5, 1918 (Versailles), October 30 -10 November 1918 (Versailles).

January 8, 1918 Speech, in which Wilson presented to the United States Congress the 14 conditions necessary for the organization of peace. Not even officially transmitted to Allied governments, this speech remained a rather journalistic topic for nine months. It was the German leaders who brought him to the centre of international diplomacy by recognizing him as the basis for negotiations on an armistice between the Central Powers and the Allied and Associated Powers.

From October 1918, Wilsonian principles were taken over, at a declarative level, by European diplomats. The initiative of the German government to seek American mediation for the peace negotiations, in the memorandum of October 3, 1918, sent to President Woodrow Wilson, made the United States a mediator, despite his quality as a belligerent. The White House leader understood his situation, which is why he turned the invitation to "mediate" into "good offices", facilitating only communication between Germany and the Allied Powers to conclude the armistice of November 11, 1918,.

At the October-November 1918 meeting of the Supreme Council, the French Prime Minister said that Versailles was the place where the peace conference should be held, in opposition to Geneva, which seemed to be the Anglo-American proposal arguing for a neutral place. However, Wilson preferred the welcoming atmosphere of Lausanne to Geneva, especially because of the large hotel that existed in that Swiss town, as well as other spaces where the delegations of the participating states could be accommodated (*Seymour, 1928: 217*). Finally, the US President agreed that Paris and Versailles would be the main scenes for the Conference, both for material and symbolic reasons. From a material point of view, a Conference in London or Washington would have involved additional costs and delays caused by waterways. Symbolically, Paris and Versailles were loaded with historical value, for the French it was a reminder of the Franco-Prussian War (1871), and for the Americans Paris was the place where the Treaty of their independence was signed (1783).

The euphoria created by the unexpectedly quick signing of the armistices made some discussions seem bizarre. When Colonel House asked Lloyd George and Clemenceau about the number of delegates in each country, the French prime minister replied that half of France wanted to be present, but the British prime minister felt more fortunate, as all Englishmen would have liked to attend the Conference. Obviously, in the face of such approaches, it was necessary to postpone the discussion on such a sensitive subject. When he returned, the three interlocutors agreed that the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and the United States should participate with five delegates each, while the other powers should send between one and three representatives, House considering that "smaller countries like Belgium, Serbia, and Greece have been quite contented to have one place each at the Versailles sittings..." (*Seymour 1928, 218*)

Sketching a multilevel negotiating framework

In the Memorandum sent, on November 29, 1918, by the French Government to Robert Lansing, the American Secretary of State, it can be seen which were the principles that were to define the negotiation procedure. First, it was stated that the principles set out by Wilson in the 14-point Statement were too vague to be taken as a basis for negotiation (Baker, 1922: 56-63). The Great Powers were to have between three and five plenipotentiaries, the small powers - one or two, while the neutral states and those in formation one representative each. This limitation on the number of members in state delegations was motivated by a desire to avoid congestion and confusion during the conference. The decision-making method would have been majority voting, with each state receiving one vote, regardless of the size of the delegation.

"The great victorious powers alone will attend all its sessions, the small power being called only to sessions designated for their special affairs. [...] the enemy has no right to discuss the terms that will be imposed upon him by the victors." (Baker, 1922: 58-59)

In the initial stage, prior to the Preliminary Conference, the French Memorandum spoke of the organization of a Congress, which was to have two sections: the negotiation of peace and the creation of the League of Nations. From the French point of view, the basis of the discussions in the future Congress was neither the four armistices concluded with Bulgaria, Turkey, Austria, and Germany, nor the 14 points in Wilson's Declaration of January 8, 1918, but a methodological arrangement of the main topics: resolving the war and organizing the League of Nations. (Baker, 1922: 58-59)

At the meeting of the Supreme Council in London on December 2-3, 1918, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Orlando made some preliminary decisions for which they also waited for Wilson's approval.* Among the resolutions adopted by the three European leaders, it worth mentioning here the following:

- Establishment of an Inter-Allied Commission to examine the amount that enemy states could pay for reparations. Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States and Japan were to join the commission.
- The German Emperor and his principal collaborators shall be tried by an international court.
- An Inter-Allied Conference is to be held in Paris and Versailles before the peace preliminaries. In this, France Great Britain, Italy,

* Due to poor health, Colonel House did not attend the meeting in London, remaining in Paris.

Japan, and the United States had to have five delegates each, and the smaller allied powers should only be represented when issues of concern worry them.

- Marshal Foch was authorized to renew the armistice on December 10, 1918, for another month. (*Seymour 1928, 247-249*)

This draft negotiation outlines the characteristic lines of a multilevel structure, as opposed to a horizontal multilateral negotiation between actors with equal status. The format proposed by the Supreme Council in December 1918 subliminally sought to define future power relations in the international system by arguing for human sacrifice during the war.

Negotiating procedure at the Paris Conference

As a preliminary Conference of a Peace Congress attended by the delegations of the defeated states, the Paris Conference gradually turned into a real Peace Conference in which negotiations were held between the allied and associated powers during the war. Colonel House noted in his memoirs that in December 1918 an agreement was reached between the four powers for the Inter-Allied Preliminary Conference to take place in Paris, and for the Peace Conference with Germany to take place later in Versailles. (*Seymour 1928, 247-249*) For this reason, one of the decisions of the Supreme Council was that the Central Powers should not be invited. As a result, the conference began with a "Preliminary Inter-Allied Conference" on the conditions for peace with a view to drawing up a draft peace treaty to be approved by former enemy states. However, at the official opening of the plenary sessions on 18 January 1919, the President of France, Raymond Poincaré, spoke about the "Paris Conference" and the Rules to guide this assembly. 27 delegations from five continents participated, each with their own package of interests and pretensions.

After these states had succeeded in agreeing on the texts of the treaty with Germany, its representatives were convened, on 7 May 1919, at the same conference to present to them the Treaty on which they were to express their opinion.

The characteristic of this conference was that it did not include all the belligerents but included non-belligerent states. The principle of participation was the interest, not the wartime status. (*Potter, 1922: 346*) In this way, neutral states and autonomous colonies (referred to as "forming states") became members of the Conference at the invitation of the Powers of General Interest, and not as a right derived from belligerent status. Nevertheless, some of these invited states were signatories to the treaties resulting from the Conference. It is precisely by virtue of this result that P. B. Potter distances himself from E. M. Satow, stating that in Paris, in 1919, there was "a general world congress, not

merely a peace conference."(Potter, 1922: 346). Westphalia (1648) and Vienna (1815) seemed to repeat themselves, this time on a larger scale, by including several continents: Europe, Asia, the Americas, Africa, and Australasia.

By Decision of the Supreme Council of 15 January 1919, the participants in the Conference were divided into four categories:

(a) "Powers of general interest", participating in all plenary sessions and all committees of the Conference: The United States of America, the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan.

(b) "Powers of special interest" participating in the sessions in which they discuss matters concerning them: Belgium, Brazil, the British Dominions and India, China, Cuba, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hijras, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Siam, Czechoslovakia.

(c) "Powers having broken off diplomatic relations with enemy powers", participating in the sessions in which issues concerning them will be discussed: Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay.

(d) "Neutral Powers and states in process of formation", which will be convened by the Powers of General Interest to be heard, orally or in writing, at sessions specifically devoted to the examination of matters directly concerning them. (FRUS, III, 1969: 172)

The composition of the "Plenipotentiary Delegations" was as follows, according to the same Rules:

- Five representatives each for: the United States of America, the British Empire, France, Italy, and Japan.
- Three representatives each: Belgium, Brazil, and Serbia.
- Two representatives each: China, Greece, Hijras, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Siam, and Czechoslovakia.
- One representative for: Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay.

As for the British and Indian Dominions, they were to be represented by two delegates each: Canada, Australia, South Africa, and India and one delegate for New Zealand. (FRUS, III, 1969: 172)

The conditions for Russia's representation were to be set by the Inter-Allied Conference when the talks were to focus on Russia.

Each delegation of plenipotentiaries could be accompanied by accredited "Technical Delegates". The order of precedence followed the alphabetical order of the states after their names in French. (FRUS, III, 1969: 173) It should be noted that the minutes of the session of January 18, 1919 did not record any position contrary to the proposal of these methods of conducting the proceedings of the Conference.

From a procedural point of view, the highest forum of the Conference remained the Inter-Allied Supreme Council*, composed of the heads of state of the four great powers: France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States of America. ([World Peace Foundation, 1918a: 345-348](#)) In the absence of military advisers, the Supreme Council of War met in the form of an Inter-Allied Council on January 12, 1919, in Paris to decide on the organization of the Peace Conference. After only the heads of state and foreign ministers of France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States of America took part in the first day, on January 13, 1919, they were joined by two more representatives from Japan, so that this structure also called the Council of Ten.

In the early days, this Inter-Allied Council transmitted, through official communiqués, the decisions taken. This means of communication was preferred, instead of the free access of the press to the meetings of the Ten, motivating the divergences of opinions between them and the desire to obtain consensus on their decisions. The only forum in which access to the press was free remained the plenary sessions of the Conference. By decision of 15 January, the Council of Ten established that each delegation is considered a unit, regardless of the number of members it comprises. ([Fenwick, 1918: 203](#))

At the plenary session of January 18, 1919, Georges Clemenceau, in his capacity as newly elected President of the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris, also known as the Peace Conference, distributed the "Rules of the Conference." ([FRUS, III, 1969: 172-176](#)) This document provided for the establishment of a Bureau of the Conference, which included: one President (G. Clemenceau, from France), four Vice-Presidents (Robert Lansing, from the United States of America; David Lloyd George, from the British Empire; Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, on behalf of Italy, Marquis Saionji, on behalf of Japan) and one Secretary-General (P. Dutasta, on behalf of France).

At the second plenary session, on 25 January 1919, committees were appointed to examine the main topics of the Conference ([FRUS, III, 1969: 203-207](#)). The following composition was established for the five commissions set up:

- 1) Commission of the League of Nations: United States of America, British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Brazil, China, Portugal, and Serbia.
- 2) Commission on the Responsibility of the Authority of the War and the Enforcement of Penalties: United States of America, British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Serbia.
- 3) Commission on Reparation of Damage: United States of America, British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Serbia.

* Often referred to as the Supreme Council of War, when the political representatives of the Powers were joined by "military advisers."

- 4) Commission on International Legislation on Labor: United States of America, British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Cuba, Poland, Czechoslovakia.
- 5) Commission on International Control of Ports, Waterways and Railways: United States of America, British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, China, Greece, Serbia and Uruguay. (FRUS, III, 1969: 203-207)

The presence of Belgium in all five commissions and of Serbia in four of them was decided at the meeting of 27 January 1919 of the representatives of the states with limited interests (Fenwick, 1919: 206). On the same day, the Council of Ten decided to set up two new committees: the Economic and Financial Committee and the Committee on Private and Maritime Law.

We can look at one of these seven committees to observe the decision-making mechanism of the Paris Conference. For example, the Economic Commission was made up of representatives of the Great Powers and those of a few more powerful powers, who joined the meetings from time to time. The activity of this commission was divided into sub-commissions such as: customs and navigation (led by the United States), trade treaties (led by Italy), pre-war debts, pre-war contracts, industrial property (patents, copy-right, etc.) (led by France), elimination of enemy goods. Each country sent its experts to these sub-commissions. Their conclusions were presented in the form of reports to the Economic Commission, which approved, amended, or rejected them. After analysis, the reports adopted by the Commission were subject to the approval of the Council of Ten or the Council of Four. (FRUS, III, 1969: 203-207)

As of March 20, 1919, the Inter-Allied Council decided to hold its meetings more restricted. As a result, only the heads of state of France, Great Britain, the United States of America, and Italy met. Representatives of Japan did not attend these meetings. The new structure created was known, in the press of the time, as the Council of Four. This new structure met almost twice a day between March 24 and June 28, 1919, totalling 175 meetings. The content of these meetings was often confidential. In the face of a lack of sources of information, the press became increasingly violent against the four leaders, while public opinion seemed increasingly confused. (Temperley, 1920: 264-266; FRUS V, VI) The working language remained English at the meetings of the four leaders, but as the Italian Prime Minister did not know this language, a translator was needed during the meetings. In time, the group of four became known as the Council of Three, as Vittorio Emanuele Orlando retired from the Conference in April 1919. (Financial Times, 1919)

From the minutes of these meetings, it can be seen that this is not a replacement for the Council of Ten, but rather a reorganization of the decision-making

mechanism, following Lloyd George's Fontainebleau Memorandum.* The Council of Ten continued to function in parallel with the Council of Four, and the Foreign Ministers of the five Great Powers continued to meet under the formula often referred to as the "Council of Five." They kept the original procedure of the Council of Ten, and the minutes had the same circulation, keeping a greater transparency on the discussions and decisions. (FRUS, IV, 1969: 515-866)

The explanations of the Great Powers

The plenary session of January 25, 1919 was one of the most tense in the Conference. The attacks of the small states were directed against the discretionary and authoritarian way of decision-making by the five great powers, through the Supreme Council. The minutes of this plenary session reveal to us the image of delegates who did not directly deny the lack of equality status among all participants, but their individual desire to be recognized as a party in various committees of the Conference. (FRUS, III, 1969: 1)

In the absence of unity of attitude on the part of states which were categorized as having "limited interests", the rebuking speech of the President of the Conference was sufficiently convincing for the whole assembly:

"Well, we have decided, as regards the Commissions, in the same way as we did to summon the present Conference. I make no mystery of it – there is a Conference of the Great Powers going on in the next room. [...] We have had dead, we have wounded in millions, and if we had not kept before us the great question of the League of Nations we might perhaps have been selfish enough to consult only each other. It was our right. We did not wish to do this, and we summoned all the nations interested. We summoned them, not to impose our will upon them, not to make them do what they do not wish, but to ask them for their help. [...] What crime have we committed? We have decided that, for our part, we would appoint two delegates each on the Commission on the League of Nations. [...] It is my duty to guide the Conference in its work in order to obtain a result. We have therefore decided to appoint two delegates each, and then -may I be pardoned for it – we have decided to ask you to appoint five delegates in common." (FRUS, 1969, III: 196-197)

The British Prime Minister repeated this theme in his memoirs. Among the topics of discussion in the Council of Ten at its meetings prior to the plenary session of 18 January 1918 were (a) the number and size of delegations and their

* Entitled „Some Considerations for the Peace Conference Before They Finally Draft Their Terms“, 25 March 1919.

classification, (b) the publicity of the Conference, and (c) the invitation of Russia to the Conference. He remained convinced that if all the powers allied and associated with the same number of plenipotentiaries and the same rights of representation in committees had participated, the Conference would have become "a debating society" and the work would have lasted at least a year. (Lloyd George, 1938: 215).

Open diplomacy seems to have been interpreted by contemporaries as the free access of the press to peace negotiations. The British Prime Minister emphasized that the publicity of decisions did not mean the publicity of discussions. Therefore, only the plenary sessions were open to the press, otherwise, the minutes were the ones that transmitted the decisions that were taken at the level of the Councils. (Lloyd George, 1938: 215)

Stages of the Peace Conference

Compared to previous conferences, the Paris Conference was the largest peace conference. The formal inauguration of the League of Nations (also called the League of Nations) on January 16, 1920, ended the Paris Conference, and treaties with Turkey (1920, 1923) and Hungary (1920) were concluded outside the Peace Conference. In historiography two trends can be observed in defining the chronology of the Conference:

- a) Restricted interpretation: The conference lasted from 12 January 1919 to 21 January 1920;
- b) Extended interpretation: The Conference ended on 10 August 1920, with the signing of the first Peace Treaty with Turkey.

In view of the long duration of the Inter-Allied Conference, Table 1 provides a representation of the number of meetings for each of its units.*

Table 1: Number of meetings in the Conference's units

Unit	Period	Meetings
Council of Ten	12.01.1919 – 17.06.1919	80
• Council of Four	20.03. 1919 – 28.06.1919	175
• Council of Five	27.03.1919 – 25.06.1919	28
Council of Heads of Delegation	01.07.1919 – 10.01.1920	130
Supreme Economic Council	17.02.1919 – 07.02.1920	32
Plenary sessions (preliminary)	18.01.1919 – 31.05.1919	8
Plenary sessions (negotiation)**	07.05.1919 – 27.11.1919	6

* This article considered the minutes of the Paris Conference: Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 1969, Vol. I-XII.

** Versailles (07.05.1919, 28.06.1919), Saint-Germain (02.06.1919, 10.09.1919), Paris (19.09.1919), Neuilly-sur-Seine (27.11.1919).

Considering the narrow interpretation of the chronology, we could observe some stages that characterized this process: the preliminary stage (November 11, 1918 - January 12, 1919), the stage of the Council of Ten (January 12, 1919 - March 25, 1919), the stage of the Council of Four March 20, 1919 - June 28, 1919) and the final stage (July 1, 1919 - January 20, 1920).

The preliminary stage (November 11, 1918 - January 12, 1919) had two phases:

- a) November 1918 - when preparations for a congress of delegations for the start of peace negotiations also included representatives of the Central Powers;
- b) December 1918 - together with the meetings in London, when there is a change of direction towards a Conference of the Allied and Associated Powers. (Marston, 1944)

From January to March 1919, only the meetings of the Council of Ten took place, which included the heads of government and foreign ministers of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Italy, as well as the ambassadors of Japan. During these meetings, several hearings were held by representatives of the other states claiming their international recognition. The discussions and decisions of this body were known through the minutes of the meetings, but also through the leaks of information in the press. (*Temperley, 1920: 249-263; FRUS III: 469-1046; FRUS IV: 1-514*).

By the end of March 1919, the Council of Ten had succeeded in deciding only the military clauses of peace, while public opinion became increasingly concerned about the political situation in Central Europe. France remained determined to demand the occupation of the Rhineland, while the United Kingdom and the United States only agreed to take temporary measures to guarantee Germany's payment of war reparations. As a result, British Prime Minister Lloyd George presented the Fontainebleau Memorandum warning of the dangers that harsh conditions for peace could pose for Germany and the need to change the way decisions are made. In this context, it was decided to set up smaller, often informal meetings, known as the Council of Four, of which Japan was no longer a member.

The Foreign Ministers of the five Great Powers continued to meet under the formula often referred to as the "Council of Five". They kept the original procedure of the Council of Ten, and the minutes had the same circulation, keeping a greater transparency on the discussions and decisions. (*FRUS, IV: 515-866*).

On May 7, 1919, the German delegation, led by Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the new Weimar Republic, saw the terms of the Peace Treaty prepared by the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris. The German delegates declared that these clauses were humiliating and violated the provisions of the Pre-Armistice Agreement of November 1918. After several rounds of negotiations, the Treaty with Germany was signed on June 28, 1919, at Versailles.

After 28 June 1919, the Allies continued to prepare the other peace treaties under the leadership of the Council of Heads of Delegation, which resulted in: (a) the Treaty with Austria (10 September 1919, signed at Saint-Germain) and (b) the Treaty with Bulgaria (November 27, 1919, signed at Neuilly-sur-Seine).

Final Remarks

In his 1920 article, Preston Slosson emphasized that the Paris Peace Conference "was not only the creator of the League of Nations; it *was* a League of Nations in being." (Slosson, 1920: 360) Slosson made a comparison of the structure and functions of the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris with the revolutionary constituent assemblies that functioned until the establishment of the permanent authorities. In this logic, the plenary sessions were similar to the unicameral people's assemblies; The Supreme Council was like a cabinet; the commissions were the equivalent of committees, to which was added the Secretariat. (Slosson, 1920: 361)

At the time, the Paris Conference was criticized for prolonging the work of the Conference, but this was the first peace conference to include such a large number of participants and to discuss such a wide range of topics. André Tardieu explains the absence of real preliminary work and its transformation into a peace conference through the pressing schedule of meetings, the departure of both Wilson and Lloyd George from Paris in mid-February 1919 and their return in late March, when a change in the decision-making procedure in the group of powers with general interests meant that the text of the treaty with Germany was ready in a few weeks, which led to the abandonment of some preliminaries. Another reason invoked by Tardieu was the pressure to demobilize the armies which could not be achieved in the absence of a peace treaty between the former belligerents. (Tardieu, 1921: 116-117)

As a negotiation environment, this conference was unbalanced and inconsistent. During this time, it changed its purpose from a preliminary Allied Conference to a proper peace conference to the exclusion of wartime enemy powers. Colonel House considered that the main mistake of the leaders meeting in Paris at the beginning of January 1919 was the lack of a coherent procedure for the Conference. He saw this failure as the lack of organizational capacity of leaders such as Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Wilson to support their leadership. (Seymour, 1928: 271) This criticism is transferred by the former British Prime Minister on the shoulders of Wilson, who was unable to understand the security needs of the old world and tried to impose, without an adaptation, principles for the implementation of which he did not offer any concrete project. (Lloyd George, 1938: 221-241)

The distribution of participants by category of members led to a sense of discrimination among states. At least these two major errors in the organization and communication of the Peace Conference became lessons for similar conferences that took place later in the twentieth century.

In addition to the shortcomings mentioned, the Paris Conference created a model of permanent negotiation in the form of panels and plenary sessions, which was taken over and refined by international institutions and organizations over the last century. Multilevel negotiation was taken as a negotiating procedure to streamline multilateral negotiations, not to undermine the bargaining power of the participating actors, as was the case in Paris in 1919.

Equally, errors in communication and reporting between participating delegations have steadily improved in the following decades. What remains to be remembered is the fact that this Peace Conference was the first to publicize the work of the plenary sessions and was the framework in which the old diplomacy began to give way to a new diplomacy.

Finally, the conduct of the Paris negotiations covered all three types of conflict specific to a multicultural negotiation: conflict of purpose, procedural conflict and interpersonal conflict. (Brett, 2007)

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