Assess the successes and failures of the Paris Peace Settlement after WWI

Following the devastating Great War the leaders of all the major powers of the world met in Paris, the first time such a global forum had gathered together, to decide on a series of treaties which would restore peace worldwide. The ambitions of these leaders were huge because creating a peace was no easy feat and this was shown from the start when they had to compromise on the treaties initial terms to the many failures which resulted from the settlement. After the Treaties were ratified, although not by the USA, one of the Treaties creations, the League of Nations which was plagued with weaknesses itself, was left to preside over international peace. There were several successes of the peace settlement however it was, as ever, the failures which caused the most impact and likely laid the foundations for the tense international relationships which lead to the collapse of peace and the start of the Second World War.

The three major powers in Paris were nicknamed The Big 3, they consisted of the French President Georges Clemenceau, the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the American President Woodrow Wilson, the Italian President Orlando was also present but less involved. The three leaders had very different ideas on what they wanted to achieve in Paris, Clemenceau wanted to cripple Germany, France had suffered greatly in the war and Clemenceau wanted to ensure that Germany would never be strong enough to invade France again. Lloyd George was keen to seek revenge on Germany due to the strong public opinions against Germany however he was also conscience of not being too harsh. Lastly Wilson wanted a peaceful settlement and set out his fourteen points on which he wished to base the peace. Due to these greatly conflicting aims, it is obvious that the speed with which such encompassing treaties were written was a huge success; the first Treaty of Versailles was ratified in May 1919, just six months after the end of the war. However given that the Treaties were a compromise this caused an immediate failing in the settlement, there was limited support from all the major powers, not only because they had also been left weak from the war, but also because none of the leaders had achieved all they had set out to; this lack of support doomed the settlement to fail from the moment the ink dried on the signatures.

President Wilson wanted to base the treaty on his Fourteen Points, he was convinced that these would allow for a lasting peace and end international turmoil. This included the creation of Poland, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, freedom of the seas and one of the most important was self-determination. The self-determination clause would allow all nations to have independent rule of themselves and Wilson was hugely successful in doing this particularly across Eastern Europe; countries such as Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland were independent. However within these independent countries there were minorities who were suppressed as a result of self-determination, particularly German minorities. As Germany lost much of its European territory due to the Treaty of Versailles there were many ethnically German people living in other European countries where they were minorities. For example in Austria and Czechoslovakia there were enough German’s living there that later in the 1930’s they formed Nazi parties within the other countries to support Germany during Hitler’s rise. This suppression of minorities was a huge failure of the Treaties as it lead to the negative impacts such as the 1936 Anschluss, which went against the Treaty of Versailles and St Germain, but was only able to come about due to German support in Austria.