

## Causes, practices and effects of wars

This chapter looks at topic 1 “Causes, practices and effects of wars”. The first part of the chapter consists of case studies selected from the *History Guide*'s material for detailed study, chosen to illustrate important aspects of 20th-century warfare. The thematic activities following the case studies are designed to help you explore some of the major themes identified in the *History Guide*. Topics in 20th-century world history are examined in paper 2. In order to help you prepare for this examination, a selection of sample exam questions is provided at the end of the chapter.

Throughout the chapter there are questions and activities designed to help you explore and analyse concepts that arise in more detail.

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- analyse the relationship between causes, practices and effects of war in the 20th century
- demonstrate an understanding of the origins and causes of wars in the 20th century
- analyse the nature of 20th-century wars
- demonstrate an understanding of the different types of 20th-century war
- analyse the relationship of historical context to the causes, practices and effects of 20th-century wars
- demonstrate an understanding of the political, social and economic effects of war in the 20th century.

When asked the question “Why do wars begin?”, the classicist Thomas Palaima replied that in fact they never end, highlighting that some form of warfare has been part of the human experience for as long as that experience has been recorded. Nevertheless, for as long as there have been wars, there have been attempts to stop them. This desire, if not inclination, towards peace took on even more significance in August 1945 when the atomic bomb put into human hands the power to end all life on earth.

### Discussion point:



**The desire for peace is embodied in the IB mission statement. How might the commitment to being international-minded help create a more peaceful world?**

Return to this question again after you have worked through this chapter, and chapter 1 on “Peacemaking, peacekeeping—international relations, 1918–36”.

## The First World War: background causes, immediate causes and interpretation

This section examines the relationship between the long-term, short-term and immediate causes of war by examining the causes of the First World War. The long-term and short-term effects of militarism, industrialization, imperialism/nationalism and the alliance system are examined with a view to exploring how these developments worked in concert to make war more likely. Starting out with the July Crisis of 1914, as an immediate cause, this section examines the idea that it was not so much the crisis itself, but the management of that crisis that brought the European powers to war and posits the question of the inevitability of the war. It also looks at the importance of war plans both in precipitating the war and in determining, in part, the nature of the war, without focusing on the war itself. An important theme is the degree to which the causes—long-term, short-term and immediate—helped determine the size and scope of the war that followed.

### Causes

It has become a cliché to speak of the causes of the First World War, the Great War, as a “powder keg” (background causes) ignited by a “spark” (immediate cause). While clichés can be trite and boring, they also encapsulate an essential truth. Whatever metaphor you choose, the causes of the First World War can be broken down into a number of trends that developed through the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, leading up to the fateful events of July 1914, often called the July Crisis.

These causes did not work in isolation, however. They were interconnected. Militarism was dependent on industrial capacity. Colonial possessions required larger militaries. It is in this interconnectedness that we can begin to seek the causes of the war itself, as well as the scope of the war as it unfolded.

### Background causes

It is important to think about what we mean when we say “cause”. What we refer to as background causes are, in the strict sense, not causes—they did not make the First World War inevitable. Instead, in history, we must talk in terms of probabilities. What follows is a set of developments that made war more likely. These developments increased the suspicion, fear and tension between the European powers and therefore made war more likely. Further, they made a big war more likely. The trend towards larger militaries, industrial capacity and empires made the chances that a short, limited, regional war involving two, maybe three, countries would stay contained slim at best.

## Militarism

Broadly speaking, we can talk about **militarism** as an overall societal emphasis on the military. The trend towards massive armies and navies at the end of the 19th century can be highlighted in two ways. On the one hand there are the precise, technical aspects that appeal to many military historians—warship tonnage, troop concentration, military expenditure. On the other hand, we should consider those aspects that appeal to the social historian—the relation of the military to the wider society. Both will be looked at.

It is certainly true that at the turn of the last century, the militaries of the major European powers were the largest in history. Paradoxically, most statesmen, if not generals, believed that this could help avoid a war. This early idea of **deterrence** held that the larger a country's military, the less likely other countries would be to attack. This might have been true if the size of militaries had remained static. The big problem was that they were growing. If a country was worried that a rival state's army was growing faster than its own, the temptation was to attack the rival preemptively before the differential was too great. In short, use your army before you lost it.

Regardless, the fact remains that the military forces that the European powers had at their disposal in 1914 were immense. There were approximately 200 army divisions in Europe in 1914 including reserves (part-time soldiers called up in the event of war). These massive armies were fed by varying degrees of conscription in all European powers with the exception of Great Britain. Men of military age were required to serve from two to six years. In fact, the terms of service were increasing. France passed the Three Year Law in 1913, increasing mandatory military service from two to three years. By all accounts, the Russian army was the largest in the world. The tsar's standing army numbered about 1.3 million and some claimed it could mobilize a further five million reservists. While these figures alone were enough to give pause to any would-be attackers, more alarming was the fact they were growing.

As impressive as the numbers may seem on paper, the reality reflected a dangerous contradiction. In the case of Russia, the likelihood that all of these conscripts would report for duty as required was wishful thinking and if they had it would have created an even bigger problem. The combination of poor infrastructure, massive distance between military depots and poor military organization meant that the most the Russian army could reliably call into service was about one-fifth of the able-bodied men of military age. This deceptive picture was a double-edged sword. To her rivals, inclined as they were to focus on the strength of other states, Russia was an imposing behemoth. To Russian military planners, aware of the deficiencies in their military apparatus, the theoretical or even actual size of the army meant that mobilization must be undertaken before any potential enemy could mobilize. This was to have ominous ramifications in July 1914.

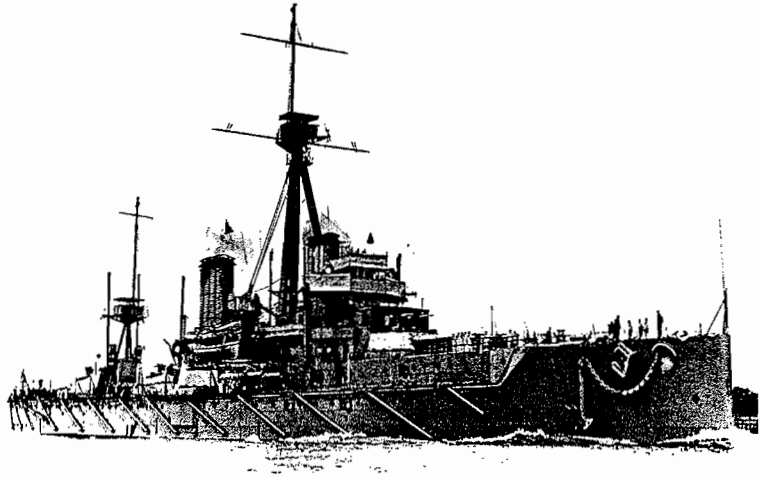
Militarism was evident not only in the size of armies and navies, but also in the technology used by these forces. By 1914, modern industrial methods meant that the great armament foundries of

**Militarism** A political, diplomatic and social emphasis on military matters. Evidence of militarism often includes increased military spending, development of military technology, a general support for the goals and plans of a nation's military and the influence of military leaders on political decisions.

**Deterrence** Actions or policies designed to discourage an attack by making the consequences of the attack prohibitive.

Krupp and Skoda were producing artillery that could hurl a one-ton explosive projectile up to 10 miles (16 km). Machine guns could theoretically fire 400 to 600 rounds per minute. In practice, each machine gun was the equivalent of 80 rifles.

The Anglo-German naval race was perhaps one of the starkest illustrations of militarism. When the British Royal Navy launched the revolutionary HMS *Dreadnought* in December 1906, it instantly made every battleship then afloat, including British ships, obsolete. If a country was to have a modern navy after 1906, it had to spend money on Dreadnoughts. When this was coupled with Germany's desire for a navy to rival the Royal Navy, as expressed in the Second Naval Law of 1900, it created an arms race that would see the size of these navies increase by a combined 197 per cent between 1900 and 1914.



The HMS *Dreadnought* was revolutionary in all aspects: design, speed, armament, materials and production methods. How could one ship change the nature of naval warfare so completely? How might the production of HMS *Dreadnought* have affected the other background causes of the First World War?

Large or even growing militaries do not cause wars. They do, however engender suspicion and fear in rival states. When this suspicion is coupled with economic rivalry, imperialism and nationalism, it makes war more likely. Further, it makes a large, massively destructive war more likely.

### Industrialization

Some historians have contended that by 1900 economic power equated to military power. Others contend that, while there is a strong relationship between these two concepts, the matter of what constituted a Great Power was more complex. What is not generally disputed is the massive increase in industrial output in the second half of the 19th century. The revolution in production that had taken root in England a century before had, by 1870, spread to the rest of Europe and across the Atlantic.

By all measures, Europe was far more industrialized in 1914 than it had been in 1880; this industrialization would help determine the nature of the war to come as the first total war of the 20th century.

Of course, increasing industrial output does not cause war any more than large armies do. There are, however, certain consequences of this increase in manufacturing that played a role

**Chart 1: Military and naval personnel, 1880–1914**

	1880	1890	1900	1910	1914
Russia	791 000	677 000	1 162 000	1 285 000	1 352 000
France	543 000	542 000	715 000	769 000	910 000
Germany	426 000	504 000	524 000	694 000	891 000
Britain	367 000	420 000	624 000	571 000	532 000
Austria-Hungary	246 000	346 000	385 000	425 000	444 000
Italy	216 000	284 000	255 000	322 000	345 000
Japan	71 000	84 000	234 000	271 000	306 000
United States	34 000	39 000	96 000	127 000	164 000

**Source:** Kennedy, Paul. 1988. *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London, UK. Fontana Press. p. 261

in making a general European war more likely. Among these consequences is the fact that the increase was not uniform among the powers. For example, while iron and steel production had increased in the United States by approximately 242 per cent between 1890 and 1913, it had actually decreased in the United Kingdom. More to the point for the British, Germany's steel production had increased by approximately 329 per cent in the same period. In absolute terms, in 1913, France was woefully behind all the powers except Austria–Hungary. These disparities helped create competitive economic tension between the powers, which in turn increased diplomatic and political tension.

In order to feed these massive industrial machines, the powers needed access to resources, which in turn created a **neo-mercantilist** mindset complemented by the drive for colonies in the second half of the 19th century. This thirst had been momentarily slaked by the “scramble for Africa” (see page 210), but by 1900 that well had gone dry. The European powers had claimed all of Africa, with a few small exceptions. Sources of raw materials, not to mention markets, had either to be wrung from existing holdings or wrestled, forcibly or diplomatically, from another power.

Not only had industrial output increased, so had trade. By 1913 the total of German exports was equal to that of the United Kingdom and in the lucrative American market the Germans significantly outsold the British. To protect and to increase this trade, the Germans needed a modern, powerful navy. It did not take long for the powers to harness their huge industrial potential once the war began. By 1914 France was producing 200 000 artillery shells a day. Even the backward Russian factory system was manufacturing 4.5 million artillery shells in 1916, a tenfold increase on the previous year. The connection between economic rivalry and military rivalry was evident.

### The alliance system

If these great, interlocking alliances caused large-scale wars, the NATO and Warsaw Pact would have brought the Cold War to a disastrous end long before the communist states of Eastern Europe were dissolved at the end of the 1980s. Similar to the Cold War, Europe in 1914 was split into two rival, albeit smaller, alliances. These two alliances were connected by a secondary set of treaties, agreements and alliances to countries around the globe.

After Bismarck had finished forging the German Empire by means of “blood and iron” in 1871, he sought to preserve it by carefully shielding her from war. His method was to create an intricate set of alliances as part of a policy of deterrence. The Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria–Hungary, established in 1879, was a major part of that

**?** Under what circumstances could a war be considered a total war by one of the combatants, but not other combatants in the same war? Can you give an example?

**Neo-mercantilism** An economic doctrine that emphasizes the need to decrease imports by moving towards self-sufficiency. This move to self-sufficiency often requires an increase in colonial holdings to supply raw materials and provide markets for finished goods.

**Chart 2: Warship tonnage of the powers, 1880–1914**

	1880	1890	1900	1910	1914
Britain	650 000	679	1 065 000	2 174 000	2 714 000
France	271 000	319 000	499 000	725 000	900 000
Russia	200 000	180 000	383 000	401 000	679 000
United States	169 000	240 000	333 000	824 000	985 000
Italy	100 000	242 000	245 000	327 000	498 000
Germany	88 000	190 000	285 000	964 000	1 305 000
Austria-Hungary	60 000	66 000	87 000	210 000	372 000
Japan	15 000	41 000	187 000	496 000	700 000

**Source:** Kennedy, Paul. 1988. *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London, UK. Fontana Press. p. 261.

shield. Within three years, the addition of Italy turned the Dual Alliance into the Triple Alliance, with each state pledging military support in the event that either of the other two became embroiled in a war against two or more opponents. To this Bismarck added the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia in 1887. The cumulative effect of these agreements was, as Bismarck had intended, to isolate France from the rest of Europe, something French diplomats were going to have to work hard to undo.

This work was made easier when Bismarck refused to approve German loans to Russia in 1887 and the post-Bismarckian foreign office elected not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty in 1890. Now

## Activity:

### Industry, war and power

**Chart 3: Per capita levels of industrialization, 1880–1938 (Relative to GB in 1900)**

	1880	1900	1913	1928	1938	
1 Great Britain	87	[100]	115	122	157	2
2 United States	38	69	126	182	167	1
3 France	28	39	59	82	73	4
4 Germany	25	52	85	128	144	3
5 Italy	12	17	26	44	61	5
6 Austria	15	23	32	-	-	
7 Russia	10	15	20	20	38	7
8 Japan	9	12	20	30	51	6

**Chart 4: Iron and steel production of the powers, 1890–1938 (millions of tons; pig-iron production for 1890, steel thereafter)**

	1890	1900	1910	1913	1920	1930	1938
United States	9.3	10.3	26.5	31.8	42.3	41.3	28.8
Great Britain	8.0	5.0	6.5	7.7	9.2	7.4	10.5
Germany	4.1	6.3	13.6	17.6	7.6	11.3	23.2
France	1.9	1.5	3.4	4.6	2.7	9.4	6.1
Austria-Hungary	0.97	1.1	2.1	2.6	-	-	-
Russia	0.95	2.2	3.5	4.8	0.06	5.7	18.0
Japan	0.02	-	0.16	0.25	0.84	2.3	7.0
Italy	0.01	0.00	0.73	0.93	0.73	1.7	2.3

**Chart 5: Total industrial potential of the powers, 1880–1938 (Relative to GB in 1900)**

	1880	1900	1913	1928	1938
Great Britain	73.3	[100]	127.2	135	181
United States	46.9	127.8	298.1	533	528
Germany	27.4	71.2	137.7	158	214
France	25.1	36.8	57.3	82	74
Russia	24.5	47.5	76.6	72	152
Austria-Hungary	14	25.6	40.7	-	-
Italy	8.1	13.6	22.5	37	46
Japan	7.6	13	25.1	45	88

**Chart 6: Energy consumption of the powers, 1890–1938 (in millions of metric tons of coal equivalent)**

	1890	1900	1910	1913	1920	1930	1938
United States	147	248	483	541	694	762	697
Great Britain	145	171	185	195	212	184	196
Germany	71	112	158	187	159	177	228
France	36	47.9	55	62.5	65	97.5	84
Austria-Hungary	19.7	29	40	49.4	-	-	-
Russia	10.9	30	41	54	14.3	65	177
Japan	4.6	4.6	15.4	23	34	55.8	96.5
Italy	4.5	5	9.6	11	14.3	24	27.8

### Power ranking

- Using the information in the above charts, rank the countries according to how powerful they were in 1914. What criteria are you using? What is your definition of power in this context? What happens to your ranking if you take into consideration the information in charts 1 and 2 on pp. 206–7?
- What conclusions can you draw about the relationship between the information and a country's ability to conduct a war?
- Compare and contrast each country's pre-war and post-war figures. What conclusions can we draw from the comparison? How did this affect your "power ranking?"

**Source:** Kennedy, Paul. 1988. *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London, UK: Fontana Press.

Russia, too, was isolated. Between 1890 and 1894, France nurtured a closer relationship with tsarist Russia—offering loans totaling £400 million and coordinating military planning. This new friendship culminated in the Franco-Russian Alliance, formalized in 1894. The tsar pledged that Russia would attack Germany if Germany ever attacked France or aided Italy in attacking France. France agreed to do likewise if the Kaiser's forces ever attacked Russia or helped Austria-Hungary do the same. The German nightmare of a two-front war was now a distinct possibility.

While France and Russia saw isolation as a dangerous condition, Britain traditionally revelled in it. She emerged from her “splendid isolation” when it suited her and retreated behind her watery ramparts when it was prudent. British statesmen eschewed the rigidity of formal alliances. The diplomatic world, however, had changed by the turn of the century. Britain had been battered by her victory in the South African War. The naval race with Germany was pressuring her treasury. Tensions with France in Africa had nearly erupted into war. The time seemed right to begin a tentative emergence from isolation. First came an alliance with Japan and then a rapprochement with France. The Entente Cordiale of 1904 was the result. By this agreement, the United Kingdom and France agreed to settle differences in Africa as well as a number of smaller disputes around the world. Significantly, however, the Entente Cordiale contained no military commitments, preserving Britain's free hand, or so the British thought, in the affairs of continental Europe. By 1907 the British had settled old differences with the Russian Empire and the Entente Cordiale metamorphosed into the Triple Entente. It was a less rigid agreement than the Triple Alliance as the British refused to agree to any binding military action.

Each of these alliance systems was complicated by other agreements made by the powers, some of which were public and some secret. Two notable examples involved the United Kingdom and Russia. Britain's alliance with Japan has already been noted, but she was also linked to the largest empire on earth. Even the so-called independent “white dominions” of Canada, Australia and New Zealand were automatically committed to war should the UK declare war on another country. This almost guaranteed that were Britain to support one of her Entente partners militarily, the result would be a global war. On top of this, since 1839 the UK had guaranteed Belgium's perpetual neutrality. For her part, Russia had interests in the Balkans, which helped draw her into an alliance with Serbia, further complicating the web of treaties and agreements in the period 1900–14.

The net result of this interlocking, secretive and fairly rigid set of alliances was to increase the tension and suspicion of the great powers. While not causing the war, it made it more likely and ensured that it would be large in scope. The complex system was also arduous to maintain, requiring very subtle diplomacy, or what historians Robert Roswell Palmer and Joel Colton have called “the most Olympian of statesmanship”. No such level of statesmanship was forthcoming in the summer of 1914.

### Imperialism/nationalism

It is important to keep in mind that a nation is, at its heart, a group of people. In many ways, therefore, **imperialism** and **nationalism** are two sides of the same coin. The imperialism of one nation state will generally aggravate the nationalist feelings of those it dominates.

Imperial tensions between the European powers became dangerously high in the second half of the 19th century in large measure because of what has become known as the “scramble for Africa”. Until 1850, the European exploration and subsequent exploitation of Africa had largely been limited to the coastal areas. By the 1870s, however, entrepreneurial explorers such as Henry Stanley had begun to awaken to the economic potential of the African interior, touching off a race by European states to claim their own colonies in Africa. The potential of this “scramble” to bring far-flung powers into conflict should be obvious. It certainly was to Bismarck. Despite his disdain for overseas colonies, Bismarck hosted a conference in Berlin in 1885 to hammer out the rules for claiming and exploiting Africa in hopes that these rules would stave off disagreements over ownership. Just

A **nation** is group people who share a number of commonalities, generally including language, culture, historic development and territory.

**Nationalism** is an emotional attachment to this people and a desire for its political independence.

**Imperialism** A set of actions and policies by which one national group dominates another national group and its territory.

### Activity:

#### The web of alliances, 1914



- 1 Using the above map, list the geographic advantages and disadvantages of
  - ▶ the Triple Alliance
  - ▶ the Triple Entente.
- 2 Using an outline map of the world in 1914,
  - ▶ outline the two major alliance systems
  - ▶ draw a red line between the alliances and any outside country with which there were military agreements
  - ▶ draw a green line between the alliances and any outside country with which there were economic agreements
  - ▶ draw a blue line between the alliances and any outside country with which there were cultural/national relationships.
- 3 What conclusions can you draw between alliances and the theory of deterrence?



as he had no interest in Germany acquiring her own colonies, he did not want disputes between other powers in some distant African land to jeopardize his new Germany by dragging her into a European war.

Despite his efforts, and in some ways because of his efforts, the European powers would come dangerously close to war over African questions after Bismarck's retirement in 1890. Part of the problem lay in Bismarck's desire to stay out of the colony game, the result of which was what the new Kaiser, Wilhelm II, thought was an insulting under-representation of Germany on the world stage. Young Wilhelm demanded that Germany get her "place in the sun" and developed a brash, provocative and ultimately dangerous **Weltpolitik** (world policy) to achieve it. The result of this ill-conceived policy became evident in 1905. During a state visit to French-controlled Morocco, Wilhelm boldly proclaimed that the status of Morocco should be re-evaluated at an international conference. Unfortunately for the Kaiser, this conference, held at Algeiras the following year, upheld French claims to the territory. While the Kaiser had wished to assert German authority, and in the process drive a wedge between the Anglo-French entente, he served only to strengthen the entente and make the rest of Europe wary of German motives and methods on the world stage. When Germany sent the gunboat *Panther* to the Moroccan port of Agadir in 1911, to once again pressure France by calling into question her imperial claims, the UK unequivocally supported her ally. Wilhelm came away from Algeiras and the Agadir Crisis feeling that Germany was becoming dangerously isolated and victimized.

### The Balkans

The role that nationalism played in the growing international tensions at the turn of the century is best demonstrated in the Balkans. This region was populated by a number of ethnic groups broadly referred to as Slavs and centred in the small independent nation-state of Serbia. Political domination in the region had traditionally been split between two rival empires, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman. By the end of the 19th century, the crumbling influence and power of the Ottoman Empire, coupled with Austria-Hungary's desire to retrench and expand her influence in the region, made this a very unstable part of the European political system. The flux in the region reawakened in Russia age-old Balkan aspirations. Growing numbers of radical pan-Slavic nationalists living under the Hapsburgs were convinced that their future lay not in a federated Austria-Hungary, but rather in a Greater Serbia or Yugoslavia. With Serbia's ambition to become the Piedmont of a pan-Slavic state added to this frightening situation, the region was becoming dangerously volatile.

**Weltpolitik** The foreign policy adopted by Germany at the end of the 19th century by which she sought to assert her influence around the globe.



The Balkan region had many distinct national groups, most of whom had been part of the Ottoman Empire at one time. By 1914, the Balkan region was bordered by three of the major European powers and of strategic interest to all of them. Given this situation, explain what Otto von Bismarck meant when, in the 19th century, he said, "If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans."

When Italy tried to wrest Tripoli from the Ottomans by force in 1911, Serbia saw an opportunity to profit from the sultan's divided attention and resources. Forming the Balkan League with Bulgaria, Montenegro and Greece, she went to war with Turkey. The profit was Albania and Macedonia, with the lion's share going to Bulgaria, a grievance Serbia quickly addressed by defeating Bulgaria in the second Balkan War in 1913. This time Serbian designs on Albania, and

the consequent access to the sea, was thwarted by international intervention, spearheaded by Austria–Hungary. Russia, though a supporter of Serbian claims, backed down when faced with Austrian resolve, just as she had done when the Austrians annexed Bosnia, a Slavic territory, in 1908. The result was the creation of the Independent Kingdom of Albania. The sum total of this confusing ten months of war and negotiation was an Austro-Hungarian Empire determined to stop pan-Slavic nationalist claims, an emboldened Serbia determined to further pan-Slavic nationalist schemes and a twice-humiliated Russian Empire determined to reassert her authority.

It is important to read these background causes together. The massive size of European militaries was made possible by the prodigious increase in European industrial production, fed by raw materials garnered from global empires. The expansion of empires, partially necessitated by the hunger for resources, angered countries such as Germany and Austria–Hungary who wanted to expand their holdings, while simultaneously increasing the anxiety of those at whose expense this expansion would have to occur—countries such as the UK, France, Russia and Serbia, not to mention countless African and Asian peoples, who are often overlooked in this European drama—a drama that was shortly to become a global tragedy.

### Immediate causes: the July Crisis

When asked what caused the First World War, people with even the most rudimentary of historical knowledge will likely reply that it had something to do with the shooting of a member of the Austrian royal family. As we have seen, however, this is woefully inadequate in explaining an event the scale and scope of the First World War. Indeed, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne, and his wife Sophie were shot while visiting Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, they were not particularly unique in their fate. The archduke was but one of eight heads of state that were assassinated in the years 1881–1914, two of them being Hapsburgs. No, it was not the assassination itself that sparked the war. Rather, it was an inability to manage the ensuing crisis in the light of the background causes outlined above that tumbled the European powers into four years of disaster.

#### Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941)

Kaiser Wilhelm II was the German emperor who led Germany throughout the First World War until his abdication in November 1918. He took a much more aggressive approach to foreign affairs than his father Frederick III. Wilhelm sought to enlarge Germany's imperial holdings outside of Europe and consequently increase Germany's influence and prestige on the world stage. He provoked international incidents over French holdings in Africa, while at the same time building a navy that he believed could rival the British Royal Navy. The Kaiser's unconditional support for Germany's Austrian ally during the July Crisis helped precipitate the First World War.



#### Political assassinations, 1881–1914

- 1881** Alexander II of Russia, Emperor of all the Russias
- 1894** Marie François Sadi Carnot, President of France
- 1895** Stefan Stambolov, Prime minister of Bulgaria
- 1897** Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, Prime minister of Spain
- 1898** Empress Elisabeth of Austria
- 1900** King Umberto I of Italy
- 1901** William McKinley, President of the United States
- 1903** King Aleksandar of Serbia
- 1904** Nikolai Bobrikov, Governor-general of Finland
- 1908** King Carlos I of Portugal
- 1908** Luiz Filipe, Crown prince of Portugal
- 1911** Peter Stolypin, Prime minister of Russia
- 1912** José Canalejas, Prime minister of Spain
- 1913** King George I of Greece
- 1914** Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria

Certain members of the Serbian military supported the Bosnian terrorist group “Union or Death”, commonly known as the Black Hand, though it appears that this support did not extend throughout the Serbian government. Nevertheless, Austrian officials, specifically the chief of the general staff, Conrad Hotzendorff, and the chancellor, Leopold von Berchtold, wished to seize the opportunity afforded by the assassination to crush South Slav nationalism once and for all. This would mean war with Serbia. After a pledge of unlimited support from Germany, her only European ally, in the so-called **Blank Cheque**, the Austrians formulated their ultimatum to the Serbs. The exact nature and intent of the Blank Cheque has for years been debated, as has the authorship of the ultimatum itself (see the historiography chart in the activity on page 215). It would seem that the terms of the ultimatum were designed to be impossible to accept, offering as it did affront to many aspects of Serb sovereignty

Nevertheless, the Serbs capitulated to most of the demands, so much so that the Kaiser believed that with the Serb response “every reason for war drops away.” Perhaps he was more surprised than many when Austria–Hungary went to war against Serbia within hours of this response on 28 July 1914.

The Russians viewed the size of the Austrian mobilization as a direct threat to their frontiers. To this was added the memory of the two previous Balkan humiliations. The tsar ordered partial mobilization against Austria on the night of 29 July. Understanding the alliance obligations that Germany owed to Austria, the Russian war minister, Sukhomlinov, persuaded Nicholas to change the order to full mobilization along the entire length of Russia’s western frontier. As an increasing sense of panic gripped the Kaiser, he demanded that his cousin, the tsar, cease all military preparation. When this was not forthcoming, Wilhelm ordered the full mobilization of the German army, a mobilization that, as part of the Schlieffen Plan (see below), was directed against France, through neutral Belgium.

Some historians believed that the Germans were clinging to the hope that the United Kingdom would stay out of the looming conflict. Others thought that this was never a serious possibility. For his part, the British Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, did nothing to dispel this notion, reserving the UK’s freedom of action until the very last moment. When the German army crossed into Belgium on 3 August, the UK’s treaty obligations brought her and her empire into what was now a world war.

Could this war have been avoided? It is easy to see where, during July 1914, different decisions, stronger leaders, better communication may have yielded a different outcome. This would have solved

**Blank Cheque** A pledge of unconditional support given by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany to Franz Joseph of Austria in July 1914. The pledge was in reference to Austria–Hungary’s dispute with Serbia and Russia.



Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie. Ferdinand was known to be a reformer when it came to the role of national groups within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, favouring some forms of semi-autonomy. Why might the fact that Ferdinand was a reformer in this regard make him dangerous to extremist groups like the Black Hand?

#### **Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914)**

Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the throne of Austria–Hungary; his assassination in June 1914 ignited the July Crisis that would lead to the outbreak of the First World War. After a standard military education and service in the Austrian army, Ferdinand found himself heir to the throne after the early death of his cousin, Emperor Franz Joseph’s son. His promotion of greater autonomy for some of the nationalities within the Austrian army, specifically Czechs and national groups in the Balkans, alienated both the hard-core conservatives within the Austrian administration and hard-core nationalists within the empire. He and his wife were shot to death by a Bosnian nationalist named Gavrilo Princip while on a state visit to the Bosnian city of Sarajevo in June 1914. The ensuing crisis and the inability of the leaders of Europe to resolve it tumbled the world into war in August.



the crisis only. The underlying causes remained. The issue of what would become known at Versailles as “war guilt” is, therefore, far more complex than anyone at the Peace Conference, with the possible exception of Wilson, and indeed, many historians could simply state. The war was, in fact, the result of a complex set of long-term, short-term and immediate factors that stretched from the mid-19th century right up to the eve of the war.

## War plans and opening moves

The opening days of the First World War have often been referred to as “war by timetable”. Indeed, the act of mobilizing millions of soldiers required a level of co-ordination unprecedented in 1914. So vital was the railroad system to this endeavour that the German government had taken sole control of the entire German railroad system by the 1880s. The fact was that all the major European powers had to move millions of men to positions on their frontiers, so as to be able to carry out war plans of varying degrees of complexity.

The most famous of these plans was the Schlieffen Plan, named after its creator, Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the German general staff from 1891 to 1905. In that time he conceived of a plan that was designed to deal with the Bismarckian nightmare of a two-front war, against France in the west and Russia in the east. The plan called for a massive concentration of German arms in the west against France. This force, composed of seven armies, would sweep through Luxembourg and Belgium into northern France in a great arc that would conquer Paris within 41 days of mobilization. Meanwhile, Russian forces would be held at bay by a combination of Austro-Hungarian armies and her own sluggish mobilization. The Schlieffen Plan was itself an immediate cause of the war, in that it depended upon Germany mobilizing first. In case of a threat by Russia, as in July 1914, Germany’s entire grand strategy required the Kaiser to start a war with France.

At first glance it would seem that the German general staff also had a hand in the preparation of the French war plan. France’s Plan XVII called for a massing of French armies on their eastern frontier, away from the main thrust of the German army. These troops would then rush gallantly eastwards, regaining at once the honour of the French army and the territories of Alsace and Lorraine. Whereas the Schlieffen Plan was built on meticulous timetabling and organization, Plan XVII rested on the ideas of *élan vitale* and the offensive spirit, prompt Russian mobilization and the coordinated assistance of the British army.

## IB Learner Profile link

Choose any three of the characteristics in the IB learner profile and compare them to the characteristics displayed by one of the following leaders during the July Crisis of 1914:

- Kaiser William II— Emperor of Germany
- Lord Grey— British Foreign Secretary
- Tsar Nicholas II— Emperor of Russia
- Emperor Franz Joseph— Emperor of Austria



**If the alliance system was constructed in part as a deterrent to war, how did the Schlieffen Plan work at cross purposes to the alliance system?**



Schlieffen’s original plan called for the capture of Paris within 41 days of mobilization. How did von Moltke’s decision to wheel the first army in front of Paris, rather than around it, change the nature of the entire war?

In the context of French military doctrine in 1914, *élan vitale* was the preference of attack at the expense of prudent defense. Deficiencies in sound planning and tactical considerations could be overcome with sufficient enthusiasm and vigour.

**Activity:****What caused the First World War?**

Sydney Bradshaw Fay <i>The Origins of the World War</i> , 1929	Fay was writing in response to the finding of the Paris Peace Conference that Germany was solely responsible for the outbreak of the war. Fay maintained that it was a complex assortment of causes, notably imperialism, militarism and alliances, that pushed Europe into war. No one country plotted an aggressive war and many, including the UK and Germany, made genuine, though unskilled, efforts at mediating the July Crisis. In some ways, Fay and those who agreed with him are part of the larger movement to reintroduce Germany to the community of nations in the same way that the spirit of Locarno was (see pp. 62–3).
Fritz Fischer <i>Grasp for World Power</i> , 1961	In the wake of the Second World War, German historian Fritz Fischer re-evaluated his country's role in causing the First World War. In contrast to Fay, Fischer found that Germany sought an aggressive war of expansion in 1914. Germany was surrounded by hostile countries and her economy, culture and influence in decline. A successful war of expansion would solve these problems and was therefore plotted and encouraged in the years 1912–14. The July Crisis was deliberately managed to this end. Fischer maintained that these attitudes and desires were not held solely by a maleficent and deluded leadership. After examining a broad cross section of German society in 1914, Fischer concluded that these attitudes and aims had broad support from business interests, academics and all political parties in Germany. It is not difficult to understand why this was a contentious position in post-Second World War Germany.
Eric Hobsbawm <i>The Age of Empires</i> , 1987	Writing in the Marxist historical tradition, Eric Hobsbawm does not find the causes of the war in any one country or person, but rather in the system of industrial capitalism that dominated the economies of Western Europe. Hobsbawm argues that industrial capitalism's insatiable hunger for resources and markets fuelled the New Imperialism of the 19th century. While this need was temporarily slaked by the "scramble for Africa", it soon brought European countries into conflict. Further, within industrial powers, this competition required a close partnership between the government and arms producers, for whom peacetime profits had to be maintained. These profits were required so that the industry would be around for the next war, a war in which strength would be measured not in military strength alone, but also in industrial capacity. By arguing a systemic cause of the war, Hobsbawm and other Marxist historians bring a degree of inevitability to the war. Regardless of who led the countries, or which countries were involved, they believe the system would have caused a war eventually.
Niall Ferguson <i>The Pity of War: Explaining World War 1</i> , 1999	Niall Ferguson, like Fischer, blames one country in particular. For Ferguson, rather than Germany, responsibility rests with the actions, and in some cases inaction, of the UK. Ferguson believes that Fay was wrong, that anti-militarism was rising in Europe by 1914, secret diplomacy had solved many disputes, and that Germany and the UK were more than capable of settling their differences. Rather, he maintains that British political and military leaders had planned to intervene in a European conflict from 1905 and in fact would have violated Belgian neutrality themselves had Germany not done it first. Further, he maintains that the UK misinterpreted German intentions, seeing them as Napoleonic rather than as essentially defensive. These leaders misled the British parliament into a declaration of war.
John Stoessinger <i>Why Nations Go To War</i> , 1974	John Stoessinger finds liability for the war largely in the personal failings of those trying to manage the July Crisis. He believes that each of the leaders acted out of an over-inflated sense of both their own country's weakness and their enemy's strength. Further, the supreme leaders in Austria–Hungary and Germany failed to exercise sufficient control over their subordinates, who actively conspired to provoke at least a regional war if not a general European war. Once the "iron dice" were cast, none of the leaders had the nerve to order a halt to the mobilization, even though this was a completely viable option. Had different personalities been in positions of authority in July 1914, there may never have been a war.

- 1 Which historian has the most convincing thesis? Why?
- 2 Add your own row to the above chart. What do you believe caused the war? How might it have been avoided?
- 3 How might the era in which each of the above historians was writing have affected their views? Why is it important for students of history to understand the context in which historians write?