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

**Introduction**

The First World War ended a century of relative peace in Europe and profoundly altered the liberal order of European nation states. Although all of the belligerent powers entered the war confident that victory would be attained quickly, the multi-lateral conflict soon developed into a protracted war of attrition exacting enormous economic, political, and human costs. The war resulted in the dissolution of the Austrian, Ottoman, German, and Russian empires, and bore immediate fruit in a wave of revolutions between 1917 and 1920. In Russia, military setbacks, food shortages, popular unrest, and a crisis of political leadership brought about the abdication of the tsar and the demise of the Romanov dynasty in February, 1917. Over the next eight months, a Provisional Government struggled to establish itself as a legitimate political authority, address long-standing social and economic grievances, and revive the stalled war effort. Failure on all of these fronts enabled the revolutionary Bolshevik party to come to power on a deceptively simple platform of "bread, land, and peace" in a second revolution in October, 1917. The fact of this second revolution and its far reaching consequences would be central to global politics throughout the twentieth century.

While war was clearly one cause of Russia's revolutionary crisis, this unit examines the many factors informing the revolutionary upheavals of February and October 1917. The question that should guide your study of the Russian revolution in this unit is: **What was the relative importance of immediate events, long-term social and economic developments, the crisis in political authority, and the stresses of the war to the revolutions of February and October, 1917?**