

## **Module 03: 1917 — Did the War Cause a Revolution?**

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between war and revolution in the early twentieth century has been central to the materials in this module. As the Introduction, Context, and Evidence illustrate, the answer to the question of whether the war caused the revolution is neither simple nor one sided, but rather reflects the complexity of social, political, military, economic, and ideological conditions in times of crisis.

Clearly, the stresses of total war deepened Russia's revolutionary crisis and presented daunting challenges to the country's new rulers. Russia was not unique in this regard, as communist-inspired uprisings also broke out in war-torn Hungary, Germany, and Italy. While the revolutionary wave was contained outside of Russia, the fact of the Bolsheviks' successful revolution, together with the dissolution of the four empires that had previously dominated the European order, ushered in a new era of political instability characterized by the rise of fascist regimes in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War. That World War I did, in fact, contribute to the outbreak of revolution in Russia and elsewhere illustrates the importance of political structures, social conditions, and ideological leadership in shaping the outcome of historical events and processes.

The question concerning the relationship between war and revolution would reappear throughout the twentieth century. In the aftermath of the Second World War, for example, both Soviet and Western leaders looked back to the post-World War I period (even if they drew starkly different lessons from the war itself) as they determined the geographic boundaries, political systems, and ideological constraints of their respective zones of influence. In a similar fashion, independence movements around the world in the post-1945 period looked to the Russian case for guidance on creating a new government in conditions of military losses, social upheaval, and political conflict. Finally, when communism ended in Europe in 1989-1991, this time in peaceful conditions, the new governments of Central and Eastern Europe again drew on the experience of the interwar period to try to avoid the civil war, internal dissension, and international intervention that shaped Russia's difficult transition from war to revolution. As these examples suggest, the enduring legacy of the Russian War and Revolution remained significant throughout the tumultuous century that followed.