

Introduction

1. In 1914, the continent of Europe was dominated by France, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Russia. Britain was also a major power.

Until the 1860s, Germany was just a loose collection of states. Prussia fought and won 3 wars to bring the rest of the German states under her control. In the last of these wars, Prussia defeated France and took the French provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. The chancellor of the newly-formed German nation was Otto von Bismark, and he knew France would take revenge.

Cause #1 - The Alliance System: The Fall of Bismarkian Diplomacy

There were 2 major alliances:

- 1) The Triple Alliance - made up of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.
- 2) The Dual Entente - made up of Russia and France

For 40 years, Britain had tried to keep out of European affairs. Britain decided to patch up its differences with France.

Cause #2 - Imperialism

When Wilhelm II came to power (in Germany) in 1888, Britain, Russia, and France all had large colonial empires. He wanted Germany to have a large empire as well. But Germany's bid for colonial greatness was doomed from the start. Germany started too late—there wasn't much land left to be taken. This brought Germany into conflict with the other empires.

Cause #3 - Militarism

At the end of the 19th century, the commonly-held view at the time was that, in the future, strong nations would flourish while weak nations would be crushed. A strong army became a necessity and war was considered by all the major powers as a viable policy option in order to gain or maintain superiority.

Britain needed a large navy to protect her colonies and trade routes. In 1893, Britain adopted a policy called the "Two Power Standard" which meant the British fleet should be equal to any 2 navies in the world put together.

If Germany wanted to have a large empire, it needed a large navy.

In 1906, the British navy launched the H.M.S. Dreadnought, a new type of battleship that could outgun any battleship afloat. Germany started to build its own fleet of dreadnoughts, so Britain sped up its shipbuilding program. The Naval Race had begun.

Between 1870 and 1914, military spending by the European powers increased by a massive 300%. By 1914, more than 12 million men could be called into action in the event of a war.

Cause #4 - The Schlieffen Plan

Readying an army for war is a big operation: troops have to be organized into fighting units and provided with weapons, clothing and rations. Then, they have to be transported to the front line as quickly as possible. This process is called mobilization.

The faster a nation mobilized, the greater the chance of success in a conflict. The army that mobilized first might even deliver a knock-out blow to the enemy before they were ready. Germany had the best railway network in Europe, and they planned to use it in the event of war. Germany thought that war with France was inevitable. France wanted revenge for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. The Franco-Russian Entente meant that in the event of war Russia would probably support France. The German Chief of Staff, Count von Schlieffen, did not think that Germany was strong enough to fight both France and Russia at the same time. Estimating that it would take 6 weeks for Russia to mobilize, Schlieffen devised a plan where Germany would crush France first, then move to the eastern front to take on Russia. He planned to go through Belgium.

The plan had several major flaws:

==> It called for the invasion of 2 neighbouring countries, Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as France.

==> The plan could not be changed, mainly because the trains had to be synchronized.

==> By invading Belgium, Germany risked bringing Britain into the war.

==> There was no plan for a war with Russia only. To go to war with Russia meant that Germany had to invade France.

Cause #5 - Nationalism

Within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there were many national groups (e.g. Serbs, Croats, Czechs, etc.). The Balkan States were known as the Powder Keg of Europe. 3 empires, Turkey, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, all had interests in the area. One minor incident could lead to war.

Relationships between Austria-Hungary and Serbia deteriorated rapidly after the Balkan Wars.

Cause #6 - The July Crisis

In June 1914, the Austrians decided to reassert their authority in the Balkans by conducting army maneuvers in Bosnia, an area that was showing too great a fondness for Serbia.

The Inspector-General of the forces and heir to Austro-Hungarian throne was Archduke Franz Ferdinand. He and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo, by a Serbian terrorist.

The Austrians now had an excuse to go to war with Serbia. But first, they needed to be sure that Germany would support them if Russia backed Serbia. Germany agreed.

On the 24th of July, Austria delivered to Serbia an extremely harsh ultimatum. Serbia accepted all of the demands except one. This was not good enough for Austria.

On July 28th, Austria declared war on Serbia and attacked them. Russia moved to support Serbia and began to mobilize on the 30th. On the 31st, Germany issued an ultimatum to Russia and one to France. On August 1st, when the ultimatum to Russia expired, Germany declared war. France rejected Germany's ultimatum. On August 3rd, Belgium rejected Germany's ultimatum, and Germany invaded. Britain sent an ultimatum to Germany. When it expired at midnight, Britain declared war on Germany. The First World War had begun.

CAUSES OF WORLD WAR 1: THE GREAT WAR

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Cause #1 - The Alliance System: The Fall of Bismarkian Diplomacy

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Cause #2 - Imperialism

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Cause #3 - Militarism

5. At the end of the 19th century, the commonly-held view at the time was that, in the _____, strong nations would flourish while weak nations would be crushed. A strong _____ became a necessity and war was considered by all the major powers as a viable policy option in order to gain or maintain superiority.
6. Britain needed a large _____ to protect her colonies and trade routes. In _____, Britain adopted a policy called the "Two Power Standard" which meant the British fleet should be equal to any _____ navies in the world put together.
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8. In 1906, the British navy launched the H.M.S. Dreadnought, a new type of battleship that could outgun any battleship afloat. Germany started to built its own fleet of dreadnoughts, so Britain sped up its shipbuilding program. The _____ had begun.
9. Between 1870 and 1914, military spending by the European powers increased by a massive _____. By 1914, more than _____ million men could be called into action in the event of a war.

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11. The faster a nation mobilized, the greater the chance of success in a conflict. The Franco-Russian Entente meant that in the event of war _____ would probably support France. The German Chief of Staff, Count von Schlieffen, did not think that Germany was strong enough to fight both France and Russia at the same time. Estimating that it would take 6 weeks for Russia to mobilize, Schlieffen devised a plan where Germany would crush _____ first, then move to the eastern front to take on _____. He planned to go through Belgium.

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