

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, 1928

Introduction

The Kellogg-Briand Pact was an agreement to outlaw war signed on August 27, 1928. Sometimes called the Pact of Paris for the city in which it was signed, the pact was one of many international efforts to prevent another World War, but it had little effect in stopping the rising militarism of the 1930s or preventing World War II.



Photograph with representatives who signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact in the White House

U.S. Peace Advocates

In the wake of World War I, U.S. officials and private citizens made significant efforts to guarantee that the nation would not be drawn into another war. Some focused on disarmament, such as the series of naval conferences that began in Washington in 1921, and some focused on cooperation with the League of Nations and the newly formed World Court. Others initiated a movement to try to outlaw war outright. Peace advocates Nicholas Murray Butler and James T. Shotwell were part of this movement. Both men were affiliated with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an organization dedicated to promoting internationalism that was established in 1910 by leading American industrialist Andrew Carnegie.

French Involvement

With the influence and assistance of Shotwell and Butler, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Aristide Briand proposed a peace pact as a bilateral agreement between the United States and France to outlaw war between them. Particularly hard hit by World War I, France faced continuing insecurity from its German neighbor and sought alliances to shore up its defenses. Briand published an open

letter in April of 1927 containing the proposal. Though the suggestion had the enthusiastic support of some members of the American peace movement, U.S. President Calvin Coolidge and Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg were less eager than Briand to enter into a bilateral arrangement. They worried that the agreement against war could be interpreted as a bilateral alliance and require the United States to intervene if France was ever threatened. To avoid this, they suggested that the two nations take the lead in inviting all nations to join them in outlawing war.



Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg

The extension of the pact to include other nations was well-received internationally. After the severe losses of the First World War, the idea of declaring war to be illegal was immensely popular in international public opinion. Because the language of the pact established the important point that only wars of aggression – not military acts of self-defense – would be covered under the pact, many nations had no objections to signing it. If the pact served to limit conflicts, then everyone would benefit; if it did not, there were no legal consequences. In early 1928, negotiations over the agreement expanded to include all of the initial signatories. In the final version of the pact, they agreed upon two clauses: the first outlawed war as an instrument of national policy and the second called upon signatories to settle their disputes by peaceful means.

On August 27, 1928, fifteen nations signed the pact at Paris. Signatories included France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Italy and Japan. Later, an additional forty-seven nations followed suit, so the pact was eventually signed by most of the established nations in the world. The U.S. Senate ratified the agreement by a vote of 85–1, though it did so only after making reservations to note that U.S. participation did not limit its right to self-defense or require it to act against signatories breaking the agreement.

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Questions

1. Define and explain the Kellogg-Briand Pact, 1928?
2. Explain the United States' position on the pact? Why were they hesitant to sign the pact? What stipulation prompted the Senate to ratify the Pact?
3. What was the extent of the French Involvement in the ratification of the Kellogg-Briand Pact? What was their prime concern?
4. Why did Kellogg-Briand only address "wars of aggression"?