

A century of conflict: this map shows only some of the wars fought in the 20th century.

2

THE CAUSES OF WORLD WAR I

As you read through this chapter, consider the following essay question:

- Why did a general European war break out in August 1914?

One of the most brutal and destructive wars in human history began in Europe in August 1914; it would last until November 1918. By the end of 1918, 60 declarations of war had been made between countries. Contemporaries and historians have argued ever since 1918 over what caused this catastrophe. This chapter looks at the long-term, short-term and immediate events that led the Great Powers of Europe, their empires and their allies into armed conflict.

Timeline of the causes of World War I – 1871–1914

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1871 | End of Franco-Prussian War / German Empire proclaimed |
| 1873 | The Three Emperors' League |
| 1879 | Dual Alliance |
| 1881 | The Three Emperors' Alliance |
| 1882 | Triple Alliance |
| 1887 | Reinsurance Treaty (Germany, Russia) |
| 1888 | Wilhelm II becomes German Emperor |
| 1890 | Bismarck resigns |
| | Reinsurance Treaty lapses |
| 1892–94 | Franco-Russian Alliance |
| 1897 | Austro-Russian Agreement |
| 1898 | Fashoda Incident |
| | German Naval Law |
| 1900 | Second German Naval Law |
| 1902 | Anglo-Japanese Alliance |
| 1904 | Russo-Japanese War |
| | Entente Cordiale (Britain, France) |
| 1905 | First Moroccan Crisis |
| 1906 | Algiers Conference |
| 1907 | Anglo-Russian Entente; Triple Entente (Russia, France and Britain) |
| 1908 | Annexation of Bosnia by Austria-Hungary |
| 1911 | Second Moroccan Crisis |
| 1912 | First Balkan War |
| 1913 | Second Balkan War |
| 1914 | 28 Jun Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated |
| | 5 Jul German 'blank cheque' to Austria-Hungary |
| | 23 Jul Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia |
| | 30 Jul Russia orders mobilization |
| | 1 Aug Germany declares war on Russia |
| | 3 Aug Germany invades Belgium and declares war on France |
| | 4 Aug Britain declares war on Germany |

ToK Time

When analyzing the causes of a key event in history, the historian must decide 'when' the causes began, i.e. a starting date. However, if historians have to decide this themselves, how can they reach this decision? If one historian focuses on events in the short term, will that necessarily lead to a different view of what was an important cause when compared to an historian whose focus is on events and issues in the longer term?

Discuss in small groups how this problem in historians' methodology might impact on their conclusions. Write your discussions up in your ToK journals.

Map of the 39 states of the German Confederation.

In this chapter, we begin looking at the causes of World War I with an earlier conflict that destabilized the balance of power in Europe before the dawn of the 20th century. This conflict is the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), which created a unified Germany.

Franco-Prussian War (1870–71)



After the Napoleonic Wars, which ended in 1815, there were 39 separate Germanic states in Europe; the two largest were Austria and Prussia. The Prussians, under the leadership of their Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, fought three wars with the objective both of consolidating these smaller states into a new German state, and of asserting themselves as the dominant Germanic state instead of Austria. The Prussians defeated Denmark and Austria in 1864 and finally France in 1871.

The final war in 1870–71 saw the well-equipped Prussian Army not only defeating, but also humiliating, France. In early September 1870, at Sedan, one French army was forced to surrender its 80,000 men. The core of the French Army, some 150,000 men, was encircled for two months at Metz and surrendered in October. The war continued for another three months. Paris, which had been under siege since mid September, finally fell in January 1871. Cut off from the rest of France, Paris had suffered horrendously, and there were some clear signs of the effectiveness of modern technology in supporting warfare; for example, in Prussia's use of railways to deliver men and material to the battlefield. Prussia won the military battles, and crippled Paris in an economic **blockade**.

The terms for peace were severe. France lost the territory of Alsace-Lorraine, had to pay an **indemnity** of 5,000 million marks and suffered Prussian occupation of parts of France until this sum had been paid. There was also a Prussian victory march through Paris. The King of Prussia was proclaimed the German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles in January 1871. German unification (without Austria) was complete.

In France, political and **socio-economic** problems followed the humiliation of defeat. There was a desire for revenge in France that manifested itself in the political **revanche** movement.

From tomorrow, France will have only one thought: to reconstitute its forces, gather its energy, feed its sacred anger, raise its generation ... form an army of the whole people, work relentlessly to study the processes and talents of our enemies, to become again the great France, the France of 1792, the France of the idea and the sword... Then suddenly one day it will rise ... regain Lorraine, recapture Alsace.

The French poet Victor Hugo, 1871

Internationally, the war had far-reaching consequences. Germany was a new power in Europe, and France's position had been undermined. This situation shifted the balance of power in continental Europe. Germany now had the potential to be dominant. The Prussian Wars of Unification also offered important military lessons for the rest of Europe – the emphasis in modern warfare had to be on rapid mobilization and fast deployment. Modern armies had to be well trained and well equipped, and to a certain extent educated and probably conscripted. The General Staff of an army (the personnel distributing the orders of the top leadership down to the field officers) had to be competent, and able to plan and coordinate the use of railways in deploying millions of men and their equipment. Another lesson that seemed to come from the unification wars was that modern warfare would rely on movement, and be relatively short in duration.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review questions

- 1 What was the impact of the Franco-Prussian War on France?
- 2 Why would the other European powers be worried about the unification of Germany?

What were the key characteristics of the Great European Powers, c. 1900?



◀ The Great Powers in 1900.

Before reviewing the key developments in Europe that led up to World War I, it is important that you have a clear idea of the characteristics of the Great Powers of Europe by 1900.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Group activity

Using the information below on each of the European countries, complete the following table. This can be done as a group activity; each group researches a country and feeds back its information to the rest of the class.

	Germany	France	Britain	Austria-Hungary	Russia	Turkey
Political system						
Economic strength						
Socio-economic problems						
Foreign policy						
Key strengths/weaknesses						
Key aims/fears						

Germany

Germany was a **democratic monarchy**; its system was authoritarian, with power held by the Kaiser and the Chancellor. The power of the German parliament, the Reichstag, was limited. In the 30 years following the Franco-Prussian War, Germany became the strongest industrial power in Europe. By 1900, Germany had overtaken Britain in industrial output. However, although its economy was strong and effective, Germany had acute social problems. Rapid industrialization had produced a large working class in the expanding cities and a growing middle class. There were socio-economic tensions between these two groups and also between these groups and the authoritarian government. The great Prussian landowning classes, the Junkers, retained political dominance, promoting **militarism** and allegiance to the Kaiser; they were against reforms designed to move Germany towards becoming a more **liberal** democracy.

A growth in the German population, and pressure from capitalists to secure international markets and raw materials, led the German government to pursue the 19th-century European policy of developing and expanding an overseas empire. Yet, at least initially, the government was cautious in its approach, and attempted to cooperate with the other imperial powers – for example, at the Congress of Berlin in 1884, where the continent of Africa was carved up between the Europeans.

The key problem here was that although Germany wanted colonies, the globe had already been divided up by the other European powers. Britain's empire was territorially the largest. Germany's leaders were apparently undecided at the turn of the new century whether to attempt to work with Britain as an ally, or to compete with the British.

France

France was a democratic **republic** and offered extensive civil liberties. Its economy was agriculturally based, with most of the population living and working in the countryside. Nevertheless, France was a wealthy nation. It had a large empire, sizeable gold reserves and had made much overseas investment, particularly in Russia. Politically the nation was broadly divided between the '**pacifist**' **left wing** and the revanchist **right wing**. France was plagued by short-lived governments, which swung between the left to the right. This instability had a serious impact on foreign policy, as the right wing wanted to pursue

imperialist ambitions and the reclamation of Alsace-Lorraine, whereas the left were against these ambitions. France looked for an alliance with Russia to help 'contain' Germany.

Britain

Britain was a well-established **parliamentary democracy**, with a **monarchy** retaining limited powers, and had been the first European power to undergo an industrial revolution. It had built a vast overseas empire and established itself as the most powerful international trader of the 19th century. Britain had indeed been the number one economic power of the 1800s, but by 1900 it was to a certain extent in decline, both in terms of its international dominance of trade, and in its position as the primary economic power. Not only had the USA overtaken Britain in industrial production, but by 1900 Germany had too. Britain had similar socio-economic problems as Germany, with much working-class discontent. The long-standing political system, however, combined a degree of flexibility with coercion and therefore appeared better able to cope than Germany's autocratic fledgling democratic monarchy. The British government had learnt to be alert to public opinion and the power of the popular press.

The changing balance of power in Europe led to a corresponding change in the shape of British foreign policy. In the 19th century, Britain had followed a policy of 'Splendid Isolation', not wanting to be drawn into conflicts between other nations, as this could impact negatively on its international trade. By 1900, with competition from the USA and Germany, Britain was starting to review this policy and to look for allies. Britain's major military power was its navy. But in this strength lay Britain's weakness. Britain depended on the navy not only to defend itself against attack, but also to defend its sea-based trade and its vast empire. Resources were overstretched. It was paramount that the navy was invulnerable. Britain's traditional enemies and rivals had been the French and the Russians, and it remained particularly suspicious of Russia regarding its relationship to the overland Asian trade routes to India (see the Interesting Facts box on p.16). Britain's interests lay in maintaining its dominance of the seas, preserving the balance of power in Europe and defending the Indian trade routes.

Austria-Hungary

Austria-Hungary was a 'dual monarchy': an Emperor presided over the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with Austria and Hungary having their own parliaments. The system was heavily bureaucratic and inefficient.

There had been slow economic growth in this land-based empire. The key problem for the dual monarchy was the national rivalries within their European empire (see figures on next page). The 19th century had unleashed powerful **nationalist** forces and ambitions across Europe, leading to demands for national liberation from states within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The empire lacked military strength, which had been highlighted in the brief war with Prussia in 1866. A key concern for the Habsburgs was the demise of the Ottoman Empire on their border. This process had strengthened the nationalist cause of many **Slavic** peoples, who now strived for independence from the Ottomans, and ultimately wanted to unite with their 'brothers' within the borders of the Habsburg Empire. The Austro-Hungarian regime, therefore, pursued a foreign policy of containment in the Balkans, and as the Ottoman decline left a vacuum of power, Austria-Hungary intended to fill it.

Austria-Hungary was a multi-national European empire in an age of nationalism. In general, the empire lacked cohesion economically, politically and socially. Its greatest

The Habsburgs

The Habsburgs were the rulers of the dual monarchy set up in 1867, Austria-Hungary, and the territories under Austrian and Hungarian control were known as the Habsburg Empire.



Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary.



Tsar Nicholas II.

Ottoman Empire

The Turkish Empire came to be called the 'Ottoman' Empire after a 14th-century leader called Osman I. The Ottoman Empire was an Islamic empire led by a Sultan (the Arabic word for 'ruler'). The empire consisted of 29 provinces, and other states under the nominal authority of the Sultanate.

concern was the hostility and aggression of Serbia. The anxiety was accentuated by the support given to the Serb nationalists by Russia, who saw itself as the great defender of the 'Slav people'.

NATIONALITIES OF THE HABSBURG EMPIRE, 1910

Austria	Hungary	Bosnia-Herzegovina
Germans 35.6%	Magyars 48%	Croats 21%
Czechs (inc Slovaks) 23%	Germans 9.8%	Serbs 42%
Poles 17.8%	Slovaks 9.4%	Muslims 34%
Ruthenians 12.6%	Romanians 14.1%	
Serbo-Croats 2.6%	Ruthenians 2.3%	
Romanians 1%	Croats 8.8%	
	Serbs 5.3%	

Russia

Russia was an autocratic 'divine monarchy', the Tsar being perceived by many as having been appointed by God. The state was again heavily bureaucratic and ineffective. There had been rapid industrialization at the end of the 19th century, yet the majority of people in Russia remained peasants, working the land with intensive labour processes long outdated in the modernized European states.

By 1900, discontent towards the regime was growing among the middle classes and among the new urban workers. This mood exploded into revolution in 1905 after Russia had been defeated in a disastrous war against Japan. Although this revolution did not achieve regime change, it led to a very limited degree of democracy being introduced. Working conditions, however, were not improved.

After its defeat in the Crimean War (1853–56) and then in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), Russia was no longer viewed as a 'great military power'. Russia's strength in 1900, and throughout the 20th century, was its huge resources of people. But again, this strength was also a weakness, as the Russian people were increasingly unhappy with their regime. Russia wanted to encourage Slav nationalism in the Balkans to establish its own influence in the region; however, it also wanted to prop up the ailing Ottoman Empire to prevent any expansion of Austria-Hungary.

Turkey

Turkey was the 'sick man of Europe'. The Ottoman Empire was in decline, and the power of its ruler – the Sultan – had been terminally undermined in most areas. The regime was corrupt and ineffective. Revolts by some national and Islamic groups within the empire could not be contained. Its weakness was exploited by the other European powers for commercial interest, and by 1900 foreign debt and political discontent meant the empire was near collapse. There were divisions between Turks, Slavs and other Europeans in the Turkish Empire, including between Christians and Muslims. European interference led to widespread Muslim resentment. The Sultan was overthrown in 1909 by the 'Young Turks', a group whose aim was to modernize Turkey, economically and politically.

The Eastern Question

The 'question' of what to do about the decaying Ottoman Empire preoccupied the other European Powers. As its decline would lead to a power vacuum in the territories it formerly

ruled over, there was the potential for a conflict between the powers for the spoils. Most European powers agreed the best solution for the time being was to 'prop up' the Turkish regime, and try to persuade it to modernize. The Russians, on the other hand, preferred to promote self-government for the Balkan states, but Austria-Hungary was deeply opposed to this idea.

SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAJOR POWERS, c. 1900

Great Britain	Parliamentary Monarchy / Trade / Industry / Maritime power / Empire
Germany	Authoritarian State / Military power / Industrial power
Russia	Autocratic Tsardom / Some industrialization / Foreign debt
France	Democratic Republic / Slow economic growth / Empire
Austria-Hungary	Dual Monarchy / Nationalities problems
Turkey	Sultanate / Decline of empire

Long-term causes of World War I

As we have seen, the creation of a new state in Europe – particularly one with the economic, military and imperial potential of Germany – created a certain amount of nervousness among other European countries. France, of course, was particularly hostile in its attitude towards Germany after the humiliation of the war in 1870 and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Nevertheless, Germany under its first ruler, Kaiser Wilhelm I, and its chancellor, Bismarck, did not pursue an aggressive foreign policy. Bismarck worked at creating a web of alliances that would protect Germany from future attack and would allow Germany to work on consolidating its position in Europe. These alliances can be seen below. Germany's main aim was to keep France isolated and stay allied with Russia to prevent the possibility of a two-front war.

Bismarck's web of alliances

The Dreikaiserbund or Three Emperors' League (1873)

The *Dreikaiserbund* joined Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary into an alliance. Its terms were very vague, but it served Bismarck's purpose of keeping France isolated.

The Dual Alliance (1879)

Austria-Hungary and Russia came into conflict over events in the Balkans and the *Dreikaiserbund* collapsed. In its place, Bismarck made a separate treaty with the Austrians. This alliance was part of Bismarck's system to limit the possibility of war between the European powers, and was primarily defensive. Germany and Austria-Hungary agreed to assist one another if Russia attacked them. Each country also agreed to remain neutral if the other was attacked by another European country.

The Three Emperors' Alliance (1881)

Russia, feeling isolated in Europe, turned back to Germany, and Bismarck drew up a revised version of the *Dreikaiserbund*. Again, this offered Bismarck security. The terms of the alliance included an agreement that if either Russia, Germany or Austria were at war with another power, the others would remain neutral. The alliance also tried to resolve Austro-Russian disputes in the Balkans.

The Triple Alliance (1882)

This alliance was between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. If any of the signatories were attacked by two or more powers, the others promised to lend assistance.

Two-front war

Military commanders usually want to avoid a two-front war, which means dividing their forces to meet an enemy in two different places. In the case of World War I, this would mean the German Army sending men, ammunition, supplies and communications to both the Western and Eastern Fronts, thus limiting their capacity to fight on either front (see later information on the Schlieffen Plan).

To access worksheet 2.1 on the Dual Alliance, please visit www.pearsonbaconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

The Reinsurance Treaty (1887)

The Three Emperors' Alliance fell to pieces due to Balkan problems in 1885. Thus, this separate treaty with Russia was drawn up in order to avoid any risk of a war on two fronts. Bismarck had to make new arrangements to ensure that Germany stayed friendly with Russia.



Wilhelm II.

Wilhelm II

Wilhelm was the son of Prince Frederick Wilhelm of Prussia and Victoria (who was the daughter of Queen Victoria). He was a keen advocate of all things military. He loved wearing, and having himself photographed in, his numerous uniforms, and he surrounded himself with the elite of German military society. Wilhelm acted very much as an autocratic monarch and also had a volatile and unpredictable personality. He was a strong opponent of **socialism** and vigorously believed in *Weltpolitik* – increasing the global strength of Germany through building up the German navy and colonial expansion.

The New Course and *Weltpolitik*

In 1888, the young and ambitious Wilhelm II came to the throne in Germany, and Bismarck was replaced as Chancellor by Leo von Caprivi in 1890. Kaiser Wilhelm II and Caprivi took German foreign policy on a 'new course' that would overturn Bismarck's carefully nurtured system of alliances. The Reinsurance Treaty with Russia was allowed to lapse that year, creating the conditions for the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894. Militarily, the alliance promised mutual assistance if either was attacked by Germany. It also agreed immediate mobilization in response to any member of the Triple Alliance mobilizing. There was also a political clause, which agreed mutual support in imperial disputes; the focus of this clause was essentially anti-British. Bismarck's system was destroyed. France was free of its isolation, and Germany now could face a war on two fronts.

Undeterred, however, German policy makers from the mid 1890s began to look beyond Europe and to follow a policy that they hoped would make Germany a colonial power, with an overseas empire and navy. Such a policy would also have the benefit of diverting the German population away from the social and political problems at home. This policy, known as *Weltpolitik* – which was supported by various patriotic groups such as the Pan-German League within Germany – was bound to have an impact on Germany's relations with other countries.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Document analysis

I hope Europe will gradually come to realize the fundamental principle of my policy: leadership in the peaceful sense – a sort of Napoleonic supremacy... I am of the opinion that it is already a success that I, having come to govern at so early an age, stand at the head of German armed might yet have left my sword in its scabbard and have given up Bismarck's policy of externally causing disruption to replace it with a peaceful foreign situation such as we have not known for many years.

The Kaiser to Botho Graf zu Eulenburg, July 1892. Eulenburg was a close friend of Kaiser Wilhelm II and served as his Minister of the Interior until 1882.

Question

According to the Kaiser, what does he hope to achieve in foreign policy?

Imperialism

One of the main causes of tension between the European powers in 1880–1905 was colonial rivalries. Over the course of the 19th century, the Europeans **had** increased their domination of countries in Africa and the Far East and competed to build vast empires. This effort was initially driven by economic motives (cheap raw materials, new markets and low-cost labour forces). Over the course of the century, however, territorial acquisition increasingly occurred due to a mixture of the Social Darwinian belief that the spread of Western civilization was 'God's work' and also nationalistic competition with the other European powers (and to a certain extent the USA).

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Research and review activity

- 1 By 1914, which European powers had the biggest overseas empires?
- 2 Where did Germany have colonial possessions?
- 3 Compare the size of Germany's colonial possessions to those of the other European powers.
- 4 Why were imperial rivalries a potential cause of tension between the European powers in 1900?

Germany's desire to make its influence felt outside Europe was to bring it into conflict with the more established colonial powers, particularly Britain. An example of this effect occurred in 1896, when the German Kaiser caused great offence in Britain over his response to the so-called Jameson Raid in December 1895. The Jameson Raid was a failed attempt by Britain to incite a rising against the Boer Republic of the Transvaal in southern Africa. It was led by a Dr Jameson, who was an administrator in the British South Africa Company, but led to the resignation of Cecil Rhodes, the governor of Cape Colony, when it became clear that he was also involved in the planning of this 'illegal' operation. Germany sent a telegram to the Boer leader, Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, on 3 January 1896 congratulating him on his success in resisting the British attack:

I would like to express my sincere congratulations that you and your peoples have succeeded, without having to invoke the help of friendly powers, in restoring peace with your own resources in face of armed bands which have broken into your country as disturbers of the peace and have been able to preserve the independence of your country against attacks from outside.

This telegram caused great offence in Britain. The coverage of the affair by the British press led to national outrage among the British public.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Discussion question

Why do you think that the Kruger Telegram caused so much fury in Britain?

The emergence of the alliance system

Germany's policy of *Weltpolitik* brought it into conflict with Britain in other ways as well. In 1897, Admiral von Tirpitz was appointed as Secretary of State for the Navy. He shared the Kaiser's belief that Germany should mount a naval challenge to Britain, and within a year he had pushed a Naval Law through the Reichstag that provided for the building of 17 ships over the next seven years. This bill was followed by a second Naval Law in 1900.

Britain quickly responded to this threat to its naval supremacy. It was clear to many in Britain that the British position of 'Splendid Isolation' was no longer appropriate or useful. Britain had clashed with France in the Sudan over the territory around Fashoda and was a rival with Russia in the Far East over China. Now, with Germany challenging Britain, it seemed the right time to seek security through alliances. Thus in 1902, Britain made an alliance with Japan, which gave Britain an ally in the Far East and allowed the Royal Navy to bring back warships from this area. This alliance was followed by an **entente** with France. Although this entente was not a formal alliance, it settled the rivalry between the two nations over colonial issues and set a completely new direction for Anglo-French relations.

Social Darwinism

Social Darwinism was the application of some of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution to human societies. Herbert Spencer, an English philosopher, produced a very simplified version of Darwin's ideas that focused on the theory of 'survival of the fittest'. He suggested that countries were destined to evolve like species; through conflict the 'fittest' would triumph and the weakest die out. Peace was not an option – war was evolution. This theory gained influence in the latter half of the 19th century across European societies.

The 'Great Game'

The intense rivalry between Britain and Russia between 1813 and 1907 for control over Central Asia has been called 'The Great Game', in which Afghanistan was the key focus in the 19th century. The British were determined to protect their land routes to the 'jewel' in their imperial crown – India. Afghanistan, so the British feared, would be the launching ground for a Russian invasion of India. To prevent this, the British attempted to impose a puppet regime on Afghanistan in 1838, but this did not last long, and the British were forced to retreat from Kabul in 1852. The British then embarked on another war in Afghanistan in 1878 in retaliation for the Afghans' refusal to accept a British diplomatic mission to Kabul, after they had received one from Moscow. The British were again forced to pull out of Kabul in 1881. There was nearly war between Russia and Britain when the Russians seized Merv in 1882 and fought Afghan forces over Panjdeh. To avert war between the two European powers, Britain accepted Russian control of these territories.

In 1907, Britain and Russia reached agreement over their relationship with Persia, Tibet and Afghanistan, again reducing British concern over security in India and the Far East. France had already secured Russia as an ally following Germany's failure to renew the Reinsurance Treaty of 1887. Now Russia, France and Britain joined together in the Triple Entente. German naval expansion had thus forced Britain into seeking an agreement with its former colonial rivals, leaving Germany concerned that it was becoming 'encircled'. Europe was now divided into two alliance systems, the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance.

The naval race



▲ A British dreadnought-class battleship.

The other effect of Germany's maritime challenge to Britain was to start a naval arms race. In 1906, Britain had launched a super-battleship, HMS *Dreadnought*. The battleship's name literally meant that this ship 'feared nothing', as its speed, range and firepower were far superior to those of any other existing battleship. The irony of the creation of this battleship was that it potentially nullified Britain's historical naval advantage over the other great powers. The dreadnought class made all the older battleships obsolete; this meant that in battleship terms Britain had taken the race back to zero and their traditional numerical advantage was lost. A competitor now could construct similar battleships and catch up with Britain. This situation triggered a 'naval scare' in the winter of 1908–09, as fears grew concerning Germany's rapidly expanding fleet. The British government responded by ordering the construction of eight battleships in 1909.

The naval race also caused a complete change of mood within the British population itself, as newspapers and popular fiction now portrayed Germany (rather than France or Russia) as the new enemy threatening Britain. As Norman Lowe observes, Britain's willingness to go to war in 1914 owed a lot to the tensions generated by the naval race.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND MILITARY STRENGTH, 1900

	France	Germany	Austria-Hungary	Britain	Russia	Italy
Population	38,641,333	56,367,176	45,015,000	41,605,323	132,960,000	32,450,000
Personnel in regular army	589,541	589,266	397,316	280,000	860,000	261,728
First-class battleships	13	14	0	38	13	9
Second-class battleships	10	0	6	11	10	5
Iron and steel production (tons p.a.)	3,250,000	13,790,000	2,580,000	13,860,000	5,015,000	5,000,000
Annual value of foreign trade (£)	460,408,000	545,205,000	151,599,000	877,448,917	141,799,000	132,970,000
Merchant fleet (net tonnage)	1,037,720	1,941,645	313,689	9,304,108	633,820	945,000

Table adapted from Purnell's *History of the Twentieth Century*, 1968

Study the statistics carefully for the different countries.

Questions

- Which categories do you think are the most important for indicating the strength of a country in war?
- Overall, which alliance system seems to be the strongest?

Discussion question

To what extent would you agree that Germany's position in 1900 was less secure than it had been in 1890?

Tirpitz's Risk Theory

Admiral von Tirpitz felt that if Germany could build enough ships so that it could be a threat to Britain, then Britain would decide that it had to avoid conflict with Germany. In fact, he believed that Britain would be inclined to seek accommodation with Germany and thus Germany would be able to pursue *Weltpolitik* without British interference. As you can see, however, the plan pushed Britain into making alliances and also into increasing and modernizing its own navy while turning government and public opinion against Germany.

The situation in the Balkans

The Balkans was a very unstable area that also contributed to the tensions that existed in Europe before 1914. As you have already read in the introductory section to this chapter, three different empires had interests here – Turkey, Austria-Hungary and Russia.

Turkey

Turkey had once ruled over the whole of the Balkans, but was now largely impotent. The Serbs, Greeks and Bulgars had already revolted and set up their own independent nation states and now Turkey was struggling to hold on to its remaining Balkan territories.

Austria-Hungary

The Austrians by 1900 were losing their grip on their multi-ethnic empire. Of the various ethnic groups in Austria-Hungary, the most forceful in their demands for independence were the southern Slavs – the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – who were beginning to look to Serbia for support. They wanted to break away and form a South Slav kingdom with their neighbour, Serbia. Serbia was thus seen as a threat by Austria-Hungary.

Russia

Russia also had ambitions in the Balkans. First, the Russians sympathized with their fellow Slavs; indeed, Russia saw itself as the champion of the Slav people. Second, the Balkans was strategically important to Russia. The straits of Constantinople had to be kept open to Russian ships en route from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. With ports in the north of Russia's vast empire iced over for six months of the year, continued access to warm-water ports was vital.

The fact that Turkey's power was so weak and could in fact collapse at any moment led the powers to talk of the 'Eastern question', i.e. what would happen in the Balkans if and when this situation arose. Clearly, both Austria-Hungary and Russia hoped to benefit from Turkey's declining power.

Growing tension in the Balkans after 1900

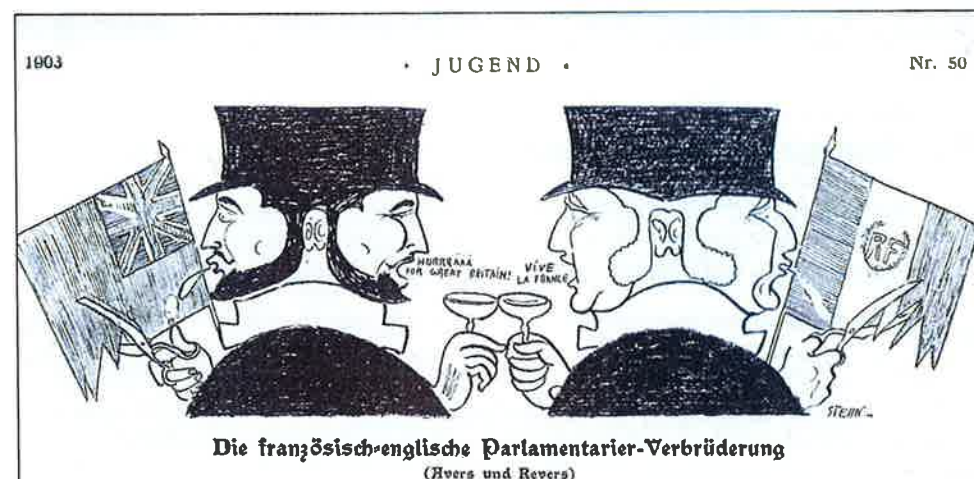
In June 1903, the pro-Austrian King Alexander of Serbia was murdered and replaced by the Russophile King Peter, who was determined to reduce Austro-Hungarian influence. This appointment caused great anxiety in Austria-Hungary, which already feared the influence of a strong Serbia on their multi-ethnic empire. A **tariff** war began in 1905–06, and the Serbs turned to France for arms and finance. Tension increased when the uncompromising Baron von Aehrenthal became Austria's foreign minister. He believed that an aggressive foreign policy would demonstrate that Austria was still a power to be reckoned with and would stamp out Serbian aspirations.

Short-term causes: the crisis years (1905–13)

Between the years 1905 and 1913, there were several crises which, though they did not lead to war, nevertheless increased tension between the two alliance blocs in Europe and also created greater instability in the Balkans.

The Moroccan Crisis (1905)

A pre-World War I German cartoon. The caption reads: 'The Franco-English Parliamentary Alliance (Face and About-face)'.



Examiner's hint

In this question, you need to make sure that you structure your answer clearly. Start your answer with 'The overall message is...' and then give details from the cartoon to support your answer.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Cartoon analysis

What is the German view of the Entente Cordiale, according to this cartoonist?

Germany was worried by the new relationship between Britain and France and set out to break up the entente by attacking France in Morocco. Germany's plan was to expose the weakness of this new friendship. As part of the entente agreement, Britain supported a French takeover of Morocco in return for France recognizing Britain's position in Egypt. Morocco was one of the few remaining areas of Africa not controlled by a European power. The Germans thus announced that they would assist the Sultan of Morocco to maintain his independence and demanded an international conference to discuss the situation.

An atmosphere of crisis and the threat of war was cultivated by the Germans throughout 1905, until the French gave in and agreed to a conference at Algeiras, Spain, in 1906. Much to the surprise of Germany, the British decided to back the French and their demands for influence in Morocco. The Germans had little support at the conference, and after several weeks had to admit defeat. Their only gain was a guarantee of their commercial interests.

The results of the first Moroccan Crisis were a disaster for Germany:

- Germany had not gained notable concessions in North Africa, which was a failure for *Weltpolitik* and a blow for German pride.
- Germany had not undermined the Entente Cordiale – they had strengthened it. Military talks between France and Britain were initiated in January 1906. British foreign policy was now directed to support French interests.
- Several states had considered war as a possible outcome of the crisis, thus signalling an end to the relatively long period of peaceful relations in Europe.
- Germany was now seen as the key threat to British interests.

The Bosnian Crisis (1908)

Following the first Moroccan Crisis, the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907 was signed, thus confirming to many Germans the idea of a conspiracy to encircle and contain them. This fear of encirclement forced Germany into a much closer relationship with its Triple Alliance partner, Austria-Hungary, a shift that was to have an impact in both the Bosnian Crisis of 1908 and the later Balkan Crisis of 1914.

In 1908, an internal crisis in the Ottoman Empire caused by the Young Turks revolution again raised the issue of the Eastern Question, and Austria-Hungary decided to act by annexing the two provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina that Austria-Hungary had occupied since 1878, but which were still formally Turkish. The Austro-Hungarian annexation caused outrage in Serbia, which had hoped that these provinces would ultimately form part of a Greater Serbia and provide access to the sea. Russia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky, had earlier met with Aehrenthal and secretly given Russia's acceptance for this move on the understanding that Austria would support Russia's demands for a revision of the treaties governing the closure of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. However, Aehrenthal went ahead with the annexation before Izvolsky had managed to gain any international support for his plan. In fact, not only did he encounter hostile reactions in London and Paris, but the Russian Prime Minister, Pyotr Stolypin, and the Tsar were unenthusiastic about any agreement giving Austria control over fellow Slavs.

Relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia became very strained and there was talk of war. It was at this point, in January 1909, that Germany decided to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with its ally. Germany reassured Austria-Hungary that it would mobilize in support if Austria-Hungary went to war with Serbia. By contrast, Russia had little support from Britain or France. The Russians – weakened by the 1904–05 war with Japan – had no alternative but to capitulate to the German 'ultimatum' and recognize Austro-Hungarian

Entente Cordiale

The Entente Cordiale marked the end of almost a thousand years of periodic conflict between Britain and France. It was a clear demonstration of the re-alignment between the old European powers in response to the perceived threat from the new European power, Germany. The most important of the three documents that made up the Entente Cordiale was an agreement over Egypt and Morocco. The British were to allow French influence over Morocco, while the French recognized British influence in Egypt. There was also a guarantee of free passage through the Suez Canal. The other documents recognized each others' rights in West and Central Africa, and in Thailand, Madagascar and the New Hebrides.

annexation of Bosnia. Serbia, facing the overwhelming military potential of Austria-Hungary and Germany, backed down.

The results of the crisis were important in raising tension in the region, and between the alliance blocs:

- Russia had suffered another international humiliation, following on from its defeat by Japan. It was unlikely that Russia could back down from another crisis situation and retain international influence and political stability at home. Russia now embarked on a massive rearmament programme.
- Serbia was enraged by the affair, and it led to an increase in nationalist feeling. The Austrian minister in Belgrade reported in 1909 that 'here all think of revenge, which is only to be carried out with the help of the Russians.'
- The alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary appeared stronger than the commitments of the Triple Entente.
- It ended the era of cooperation in the Balkans between Russia and Austria-Hungary; the situation in the Balkans became much more unstable.
- Germany had opted to encourage Austro-Hungarian expansion rather than acting to restrain their approach to the region.

The Second Moroccan (Agadir) Crisis (1911)

In May 1911, France sent troops to Fez, Morocco, on the request of the Sultan to suppress a revolt that had broken out. The Germans saw this as the beginning of a French takeover of Morocco and sent a German gunboat, the *Panther*, to Agadir, a small port on Morocco's Atlantic coast, hoping to pressurize the French into giving them some compensation for such an action.

The Germans were too ambitious in their claims, demanding the whole of the French Congo. This assertiveness was popular with public opinion in Germany, but such 'gunboat diplomacy' as it was called by the British implied the threat of war. Britain, worried that the Germans might acquire Agadir as a naval base that would threaten its naval routes to Gibraltar, made its position clear. David Lloyd George (Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer) gave a speech – called the Mansion House Speech – to warn Germany off. He said that Britain would not stand by and watch while 'her interests were affected'. This speech turned the Franco-German crisis into an Anglo-German confrontation. In November the crisis was finally resolved when Germany accepted far less compensation – two strips of territory in the French Congo.

The results of this crisis, again, increased tension between the European powers:

- German public opinion was hostile to the settlement and critical of their government's handling of the crisis, which was another failure for the policy of *Weltpolitik*.
- The entente between Britain and France was again strengthened. Naval negotiations between the two began in 1912, and Britain agreed a commitment to the defence of France by 1913.
- There was increased tension and hostility between Germany and Britain.

Thus, although imperial rivalries in themselves did not necessarily mean war (and in fact there had also been many agreements on colonial issues in the years before the war), nevertheless incidents such as those in Morocco helped to increase mutual suspicion and hostility.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Document analysis

Document A



An Italian photo from the early 1900s shows the Kaiser attempting to eat the world. The caption roughly translates as 'The glutton finds this too hard'.

Document B



A German cartoon: 'The mailed fist of Agadir' c. 1912.

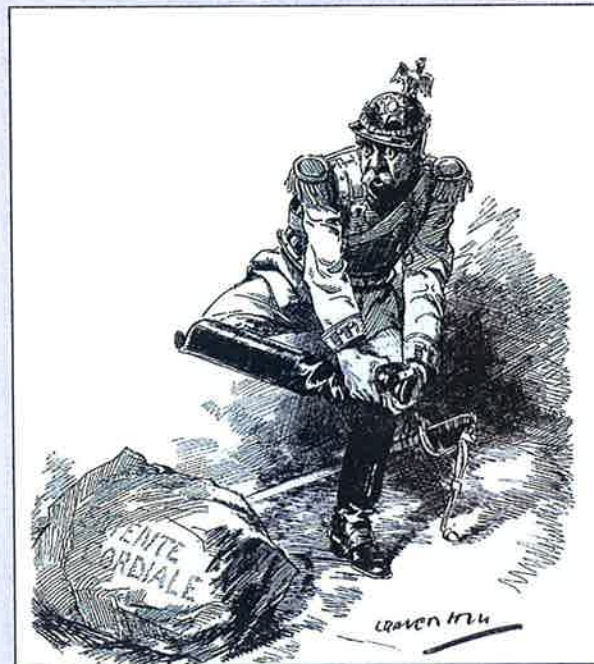
Cartoon in *Punch* magazine,
2 August 1911.

Document C

9 November 1905 – A leading member of the Reichstag was applauded when he declared:
*Now we know where our enemy stands... The German people now knows when it seeks its place
in the sun, when it seeks the place allotted to it by destiny... When the hour of decision comes we
are prepared for sacrifices, both of blood and of treasure.*

Quoted in Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, Volume 1, 2005

Document D



Questions

- 1 What are the messages of Documents A, B and C regarding the aims and methods of Germany in its quest for colonies?
- 2 What similarities are there between the messages of Documents B and C?
- 3 What do you think the caption of Document D, a 1911 cartoon, could have been?

Student review questions

- 1 Why had Germany interfered in Morocco in 1905 and 1911?
- 2 For what reasons did Germany strengthen its alliance with Austria-Hungary?
- 3 Why were the results of the Moroccan crises disappointing for Germany?
- 4 To what extent was German policy 'miscalculated'?
- 5 Explain why the Balkans situation was more dangerous as a result of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

First Balkan War (1912)

In 1912, encouraged by the Russians, the Balkan states of Serbia, Greece and Montenegro formed a Balkan alliance. Their key objective was to force Turkey from the Balkans by taking Macedonia and dividing it up between themselves. Turkey was already weakened by a war with Italy over Tripolitania the year before and they were almost completely driven out of the Balkans in seven weeks. Austria was horrified; it could not accept a

strengthened Serbia and Austrian generals called for war. There was a danger, however, that Russia would support its ally, Serbia, and that events could spiral into a wider European war.

Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, was anxious to stop the war spreading, and so called a peace conference in London. As a result of this conference, the former Turkish lands were divided up between the Balkan states. Yet Austria-Hungary succeeded in containing Serbia by getting the conference to agree to the creation of Albania, which was placed between Serbia and the Adriatic Sea. This agreement caused more resentment between Serbia and Austria-Hungary.

The Second Balkan War (1913)

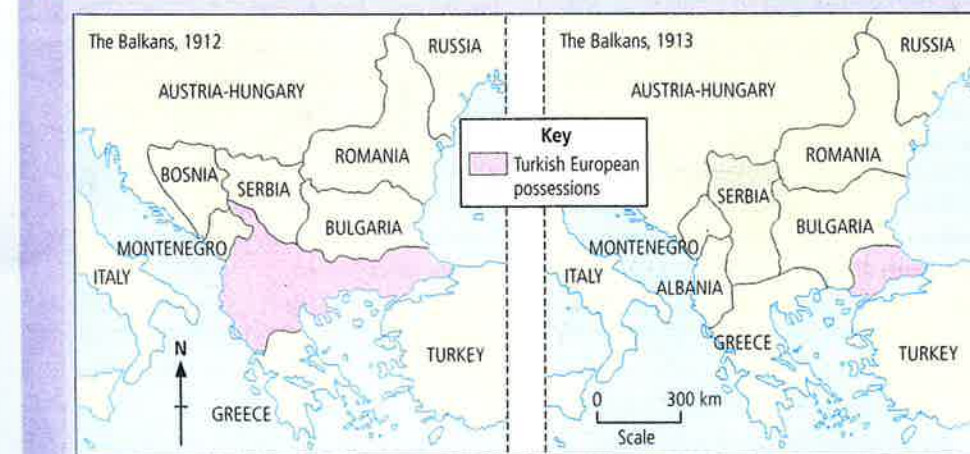
Due to the disagreement over the spoils of the First Balkan War, *another* war broke out in the Balkans in July 1913. Bulgaria now went to war against Serbia and Greece, over territory Serbia had occupied. The Bulgarians felt that there were too many Bulgarians living in areas given to Serbia and Greece, namely Macedonia and Salonika.

The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Leopold Berchtold, did not approach this situation with the same caution that he had displayed towards the First Balkan War. He asked for German assistance, as he believed that the Russians would come in to support the Serbs this time. The German government, however, urged Austrian restraint.

The Serbs, Greeks and, ultimately, Turkey (which had joined in the fight in an attempt to redress some of its losses from the previous year's fighting) defeated Bulgaria. At the Treaty of Bucharest signed in August 1913, Bulgaria lost nearly all the lands it had won in the first war to Greece and Serbia. The war also had far-reaching consequences for Europe. Although a general war between the European powers had again been prevented, the essential causes of tension were exacerbated:

- Serbia was again successful. This fact encouraged the already strong nationalist feeling within Serbia.
- Serbia had doubled in size as a result of the two Balkan wars.
- Serbia had proved itself militarily, and had an army of 200,000 men.
- Serbia's victories were diplomatic successes for Russia, and encouraged Russia to stand by its ally.
- Austria-Hungary was now convinced that it needed to crush Serbia.
- By association, the outcome of the two wars was a diplomatic defeat for Germany, which now drew ever closer to Austria-Hungary.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION



◀ The Balkans, 1912–13.

Questions

- 1 Explain the position/feelings of each of the following states following the Second Balkan War:
 - Austria-Hungary
 - Serbia
 - Bulgaria
 - Turkey
- 2 For what reasons had the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 not escalated into a general European War?

The international situation by 1913

The crises of 1905–13 had seen a marked deterioration in international relations. There was increasing division between the two alliance systems and an increase in the general armaments race, alongside the naval race that already existed between Germany and Britain. Nationalist fervour (see below) was rising in European countries. Each crisis had passed without a major European war, but every subsequent crisis exacerbated the tension and made a future conflict more likely. War was by no means inevitable at this stage, though. Clearly if there was to be another crisis, careful handling of the situation by the Great Powers would be vital.

Other developments, 1900–13

Alongside the international crises, other developments were occurring in European countries. These developments were fed and encouraged by the actual events that you have already read about.

The will to make war

Literature, the press and education did much to prepare the public of Europe for war by portraying it as something that would be short and heroic. Nationalism had also become a more aggressive force in many of the major states, and this trend was encouraged by the popular press, which exaggerated international incidents to inflame public opinion, and by right-wing pressure groups such as the Pan-German League and Action Française.

...the reactions of ordinary people in the crisis of 1914 were the result of the history they had learnt at school, the stories about the national past which they had been told as children and an instinctive sense of loyalty and solidarity with their neighbours and workmates. In each country, children were taught the duties of patriotism and the glory of past national achievements... In each country children were being taught to take pride in their historical tradition and to respect what were regarded as characteristic national virtues ... [The] reactions in 1914 ... and the patriotic language with which the war was greeted reflected the sentiments of a national tradition absorbed over many years.

From James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1992

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Research activity

Divide the class into the following groups. Each group should research the promotion of war in World War I in their area of popular culture, attempting to find material from at least two countries in opposing alliance blocs.

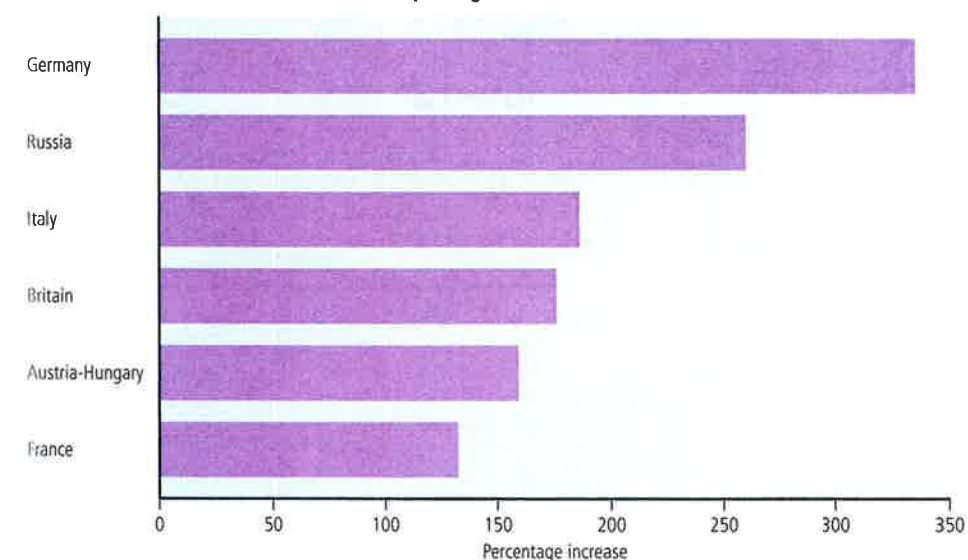
- The Press
- Literature
- Art and Music
- Education

Groups could then reveal their research findings in brief class presentations. Each group should provide the rest of the class with a handout summarizing their research.

The arms race and militarism

The naval arms race was actually part of a more general arms race. Between 1870 and 1914, military spending by the European powers increased by 300 per cent. The increase in the European population made it possible to have large **standing armies**, and **conscription** was introduced in all continental countries after 1871. In addition, there was a massive increase in armaments. Although there were some attempts to stop the arms build-up – for instance, at conferences at The Hague in 1899 and 1907 – no limits on arms production were agreed upon, although some agreements were made on restricting war practices.

Spending on armaments 1872–1912



Spending on armaments, 1872–1912.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Discussion question

How could the growth in military spending and armaments have added to the tension between the powers of Europe between 1900 and 1914?

War plans

Every European power made detailed plans regarding what to do should war break out. One of the most important effects of the alliance systems is that they reduced the flexibility of the Great Powers' response to crises, and this issue can be seen most clearly in the German war plan. This plan was drawn up by German field marshal Count Alfred von Schlieffen and was intended to deal with the implications of the Triple Entente and the difficulty of fighting a two-front war. Knowing that it would take Russia six weeks to mobilize, Schlieffen

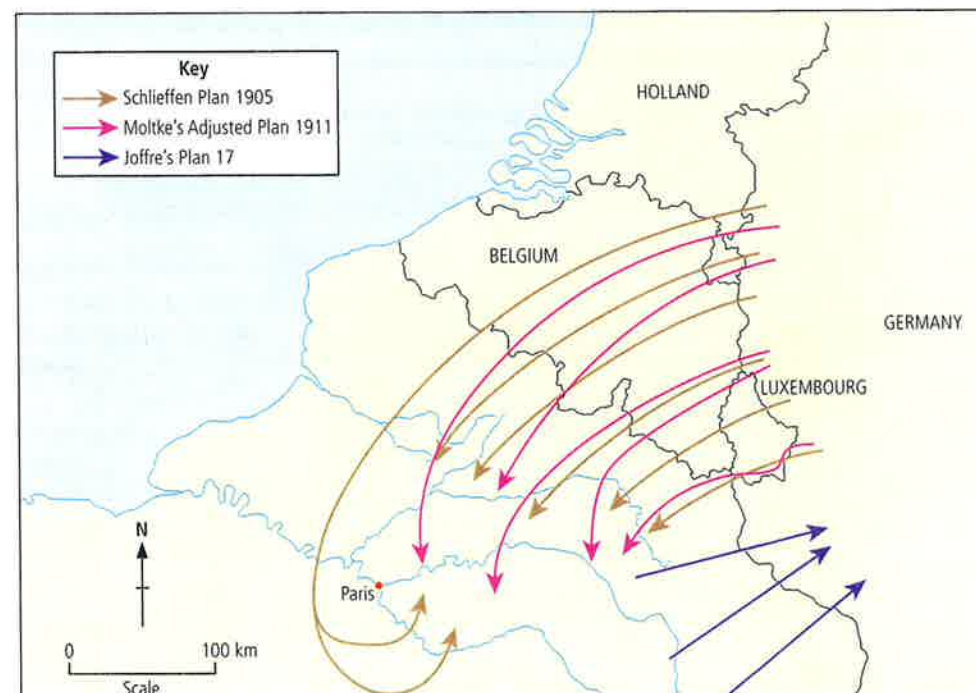
worked out a plan that would involve crushing France first. He calculated that Germany could invade France through Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg (thereby bypassing the French defences along the German–French border) and then move down to encircle Paris. With Paris captured, troops could be moved swiftly to meet the Russian troops along the Eastern Front.

In 1911, Schlieffen's successor, Helmuth von Moltke, modified the plan by reducing the amount of neutral territory that Germany would pass through and by changing the deployment of troops (see map below). However, it still remained inflexible, and contained miscalculations regarding the impact of marching through Belgium, the amount of time Russia would take to mobilize, and Britain's effectiveness in coming to the aid of France.

All other countries had war plans as well:

- France's Plan 17 involved a high-speed mobilization of the majority of its forces and a swift attack to capture Alsace and Lorraine before crossing the Rhine into Germany.
- Russia had a plan to attack Austria-Hungary and Germany.
- Austria-Hungary had two plans – Plan R and Plan B. The plans differed in the amount of troops allocated to fighting Russia and Serbia.

Pre-World War I war plans.



STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Document analysis

All the great powers had vast conscript armies. These armies of course were not maintained in peace time. They were brought together by mobilisation... All mobilisation plans depended on the railways. At that time the automobile was hardly used, and railways demand timetables.

All the mobilisation plans had been timed to the minute, months or even years before and they would not be changed... [A change] in one direction would ruin them in every other direction. Any attempt for instance by the Austrians to mobilise against Serbia would mean that they could not then mobilise as well against Russia because two lots of trains would be running against each other... Any alteration in the mobilisation plan meant not a delay for 24 hours but for at least six months before the next lot of timetables were ready.

From A.J.P. Taylor, *How Wars Begin*, 1979

To access worksheet 2.2 on the causes of World War I, please visit www.pearsonbacconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

Question

What point is A.J.P. Taylor making about the war plans?

Discussion question

What impact would such war plans have on any European war? Do you think that they made war more or less likely?

Review question

Historians generally consider that the forces of imperialism, militarism, the alliance systems and nationalism helped to increase the tensions that led to World War I. Go back over the events of this chapter and pull out examples relating to each one of these issues. Do you agree that they are all equally important in raising tension? Is one more important than the others? Once you have read the next section on the July Crisis, come back to this exercise and add any extra relevant points.

The immediate causes of the war: July Crisis (1914)



The Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie.

To access worksheet 2.3 on the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, please visit www.pearsonbacconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

The first few months of 1914 were a relatively calm period between the European states. There was even optimism that should another conflict erupt in the Balkans this would, for a third time in as many years, be contained locally. The event that broke the calm was the shooting dead of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife, on 28 June 1914. Archduke Franz Ferdinand was on an official visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, with his wife when a 19-year-old terrorist shot them both at point blank range. The assassin was Gavrilo Princip. He had been working with a small group of terrorists, armed by the Serbian Black Hand movement. Their aim in the assassination is not entirely clear, but their objective was the unification of all Slavs from the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a Greater Serbia. The Archduke was clearly symbolic of the Austro-Hungarian regime. It was unclear to what degree the Serbian government was involved with the group – the head of the Black Hand was a colonel in the Serbian General Staff.

The Austrian government saw its chance to crush Serbia, but initially hesitated. They knew that an attack on Serbia would bring in the Russians, so they needed assurances from their



King Peter of Serbia.

ally Germany that they would support them. On 5 July 1914, the Kaiser and his chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, issued Austria a 'blank cheque'. The blank cheque was the German guarantee of unconditional support. Thus, the Germans were not exercising their power to restrain Austria-Hungary, as they had the previous year.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Document analysis

The Kaiser's 'blank cheque' to Austria

The following is a report of a famous conversation between Wilhelm II and the Austrian ambassador in Berlin, Count Szogyeny, in which the Kaiser seemed to promise his support for Austria-Hungary under any conditions.

Berlin 5 July 1914

tel.237 Strictly Confidential

...the Kaiser authorized me to inform our gracious majesty that we might in this case, as in all others, rely upon Germany's full support ... he did not doubt in the least that Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg would agree with him. Especially as far as our action against Serbia was concerned. But it was his [Kaiser Wilhelm's] opinion that this action must not be delayed. Russia's attitude will no doubt be hostile, but to this he has for years been prepared, and should a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia be unavoidable, we might be convinced that Germany, our old faithful ally, would stand at our side. Russia at the present time was in no way prepared for war, and would think twice before it appealed to arms ... if we had really recognized the necessity of warlike action against Serbia, he [Kaiser Wilhelm] would regret it if we did not make use of the present moment, which is all in our favour...

From Immanuel Geiss (ed.), *July 1914: The Outbreak of the First World War – Selected Documents*, 1967

Question

How useful is this document for historians studying the immediate causes of the Great War?

Had the Austro-Hungarian response, and its bombardment of Sarajavo, been immediate, it might have averted the escalation of events that followed. Despite the blank cheque, however, their response to the crisis took nearly a whole month to manifest itself. Berchtold wanted an **ultimatum** sent to the Serb government, but he also intended that the demands of the ultimatum be so severe that the Serb sovereign government could never agree to them. The drawing up of the ultimatum took until mid July, and this delay meant they could no longer present their response as a shock reaction to the assassination; rather, they would appear far more calculating.

Then there was a further delay. The French President was in Russia until 23 July and the Austrians did not want the Russians to be able to liaise directly with their ally France concerning the demands. So finally, on 23 July, the ultimatum was sent, and a response from Serbia was required within 48 hours.

The Russians were shocked when they reviewed the terms on 24 July. Yet the Serb response was conciliatory, and most European powers thought that this might end the crisis. Such was not to be the case. Although the Kaiser suggested that the Serb response removed the 'cause for war', the Austro-Hungarians claimed it was too late to change their minds – they declared war on Serbia and bombarded Belgrade.

The Russians, determined to take a firm stance this time in the Balkans, ordered general mobilization on 30 July. Thus, the Third Balkan War had begun – Serbia and Russia against Austria-Hungary. Germany then declared war on Russia and began mobilization on 1 August. Due to the demands of the Schlieffen Plan, Germany sent an ultimatum to France demanding guarantees of French neutrality. When France responded by declaring

they would follow their 'own interests', Germany declared war on France on 3 August.

Germany's plan to take out France swiftly meant that its forces were to march through Belgium to avoid France's heavily fortified border defences. Britain, choosing to uphold an old treaty agreement with Belgium from 1839, threatened to defend Belgium if Germany did not respect its neutrality. When there was no response from Germany, Britain declared war on 4 August 1914.

The European powers, with their vast empires, were at war. The Great War had begun.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review activity

Create your own timeline of World War I. You should divide the timeline into long-term, short-term and immediate causes.

Alternatively, list all the factors (people, events, underlying forces) that you think contributed to the outbreak of war and try to create a flow diagram or a mind map to show how these factors are linked and how they led to the outbreak of a general war in 1914.

IBLP link

At the beginning of this book, on p.x, you have a copy of the IB Learner Profile, which outlines the key attributes promoted by the IB to 'develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world'. IB learners should attempt to live the IBLP. Consider the approach and decisions made by the European governments and statesmen and attempt to identify when they were acting like IB learners, and when they were not. Try to give specific examples, e.g. which of the leaders and statesmen was 'knowledgeable' in their decision-making?

In pairs reflect on the ways in which the process of crisis management, and the final descent into a general European war, might have been different if the leaders of the Great Powers had been IB learners.

What was the contribution of each of the European Powers during the July Crisis to the outbreak of war?

Germany

The Kaiser had encouraged the Austro-Hungarians to seize the opportunity to attack Serbia in the 5 July blank cheque. However, Germany may have been predicting another Balkans war, not the spread of war generally across Europe. Even as late as 18 July 1914, many in Germany's government believed that a united front of Germany and Austria-Hungary, together with a swift response, would keep the Russians from involving themselves. The Kaiser went off on a cruise, and on his return declared that the Serb response to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum removed the rationale for a war.

Nevertheless, Germany was risking drawing the powers into a general war. What was the motive?

- It had to support its ally, Austria-Hungary
- It had to prevent itself and Austria-Hungary being crushed by the entente powers
- Russia's military modernizations were increasing the country's potential for mobilization, and this could undermine the Schlieffen Plan
- German generals, e.g. von Moltke, believed that it was a favourable time for Germany to go to war with its enemies



German Chancellor
Bethmann-Hollweg

- War would provide a good distraction, and unifying effect, to overcome rising domestic problems in Germany
- War could improve the popularity of the Kaiser.

Once the Russians ordered mobilization, the Schlieffen Plan meant that Germany would have to draw in the French.

...it seems very unlikely that the Russians positively desired a major war. Mobilization for them meant preparation for a possible war. The Germans, however, interpreted mobilization as the virtual equivalent to a declaration of war, and Germany's Schlieffen Plan meant that the German army would have to attack and defeat France before moving eastwards to combat Russian forces.

From Robert Pearce and John Lowe, *Rivalry and Accord: International Relations, 1870–1914*, 2001

Thus Germany's responsibility for the beginning of war was:

- Urging Austria-Hungary on with the 'blank cheque'
- Declaring war on Russia on 1 August
- Violating Belgian neutrality
- Invading France
- Bringing Britain into the conflict.

Austria-Hungary

It is clear that Austria-Hungary was determined to respond to the Sarajevo incident, seeing it as an opportunity 'to eliminate Serbia as a political factor in the Balkans'.

The contribution of Austria-Hungary to the outbreak of war was that it:

- Exaggerated the potential threat of Serbia and was determined to make war
- Delayed responding to the assassination, which contributed to the development of the July Crisis
- Declared war on Serbia on 28 July, only five days after the delivery of the ultimatum (which in any case had a time limit of only 48 hours)
- Refused to halt its military actions even though negotiations with Russia were scheduled for 30 July.

Russia

The Russian Foreign Minister saw in the ultimatum to Serbia a 'European War'. Sergei Sazonov was determined to take a firm stand, as he believed that the Germans had seen weakness in Russia's previous responses to Balkan crises. Although the Tsar was in favour of partial mobilization, his generals ordered general mobilization on 30 July.

The contribution of Russia to the beginning of the war was that it:

- Did not try to restrain Serb nationalism, even though it was likely to lead to instability in the Balkans
- Supported Serbia, which deepened the conflict and possibly caused Serbia to reject the ultimatum
- Mobilized, thus triggering a general European war.

France

France's government was hesitant about getting involved in a war, and, after the ignominious defeat of 1871, it did not want to provoke a general war. France's ally Russia mobilized without consulting the French, and then the Germans declared war on France on 3 August. France had not decided to go to war; it was swept into it.

The responsibility of France was that it gave Russia assurances of support before the July Crisis.

Britain

Britain was divided over whether to fight Germany or not. The Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, wanted to, and there has been criticism of his and Britain's ambiguous position in the July Crisis. Some historians argue that Britain should have made it clear to Germany that it would stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the French, and this might have deterred the Germans from pursuing the Schlieffen Plan. Yet Grey himself did not have a mandate to make his position clear, due to the mixed opinions of parliament.

The violation of the neutrality of Belgium led to some popular demands for war with Germany, and gave the British government grounds, based on the treaty of 1839, to declare war. The responsibility of Britain for the start of the war was that it should have made its position clearer during the July Crisis.

John Lowe also makes the following point:

...the most serious charge against Britain, however, is that her naval talks with Russia in 1914 convinced the German chancellor that the ring of encirclement around her was now complete. Grey's false denial of these secret talks also destroyed his credibility as a mediator in German eyes in the July crisis.

From Robert Pearce and John Lowe, *Rivalry and Accord: International Relations 1870–1914*, 2001

Historiography: the causes of the Great War

STUDENT STUDY SECTION



THE TRIUMPH OF "CULTURE."

Cartoon analysis

What is the message of this cartoon, which was published on 26 August 1914, following Germany's invasion of Belgium?

◀ 'The Triumph of Culture', a cartoon from *Punch*.

Central Powers

The Central Powers were the countries that fought against the entente powers, namely Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria. They were called the Central Powers due to their geographical position in Central Europe.

Responsibility for causing World War I was placed on the Central Powers by the Versailles settlement in 1919. In the war guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles with Germany (Article 231), Germany had to accept responsibility as one of the aggressors. (This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.) While the Treaty of Versailles was being drawn up by the victorious powers, the German Foreign Office was already preparing documents from their archives attempting to prove that *all* belligerent states were to blame. To this end, between 1922 and 1927 the Germans produced 40 volumes of documents backing up this claim.

Other governments felt the need to respond by producing their own volumes of archives. Britain published 11 volumes between 1926 and 1938, France its own version of events in 1936, Austria produced 8 volumes in 1930 and the Soviet Union brought out justificatory publications in 1931 and 1934. Germany's argument gained international sympathy in the 1920s and 1930s. There was a growing sentiment that the war had been caused by the failure of international relations rather than the specific actions of one country. Lloyd George, writing in his memoirs in the 1930s, explained that 'the nations slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war.'

S.B. Fay and H.E. Barnes were two American historians who, to some extent, supported the **revisionist** arguments put forward by Germany regarding the causes of World War I. Barnes argued in his 1927 book, *The Genesis of the War*, that Serbia, France and Russia were directly responsible for causing the war, that Austro-Hungarian responsibility was far less, and that least responsible were Germany and Britain. He supported this view by arguing that the Franco-Russian alliance became offensive from 1912, and their joint plans intended to manipulate any crisis in the Balkans to provoke a European war. Both countries decided that Serbia would be central to their war plans and early in 1914 officers in the Serbian General Staff plotted the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. The Russian and French motives for starting a European war were to attain their key objectives: the seizure of the Dardanelles Straits and the return of Alsace-Lorraine, which could only be realized through war.

An Italian historian, Luigi Albertini, wrote a thorough and coherent response to the revisionist argument in the 1940s. Albertini's argument focused on the responsibility of Austria-Hungary and Germany in the immediate term: Austria for the ultimatum to Serbia, and Germany for its 'naivety' in demanding a localized war. Overall, Germany was in his view fundamentally to blame, as it was clear that Britain could not have remained neutral in a war raging on the continent.

Fritz Fischer

In 1961, historian Fritz Fischer published *Germany's Aims in the First World War*; this was later translated into English. Fischer's argument focused responsibility back on Germany. He discovered a document called the 'September Programme' written by the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg. This memorandum, which was dated 9 September 1914 (after war had started), set out Germany's aims for domination of Europe (see Chapter 3 for more discussion of this aspiration). Fischer claimed that the document proved that the ruling elite had always had expansionist aims and that a war would allow them to fulfil these. War would also consolidate their power at home and deal with the threat of socialism. Fischer went on to argue in another book that the War Council of 1912 proved that Germany planned to launch a continental war in 1914. At this War Council, von Moltke had commented that 'in my opinion war is inevitable and the sooner the better.'

Fischer's argument is persuasive, as he links longer-term policies from 1897 to short-term and immediate actions taken in the July Crisis. In short, he is able to explain why war began.

Given the tenseness of the world situation in 1914 – a condition for which Germany's world policy, which had already led to three dangerous crises [those of 1905, 1908 and 1911], was in no small measure responsible – any limited or local war in Europe directly involving one great power must inevitably carry with it the imminent danger of a general war. As Germany willed and coveted the Austro-Serbian war and, in her confidence in her military superiority, deliberately faced the risk of a conflict with Russia and France, her leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of a general war in 1914.

From Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 1967

Fischer's arguments have been criticized in the following ways:

- Fischer argues 'backwards' from the German 'September war aims'. There is limited evidence to prove Germany had specific expansionist aims prior to September 1914.
- The December War Council is also limited evidence; its importance is debatable as the imperial Chancellor was not present.
- Fischer holds the domestic crisis in Germany as central to why war was triggered in 1914. However, Bethmann-Hollweg dismissed war as a solution to the rise of socialism.
- It could be argued that German policy lacked coherency in the decade before 1914.
- Fischer focuses too much on Germany; this priority leads to an emphasis on German actions and he neglects the role played by other powers.

After Fischer

Since Fischer's theses on German guilt, historians have continued to debate the degree of German responsibility. Conservative German historians such as Gerhard Ritter rejected Fischer's view in the 1960s, although Immanuel Geiss defended Fischer by publishing a book of German documents undermining the arguments of the revisionists of the 1920s. However, the majority of historians around the world now agree that Germany played a pivotal role in the events that led to war through their policy of *Weltpolitik* and their role in the July Crisis, though this was not necessarily as part of any set 'plan' as Fischer had argued. 'It has been widely asserted that German policy held the key to the situation in the summer of 1914 and that it was the German desire to profit diplomatically and militarily from the crisis which widened the crisis from an Eastern European one to a continental and world war' (Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1993).

Other historians have stressed different issues in explaining the outbreak of war, however.

John Keegan

Military historian John Keegan focuses on the events of the July Crisis. He suggests that although there were long-term and short-term tensions in Europe, war was in fact not inevitable. In fact, war was unlikely due to the interdependence and cooperation necessary for the European economy, plus royal, intellectual and religious links between the nations.

The key to Keegan's theory is the lack of communication during the July Crisis. He highlights the fact that the Kaiser had 50 people advising him – mostly independent and jealous of one another: 'The Kaiser ... in the crisis of 1914 ... found that he did not understand the machinery he was supposed to control, panicked and let a piece of paper determine events.' Keegan suggests that had Austria-Hungary acted immediately, the war might have been limited to a local affair. It was Austria-Hungary's reluctance to act alone, and its alliance with Germany, that led to the escalation.

No country used the communications available at the time, such as radio. Information was arriving fitfully, and was always 'incomplete'. The crisis that followed the expiration of the ultimatum to Serbia was not one that the European powers had expected and the key problem was that each nation failed to communicate its aims during the crisis:

- Austria-Hungary had wanted to punish Serbia, but lacked the courage to act alone. They did not want a general European war.
- Germany had wanted a diplomatic success that would leave its Austro-Hungarian ally stronger in European eyes. It did not want a general European war.
- Russia did not want a general European war, but had not calculated that support for Serbia would edge the danger of war closer.
- France had not mobilized, but was increasingly worried that Germany would mobilize against it.
- Britain only awoke to the real danger of the crisis on Saturday 25 July, and still hoped on Thursday 30 July that Russia would tolerate the punishment of Serbia. It would not, however, leave France in danger.

None of the European powers had communicated their objectives clearly in the July Crisis. Therefore, for Keegan it was the events of 31 July that were the turning point. The news of Russia's general mobilization and the German ultimatum to Russia and France made the issue one of peace or war. The Great Powers could step back from the brink, but a withdrawal would not be compatible with the status of each as a Great Power. The Serbs, a cause of the crisis in the first place, had been forgotten.

James Joll

Joll attempts to link impersonal forces – factors beyond the specific control or influence of an individual leader, regime or government – to personal or man-made forces. He suggests an atmosphere of intense tension was created by impersonal forces in the long and short terms, and personal decisions made in the July Crisis led to war. Joll explains the outbreak of war in terms of the decisions taken by the political leaders in 1914, but argues that these decisions were shaped by the impersonal factors, which meant that the leaders had only limited options open to them in the final days of the crisis.

Personal Forces	vs	Impersonal Forces
expansionist aims		capitalism
war plans		international anarchy
calculated decisions		alliances

Marxist historians have focused on the role of capitalism and imperialism as the key causes of World War I, but a limitation with focusing on impersonal factors is that they do not seem to explain why the war broke out when it did. Joll's argument links the impersonal factors to the personal decision-making taking place during the July Crisis, and thus, apparently, overcomes this problem.

Niall Ferguson

In *The Pity of War* (2006), Niall Ferguson suggests that Germany was moving away from a militaristic outlook prior to World War I, and highlights the increasing influence of the Social Democrat Party there. The German Social Democrat Party was founded as a socialist party, with a radical agenda for Germany. By 1912 they had gained the most votes in the Reichstag and their influence increasingly alarmed the Kaiser's regime. Ferguson sees Britain as heavily implicated in the causes of war, particularly Sir Edward Grey. Britain misinterpreted German ambitions and decided to act to impede German expansionism. Ferguson does not see war as inevitable in 1914, despite the forces of militarism, imperialism and secret diplomacy.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review activity

Draw up a grid summarizing the views of the key historians that you have read about in this chapter. Also include the views of the historians in the Student Study Section below.

Document analysis

Study the sources below. As you read, decide what factor each historian is stressing as the key cause for war.

Document A

The First World War was not inevitable. Although it is essential to understand the underlying factors that formed the background to the July Crisis, it is equally essential to see how the immediate circumstances of the crisis fit into this background in a particular, and perhaps unique, way. Europe was not a powder keg waiting to explode; one crisis did not lead necessarily to another in an escalating series of confrontations that made war more and more difficult to avoid. Europe had successfully weathered a number of storms in the recent past; the alliances were not rigidly fixed; the war plans were always being revised and need not necessarily come into play. It is difficult to imagine a crisis in the Far East, in North Africa or in the Mediterranean that would have unleashed the series of events that arose from the assassination in Sarajevo. The First World War was, in the final analysis, fought for the future of the near east; whoever won this struggle would, it was believed, be in a position to dominate all of Europe. Germany and her ally made the bid for control; Russia and her allies resolved to stop them.

From Gordon Martel, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1987

Document B

[For Germany]... war seemed to offer... a solution to both domestic and foreign antagonisms. And if that war could be made appealing to all sections of the population – as a war against Tsarist Russia most certainly would be, even to ardent socialists – then so much the better. There can be no doubt that German leaders were prepared for war in 1914 and exploited the crisis of June–July 1914 to bring it about... Just as the Germans sought to increase their power, so Britain and France sought to contain it, by military means if necessary. In this sense it could be argued that both powers fought to try to restore the balance of power to Europe.

Countries went to war because they believed that they could achieve more through war than by diplomatic negotiation and that if they stood aside their status as great powers would be gravely affected...

From Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1993

Document C

It used to be held that the system of alliances was in itself sufficient explanation for the outbreak of war, that the very existence of two camps made war inevitable sooner or later. But this approach has, for two reasons, an over-simple appreciation of the individual alliances. In the first place, the primary purpose of the alliances was defensive... Second, the way that war actually broke out bore little relation to treaty obligations...

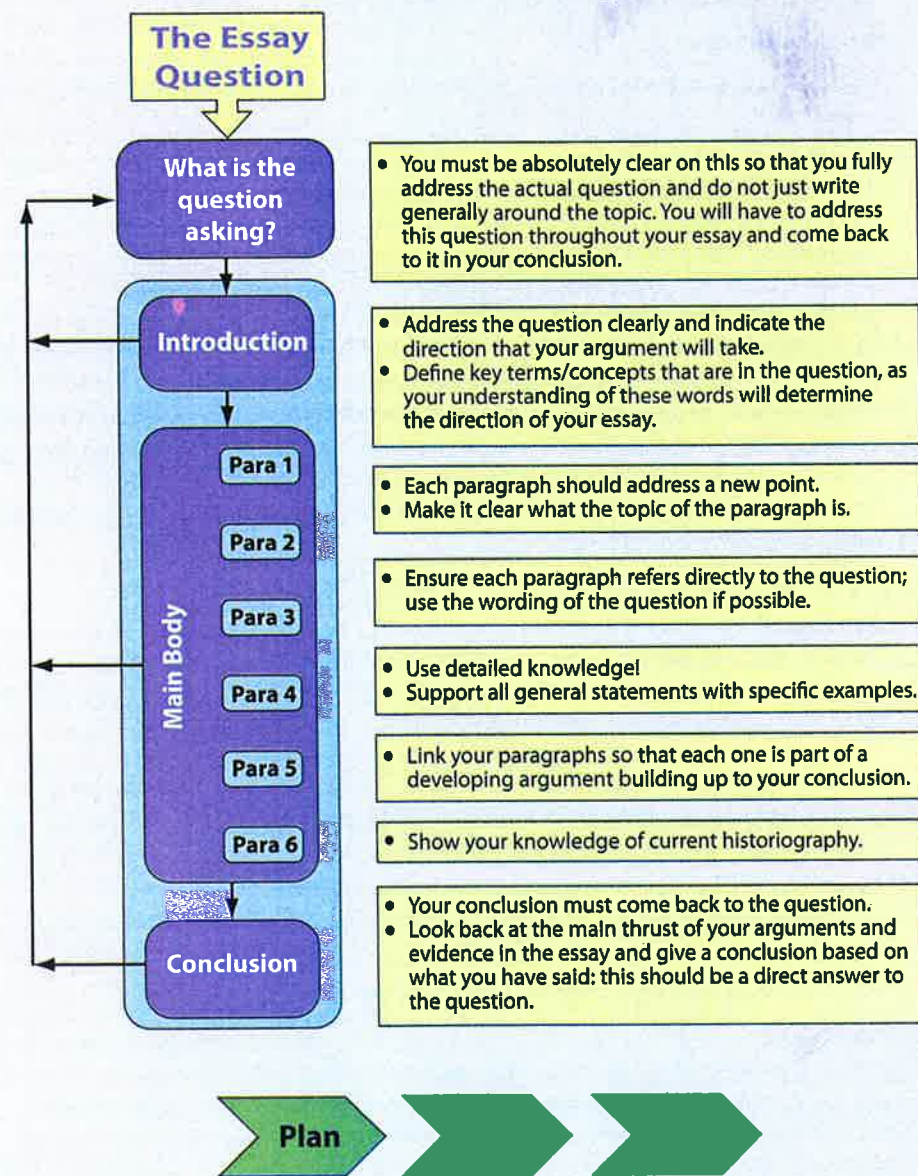
There were, however, two ways in which the alliances did affect international relations and contribute to the growth of tension in Europe in the decade before 1914. First, they provided the links across which crises could spread from peripheral areas like North Africa and the Balkans to the major powers themselves. Normally, the dangers were seen and the connections cut; hence the Moroccan crises of 1906 and 1911 were allowed to fizzle out. But, as the sequence of events after Sarajevo showed only too clearly, the means existed whereby a local conflict could be transformed into a continental war. Second, the alliances had a direct bearing on the arms race and the development of military schedules.

From Stephen J. Lee, *Aspects of European History 1789–1980*, 1988

Question

1 Read Documents A, B and C. Briefly summarize the points made in each source. Compare and contrast these arguments with those of the historians discussed on pp.32–34.

How do I write a history essay?



Essay Frame: The causes of World War I

Question

To what extent was Germany to blame for causing World War I?

Below is an essay frame to help you structure your answer. As you are writing your answer, keep referring back to the 'How do I write a history essay?' diagram. Check that you have covered all the pointers in the yellow boxes.

Introduction: Set the question into context. The Treaty of Versailles included the War Guilt Clause, Article 231, which laid the responsibility for causing World War I with Germany and its allies. Some historians, however, have argued that no one country can be held responsible for the outbreak of war in August 1914. Set down your line of argument. Attempt to keep your argument straightforward, i.e. do not attempt to cover several different lines of argument in a timed essay, as your arguments will lack depth and development.

Part 1: Always deal with the issue addressed in the question first. This means looking first at how Germany can be blamed. Make sure you consider:

- Long-term events causing tension, e.g. *Weltpolitik* and its impact on international relations
- Germany's role in the events leading up to war, e.g. the War Council of 1912
- July Crisis – the blank cheque, Schlieffen Plan, response to Russian mobilization.

Part 2: Here you need to give an alternative argument, e.g. the fact that all powers bear some responsibility. You cannot talk about all the different issues, so choose two or three to explain how they led to increasing tensions that shaped the way that the powers reacted in the July Crisis. Factors you could discuss include nationalism, colonial rivalries, the arms race and alliance systems.

Conclusion: Make sure that you come back to the actual question. Based on the weight of evidence on each side of the argument, conclude whether Germany should be held responsible for causing World War I.

Essay questions

Now plan out the following essay questions in pairs. Use the essay plan above as a guide.

- How far do you agree that World War I was caused by colonial rivalries?
- Was the outbreak of a general war in 1914 inevitable after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand?

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Examiner's hint

You have read the views of several different historians on the causes of World War I. Try to include some of these views in your essay. Only use historians, however, where they are useful for backing up your arguments.

ToK Time

Consider the methodologies used by historians in attempting to find 'historical truth' (see Chapter 16 for a review of historians' methodologies). Why do historians reach different conclusions on what caused World War I? What are the strengths and limitations in the historians' methodologies?