

World War One:

Its causes and its nature.

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Introduction to our study of World War One

There are four basic questions to address in looking at a war:

- What or who caused it?
- What was it like?
- How was it won and lost?
- What were its effects?

WW1 is no different.

But WW1 is of even greater interest to us because it links closely to four other major topics in twentieth century history: the peace treaties that concluded the war, Weimar Germany, the rise of Hitler and the causes of WW2.

With regard to the first question concerning the cause of the war, we will look at the immediate cause: the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and the July Crisis that followed his murder. But we will also look at deeper lying, more fundamental factors: the rivalries between the leading powers at the time and the build-up of tension, suspicion and mistrust. The alliances that were formed and the build-up of arms as all the powers seemed to be expecting, or at least fearing, a war. In simple terms, we look at the long term and short term causes. And we will consider the big question when it comes to the causes of WW1: whether Germany is to blame for causing the war, and if not, the extent to which each of the major powers was responsible.

As to what the war was like, it is very important to point out that this was a war like no other. It was a war involving all the great industrial powers in the world. That meant it was a war that made use of weapons that had never been used before, or at least not on such a scale and not in the same war. On land there was the machine gun, huge artillery, gas and the tank. At sea there was the submarine and in the air, the aeroplane. It was a long war too, lasting more than four years. It was a war that cost approximately ten million lives. Never had war been fought at such a cost to life, and they were overwhelmingly the lives of young men, the lifeblood of the nations involved. It was a sacrifice that was deeply felt in the years after the war, and greatly affected the relations between

nations. But it also raised questions about the tactics that were used.

How, then, was the war won? Indeed, was it won or lost? I call this the “attack and defence” approach to history. It’s like rival football fans looking at how a game was won or lost. Do you praise the team that won for their flair, the great goals they scored? Or do you blame the losing team for using the wrong tactics, their defence for allowing the goals to be scored? Or do you put it down to luck: good luck; bad luck? Usually with wars, we can look at key battles and say this is where the war was won and lost. But this is not so obvious with WW1, and so we have to consider other factors. However, it is not a major concern for us as our IGCSE course is not concerned with this question. So we will give it only a brief examination.

Finally, we come to the effects of the war and, as when we look at the causes, we must consider short term and longer term effects. Here, it is also useful to break these effects down into the classic divisions in history: economic, social and political effects. Of course, these different approaches overlap, economic effects will impact on social issues like welfare provision, both of these will impact on what kinds of government that are elected and whether they are able to provide stable government. Another, political effect that must be considered is the peace settlements that followed the war. So significant is the impact of WW1 that they dominate much of the rest of the IGCSE course: the Treaty of Versailles, the work of the League of Nations, the causes of WW2 and in the German Depth Study, the Weimar Republic and the rise to power of Hitler. So, if for different reasons, we shall again only give this a brief examination at this stage.

So, we embark on our first major study: WW1, a war that changed Europe and changed the world. But I make a plea before I begin, and it is a plea that should always be made, whatever the topic of study: always remember that, ultimately, *history is always about people*. History is made by people and the choices they make and those choices effect people, for good or ill. Never, ever forget that. Please!

The Causes of WW1

I have already said in the introduction to this topic that with regard to the question concerning the cause of the war, we will need to look at both short term and long term factors. The immediate cause - the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne - and the events that followed his murder incorporates the short term causes. But we will also look at deeper lying, more fundamental factors: the rivalries between the leading powers at the time, the German policy of Weltpolitik and events in the Balkans in the south-east corner of Europe. For these all contributed to a build-up of suspicion and mistrust, which in turn, led to the formation of two rival alliances and an arms race. So that when the tipping point or trigger occurred, i.e. the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand, the crisis that followed, the July Crisis, resulted in not a local war but a war that became a world war.

So, we will look in detail at the following factors:

- The hopes, fears and suspicions of each of the great powers in Europe
- The German policy of Weltpolitik
- Events in the Balkans
- The alliances
- The arms race
- The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the July Crisis which followed.

I would suggest that you read about the July Crisis near the end of this bloc of work first, don't worry about taking notes, just read what happened. Then go through the other chapters, making notes, and return to the July Crisis to make a more careful investigation.

We will then look at the evidence concerning responsibility or blame for starting the war.

As a guide to note-taking, I would suggest two overall frameworks (there will be others focusing on specific aspects): one puts the focus on countries, the other on issues:

| Germany | Austria-Hungary | Russia | Serbia, Britain + France |
|--|-----------------|--------|---|
| <i>Make note of factors that point to the responsibility of each country and make an overall assessment of just how much you think each country was responsible.</i> | | | <i>Note that I regard Serbia, Britain and France as carrying less responsibility though this doesn't mean that they carry none.</i> |
| <p>Conclusion</p> <p><i>Look ahead and think about how the Germans reacted to the armistice terms as well as those of the Treaty of Versailles. Did the Germans have a point that they were being treated unfairly? Should the terms of the Treaty of Versailles have been less punitive?</i></p> | | | |

| Colonial problems | Alliances | The arms race | The Balkans | The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand |
|---|-----------|---------------|-------------|---|
| <i>Make note of factors that point to the part played by each issue, noting also where different issues link. And make an overall assessment of just how much you think each issue was responsible.</i> | | | | |

The hopes, fears and suspicions of each of the key countries in Europe

The way each of the Great Powers was thinking - their hopes, fears and suspicions - is very important if we are to understand why war broke out. This notes framework will help you gather your thoughts on this particular aspect:

| | Hopes | Fears | Potential for conflict |
|-----------------|-------|-------|------------------------|
| Germany | | | |
| Austria-Hungary | | | |
| Russia | | | |
| France | | | |
| Britain | | | |
| Italy | | | |
| Serbia | | | |

Germany

Germany was one of two new countries in Europe, Italy being the other. It was created in 1871 by Prussia following two wars: one with Austria and the other with France, both of which it easily won. Germany was *the* power on continental Europe. Britain and Russia, on the edges of Europe, could rival it, and Germany was wary of them both, but it was Germany that every other country (except for Austria-Hungary, its one firm ally) feared. The Kaiser's policy of *Weltpolitik* (world policy) set out to make Germany a great power with a trading zone in central Europe which it would control and with colonies. It looked at the British and French empires and wanted the same. It also wanted a powerful navy which, along with an empire, it saw as symbols of greatness. However, *Weltpolitik* had left it feeling encircled by powers hostile to it: Russia to the east and Britain and France to the west. This meant that, with Italy an unreliable ally, Germany could only count on its alliance with Austria-Hungary

which may have left it feeling it needed to support it no matter what it did.

Austria-Hungary

Austria-Hungary was perhaps a truly multi-national European empire. There were fifteen different races in its empire. This meant nationalism was a big deal for Austria-Hungary because if it went unchecked, its empire could disintegrate. It had already lost territory it had controlled when both Italy and Germany were formed in 1861 and 1871 respectively. And Austria only became Austria-Hungary in 1867 when the Hungarians demanded greater autonomy. As a consequence it was really concerned about the crumbling Ottoman (Turkish) Empire as, if nationalism led to its collapse, it would only put pressure on its own empire. It was particularly concerned about Serbia's ambitions to unite all Slavs as there were more Slavs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire than there were in Serbia. And with Russia supporting Serbia, it meant that Russia was also seen as a potential enemy. This left it worried as it wasn't a particularly strong military power, and it constantly relied on German support to help it when crises flared up in the Balkans, never more so than in 1914.

Russia

Russia was huge: the largest European power by far in size and in population. It had problems though. It had lost a war with Japan in 1905 and suffered a revolution as a consequence. The Tsar had only managed to hold onto power by reforming the political system, but a lot more reform was hoped for. Its army was being reformed though, it had also begun to industrialise and was building railways that would speed up its ability to mobilise (get its army to the battle front). It certainly had the potential to be a great power. It had a strong interest in the Balkan region with its link to all Slavs and to Serbia in particular, and it also had the hope of controlling Constantinople (today's Istanbul) that in turn would give it control of the Straits, the water passages linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean which was a crucial passage for Russian trade as well as being a passage for its warships into the Mediterranean.

Consequently, it found itself in conflict with Austria-Hungary and, because of its alliance to Austria-Hungary, Germany.

France

After its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1 which completed the creation of Germany, France had lost two major provinces – Alsace and Lorraine – and had been left without an ally. Following its alliance with Russia in 1893 and its entente with Britain in 1904, this was no longer the case but it still lived in fear of Germany. Germany (or Prussia) had defeated it easily in 1871, and it was, in 1914, even more economically and militarily much stronger. However, France did have a large empire. France would have liked to regain the two provinces it had lost to Germany but it wasn't looking for a war to enable it to do so.

Britain

Britain was a strong economic power though Germany was now rivalling it. Britain had the world's largest empire and that was the source of its wealth and power. Britain had no particular interest in European affairs and tried to stay out of any disputes (a policy known as 'splendid isolation'), but it felt safest when no one country was too powerful and would get involved when the 'balance of power' in Europe was threatened, and it wouldn't accept a major power taking control of the Low Countries: Holland or Belgium, as this would make its own shores vulnerable. Its navy was very important to it, protecting its own shores as well as its empire, and it was very concerned when Germany started to build a fleet to rival its own.

Italy

Italy is not a major factor in explaining why a major war broke out in 1914, neither was it a significant military power, but it was an important European power nevertheless. It had ambitions to establish a Mediterranean empire which caused problems before 1914, and it did join the war in 1915 on the side of the entente powers.

Serbia

Task

A useful task to make use of this information would be to write two very different reports to the President of America. One would argue the case that Europe may well be heading for war. The other would argue that war is not likely.

This will get you to organise your thoughts into two very different viewpoints, using your knowledge of each of the countries in the process. It will make for a strong understanding of the state of Europe before you go onto to consider more specific factors.

It will be worth your effort!

Serbia is an important factor in any explanation of the First World War. It was Serb nationalism that repeatedly inflamed the Balkans, which had Austria-Hungary so worried, and which led to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in neighbouring Bosnia which Serbia felt rightfully belonged to it. It was also Serbia that encouraged Russian involvement in Balkan affairs.

The German policy of Weltpolitik

The key thing to consider:

Germany came to see itself as encircled by hostile powers: Russia to the East and Britain and France to the West. But to what degree was this Germany's own fault, the result of German foreign policy, i.e. Weltpolitik?

Weltpolitik

Weltpolitik means world policy. It had three strands to it:

- Germany wanted colonies, its "place in the sun", an empire like Britain and France benefited from
- It wanted to be the dominant economic and political power in central Europe
- And it wanted a powerful navy.

It was very much Kaiser Wilhelm II's policy though he had the support of many Germans, particularly industrialists and the middle class who would benefit financially. And it was argued that the working class would also benefit in that they would have more secure jobs. The Kaiser wanted Germany to become a world power, a power respected by other countries. This didn't mean that Germany wanted war or wanted to "rule the world". But it looked at Britain and felt that Britain's power and standing in the world, its prestige, was a result of its vast empire and its naval power. So Germany wanted the same. It wanted its "place in the sun". As far as central Europe was concerned well, that's where Germany was positioned so it was natural that it would seek to be the major economic force in Europe. In fact, it already was if you don't count Britain as a European power (which Britain didn't, it didn't really see itself as "European"). But Germany wanted to have this recognised with formal trade treaties, with Germany benefiting more than its trading partners.

As a result, Germany came into conflict with other powers in four ways:

- With Britain over its decision to build a navy to rival Britain's
- With France, and Britain, twice over Morocco
- With Russia over Constantinople
- With Russia again over its support of Austro-Hungarian policies in the Balkans

Use the framework below to help structure your notes (but remember that all the time, we are ultimately trying to explain why WW1 occurred and whether any countries should be held responsible.

| | Germany was itself to blame for its encirclement | Others were to blame | The degree to which tensions were increased |
|---|--|----------------------|---|
| Morocco | | | |
| The Naval Race | | | |
| German support for Austria-Hungary + Constantinople | | | |
| Your conclusion | | | |

Morocco

Morocco was an issue in which Germany, not once but twice, managed to turn a legitimate grievance into a public relations disaster and a humiliating diplomatic defeat.

Morocco was an independent country but a number of European countries as well as America had business interests there, and law and order was a problem in the country. France, which already controlled neighbouring Algeria, hoped for control. Spain had interests too. For its part, Britain had recognised French interests

and agreed to its likely partition between France and Spain. Germany was neither consulted nor informed of these negotiations.

Germany felt it was a matter over which it should make a stand. No decision of international importance should be made without Germany playing a full part. Germany felt there should be an "Open Door" policy in Morocco or, if France didn't want a German presence there, then a colony somewhere else would have to be given as compensation. They also saw in Morocco a means of testing the Entente Cordiale, the agreement Britain and France had reached on international matters.

So, in 1905 the German government asked the Kaiser to make a visit to Tangier, in Morocco. He rode through Tangier on a white charger, a gift from the Sultan, almost falling off the horse as he struggled to control it. It was only to be a symbolic visit but the Kaiser couldn't resist stirring things. He declared that Germany expected the rights it was entitled to in Morocco to be honoured. He also made it clear that Germany recognised Morocco's independence.

The upshot of the whole affair was an international conference held at Algeciras opening in January, 1906. Germany found itself isolated, supported only by Austria-Hungary and Morocco itself, and pitted against France, Britain, Russia and Spain as well as the minor powers present. It was agreed at the conference that France and Spain would share control of the customs and police forces, though France would play the dominant role. Germany would play a part in the international control of Moroccan finances, but that was all. The Entente Cordiale had held firm, indeed appeared strong. As a direct result of this first Moroccan crisis the British and French military held detailed talks about what would be required should Britain need to come to France's aid in a war (and that war would only be against Germany). The Franco-Russian alliance held too. Having made Morocco an issue, Germany had gained very little. The Kaiser was furious.

In February 1909 Morocco as an issue seemed closed when an agreement was signed in which Germany recognised France's 'special political interests' in exchange for a French promise to respect Germany's economic interests. Morocco's continued

independence was accepted by both sides. The whole affair seemed over.

Then, in May 1911 France, having informed and consulted with Germany beforehand, sent troops to Morocco's capital, Fez, to quell riots that were targeting foreigners.

But France had moved beyond the agreement made at the Algeciras conference in 1906 and the later agreement made with Germany in 1909 for France had moved determinedly to assert economic and political dominance over the country, regardless of Morocco's independence or the interests of other powers, not just Germany. Morocco was looking more and more like a French protectorate in everything but name. If Germany had handled the situation more diplomatically, there would have been international sympathy for Germany's concerns, but they didn't.

The German gunboat, *Panther*, was sent to Agadir, ostensibly to protect German citizens in the area. It was followed a few days later by a light cruiser, the *Berlin*.

Germany then demanded the whole of the French Congo as compensation for giving up all claims in Morocco. Once again, Europe was threatened by war. General von Moltke, head of the German army put his feelings in a letter to his wife in which he said that if Germany was not to stand firm then he would despair for Germany's future and would resign.

Moltke was to be a loud voice for war in the July Crisis of 1914, but in 1911 a compromise was reached: France would have a free hand, even a protectorate, in Morocco; whilst Germany would receive parts of the French Congo as well as other areas which were useful to the Cameroons (already German territory). However, the nationalist press in Germany made their feelings very clear, 'Have we become a generation of women?' one paper asked, and the Kaiser was targeted for personal blame. Such criticism could only have added to the pressure on the German government not to be seen to back down again and Germany strengthened both its army and its navy. Military talks between the British and the French were also held and naval talks started that would lead in 1913 to an agreement that whilst France would take the leading responsibility

in the Mediterranean, Britain would do likewise in the English Channel.

The Naval Race

Germany's determination to build a navy to rival Britain's was just about the worst thing it could do as far as Britain was concerned. Britain was an island, it had been a major sea-going nation for centuries, and it had the world's largest empire, an empire, as all schoolchildren knew, on which "the sun never set". The navy was vitally important to Britain, it protected the nation, the empire and its trade. It had the world's largest navy, much larger than Germany's, but it was spread around the world. Why did Germany, with relatively few colonies and no tradition as a sea power, need such a large navy? And why was it concentrated in the North Sea?

Admiral John Fisher, Britain's First Sea Lord, put the problem clearly, and how it changed how Britain viewed Germany. Germany, he concluded, was Britain's only likely enemy and Britain must face it with a fleet twice as strong as anything it could build.

The Naval Race and the two Moroccan crises had made Britain wake up to the German threat.

German support of Austria-Hungary and the issue of Constantinople

The crisis over Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina is examined in more detail below (see 'The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-9') but it needs to also be covered here. Austria-Hungary wanted to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina, i.e. add it to its empire. It had been given administrative control of the states but in 1907 wanted them incorporated into its empire. However, Serbia thought the two states should become a part of their kingdom, and Russia, which saw itself as the protector of all Slavs, would in any case want to have a say in any changes in the Balkans. The Austro-Hungarian and Russian foreign ministers came to an agreement whereby Austria-Hungary would annex Bosnia-Herzegovina whilst it would support Russia in its desire to at least gain more control over the

Straits. However, whilst Austria-Hungary announced its annexation, Britain and France opposed any changes to the agreements over the Straits. They also opposed the annexation but whilst Austria-Hungary gave the other powers a *fait accompli* by simply going ahead with it. But it was Germany that broke the deadlock when it demanded that Russia accept the annexation and end its support for Serbia. It didn't directly threaten war, but it left little room for doubt that war was the only alternative. Russia lost out and was also seen to have been prepared to betray Serb interests. It left Russia humiliated and extremely annoyed.

Wilhelm II's blundering foreign policy once more ruffled the feathers of all the other Great Powers, but Russia most of all when in 1913 he agreed with the Turks to send a senior German General, Otto Liman von Sanders, to command the German military mission in Constantinople. The Russians were furious - Constantinople and the Straits were so important to them - and talked of war and about seizing Ottoman ports in order to stop the appointment. A compromise was reached but even so, the whole affair only served to show how jittery the Great Powers were, and how easily anything in the Balkans can quickly escalate and risk war. It also brought suspicion of German motives within the Entente powers to a new level.

Events in the Balkans

Things to think about:

- How far did relations worsen between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, and between Austria-Hungary and Russia?
- How did events in the Balkans add to tensions between Germany and Russia?

To address the questions above. You might find it useful to put your notes in a framework like those below.

| | |
|---|---|
| Reasons for a worsening relationship between Austria-Hungary and Serbia | An evaluation of the relationship as 1914 began |
| | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Reasons for a worsening relationship between Austria-Hungary + Germany and Russia | An evaluation of the relationships as 1914 began |
| | |

The Eastern Crisis of 1875-8

The Eastern Crisis started in 1875 when, as a result of Turkish oppression in Bosnia-Herzegovina including taxes and labour services, the people revolted. The revolt spread to Bulgaria (then part of the Ottoman Empire) in 1876 and was supported by Serbia as well as Montenegro, turning the revolt into a Slav crusade against the Turks.

The Turks gained the upper hand, however, and Serbia asked the European powers to intervene. There was a temporary ceasefire but the Turkish conditions were considered too harsh and fighting continued. Russia then prepared to intervene militarily. To resolve the issue the Great Powers (though not Turkey) met in Constantinople in December, 1876. Bulgaria, Bosnia and

Herzegovina were all to be guaranteed self-rule by the Great Powers but Turkey refused to comply.

In the spring of 1877, with Serbia and Montenegro facing defeat and Bulgarians subjected to vicious reprisals at the hands of the Turks, and with 'Slavomania' spreading throughout Russia, Russia declared war on Turkey in April 1877.

Russia won the war and in the Treaty of San Stephano in March 1878, imposed severe terms on Turkey, reducing its empire to small unconnected territories. A greatly enlarged and self-governing Bulgaria was created (under Russian occupation for two years) though still tacitly under Ottoman suzerainty. The Turks were also obliged to recognise the independence of Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro.

However, Britain and France, and most of all, Austria-Hungary (which had originally agreed to the Russian war), were not prepared to accept such an increase in Russian influence in the region.

The Congress of Berlin reduced the size of Bulgaria and so, Russia's influence. What was more, Austria-Hungary was to administer Bosnia-Herzegovina (though, like Bulgaria, it remained nominally under Ottoman suzerainty). But at best, the Treaty of Berlin had only provided a temporary solution. By 1885 Bulgaria enlarged itself, but only after a war with Serbia, and then, in 1908-9 the Bosnian Crisis hit.

The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-9

Following, a trade dispute with Serbia, Austria-Hungary responded in 1908 by maneuvering to annex (incorporate into its empire) Bosnia and Herzegovina and the manner in which this was done raised tension not only between Austria-Hungary and Serbia but between Austria-Hungary and Russia and between Germany and Russia too. Bosnia-Herzegovina was a bitter issue for the Serbs. They felt it should be theirs. Also, it would make Serbia and Montenegro neighbours, a union could be on the cards, and with that Serbia would gain access to the Adriatic Sea.

The Austro-Hungarian and Russian Foreign Ministers (despite the fact that Russia was supposed to be looking after Serbian interests) struck a deal in August, 1908: Russia would agree to the annexation if Austria-Hungary agreed to a revision of the Straits Convention. The Straits are two narrow strips of water linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, splitting Constantinople (Istanbul) in two in the process and Russia desperately wanted control in order to secure trade and access for its warships.

But when Austria-Hungary announced its annexation, in Russia, both the press and the Duma (the Russian parliament), condemned the annexation of provinces populated by so many Slavs. Whilst in Europe, France was also unhappy with the annexation. And Britain did not support the proposed changes to the Straits agreement. Neither did Germany.

There was a call for an international conference. Austria-Hungary refused to give way though. The annexation would happen and there would be no international conference. There was a real threat of war with rumblings in Austria-Hungary, Serbia and Russia, even in Germany. Russia didn't want war but was being pressured into it, at home and by Serbia, but it finally backed down when Germany made it clear that war would be the only alternative, and that Germany would back Austria-Hungary.

Without Russian support, Serbia was forced to back down too. So, Austria-Hungary got its annexation, but Russia was incensed by the way in which it had been duped, and embarrassed because it had shown that it was prepared to ignore Serbian interests in the original deal. It was left humiliated, embittered and determined that it would not have to give way again. Serbia was left very bitter and, contrary to what it had promised, it redoubled its own maneuverings, agitating for a Greater Serbia. Extreme nationalist groups were formed and were not banned by the Serbian government. In 1911 the Union of Death movement was founded. Known as the 'Black Hand' it was committed to the liberation of all Serbs living under foreign rule by secret and terrorist means. In Sarajevo in 1914 the world would come to know of its existence.

The Balkan Wars

At the outset of the first Balkan War, Rumania, a much smaller country than today, had a population of seven million, Bulgaria a population of four million, Serbia of three million and Montenegro of only 250,000. The history of the region had made it a highly complex mix of nationalities: Albanians, Bulgarians, Croats, Macedonians, Serbs, Slavs, and Slovenes, that cut across such national boundaries that existed. Yet nationalism was the most important driving force for change in the region. It was a danger to the Ottoman Empire, known as the 'sick man' in Europe, and also to the Austro-Hungarian Empire for it was itself a multinational empire.

When in May, 1912, Bulgaria and Greece signed a treaty of alliance, a Balkan League was born. Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro were opposed to both Turkey and interference from the Great Powers, and on October 18th they declared war on Turkey. Turkey's forces were overrun and both Russia and Austria-Hungary made preparations in case a major war broke out. However, under pressure from the Great Powers, on December 3rd an armistice was signed by Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia (Greece remained technically still at war as Turkey wouldn't accept all its territorial gains).

The Great Powers continued to apply pressure and further war was avoided - just - and a peace conference was held which ended with the Treaty of London, signed on May 30th, 1913. All the territorial arrangements had been agreed amongst the Great Powers and then imposed on the Balkan states. Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia all gained territory, Bulgaria, much to the annoyance of the others gaining the most, and Albania became an independent state. Serbia and Greece were unhappy with what had been decided.

But for Austria-Hungary the result was still disastrous. Serbia was enlarged and, having proven its military strength (it had raised an army of some 200,000 men), it was emboldened. It would no doubt continue to press for an outlet to the Adriatic which meant acquiring Bosnia and Herzegovina first.

If Austria felt things couldn't get much worse, they were wrong. Serbia and Greece were unhappy at the size of Bulgaria's gains, Turkey too was of course unhappy (and remember, it was a treaty imposed by the Great Powers). There was a call for an immediate

revision of the treaty. Rumania, seeing the other Balkan states lining up against Bulgaria, now also got involved hoping for a share of the Bulgarian pie. The result was an immediate second Balkan war with Bulgaria the target for attacks, and in the ensuing Treaty of Bucharest signed on August 10th Bulgaria lost territory; Serbia, Greece and Rumania all gained, whilst Turkey regained a little territory.

With the Great Powers almost going to war, the European arms race moved into top gear with plans to enlarge all their armies. Austria-Hungary had most reason to be worried about change in the Balkans. It could live with an enlarged Bulgaria, but if Serbia gained territory (and Montenegro for that), then pressure would increase on the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia would gain influence in the region too. A growing number in Austria-Hungary's governments had reached the conclusion that only a head-to-head confrontation between themselves and Serbia would settle matters in the Balkans and enable Austria-Hungary to survive. The head of their army, von Hotzendorf, put the choice starkly to Franz Ferdinand: either Serbia be allowed to unite all Slavs in which case Austria-Hungary would be finished as a great power, or all Slavs, including Serbs, be incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian empire.

They were fully aware that any confrontation with Serbia would lead the Serbs to appeal to Russia for help, an appeal Russia would find very difficult to ignore. They hoped that German support would discourage Russian intervention. If it failed, so be it. But what would France and Britain do?

In Germany, meanwhile, Wilhelm summoned a War Council to discuss plans for a likely European war. Both the leader of his army, Moltke, and his navy, Tirpitz, were present. It was not a meeting to plan a war, but to ensure Germany was prepared should war break out. But Moltke did argue that Germany had a much better chance of winning a war before Russia's plans to improve its army were completed. Another worrying factor was that both Austria-Hungary and Russia had become accustomed to using mobilisation as a diplomatic tool.

So, we can see that issues in the Balkans were edging Austria-Hungary and Russia ever closer to a confrontation, and that

Germany, seeing the situation that was unfolding, was making plans for war too. But what of France and Britain?

The Alliances, the Arms Race and War Plans

Key Questions:

- What caused the arms race, including the Anglo-German naval race?
- What was the significance of the naval race between Britain and Germany?
- To what extent, and in what ways, did the Alliance System add to the tension amongst European powers?
- In what ways did the arms race make war more likely; in what ways did it make it less likely?

As for note-taking, there are a number of ways you should go about this. First, there is our first key question to address: What caused the arms race, including the Anglo-German naval race?

The notes you made above might be replicated to answer this question, but there is also the issue of “if my potential enemy is arming, so must I”.

| | |
|--|--|
| Hopes, fears and suspicions | |
| Weltpolitik in general | |
| The Moroccan crises | |
| Events in the Balkans | |
| “If my potential enemy is arming, so must I” | |

Next, our second key question: What was the significance of the naval race between Britain and Germany?

Here, you need to make sure you are clear about how it made Britain wake up to the idea that Germany was a threat, and how it drove Britain towards the Triple Entente. But you should also consider how Germany reacted towards Britain.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| How Britain reacted towards Germany | How Germany reacted towards Britain |
| | |

Then we need to address: To what extent, and in what ways, did the Alliance System add to the tension amongst European powers?

Focus on the Balkans, but use ‘Hopes, fears and suspicions’, ‘Weltpolitik’ as well as ‘Events in the Balkans’ to link the way the powers perceived themselves and their enemies to their need for allies.

| | Links to the Triple Alliance | Links to the Triple Entente |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Hopes, fears and suspicions | | |
| Weltpolitik | | |
| Events in the Balkans | | |

Finally, our last key question: In what ways did the arms race make war more likely; in what ways did it make it less likely?

Here, you should give some thought on the one hand to how the arms race increased tension, how it might have tempted Germany to risk war, and how mobilisation needs in particular might have led to the decision to go to war in 1914; but also think about the notion of a balance of power as a deterrent to war.

| | |
|---|--|
| War was more likely because the alliances, the arms race and the war plans increased tension. | <i>Treat the statements to your left as the opening sentence of a paragraph in which you support the point being made.</i> |
| It tempted Germany to risk war. | |
| And because it added to the pressure to | |

| | |
|--|--|
| mobilise quickly. | |
| However, it could be argued that war was less likely because the arms race created a balance of power. | |
| <i>Now present your conclusion</i> | |

The Alliances

The hopes, the fears and the suspicions of Europe's powers, fuelled by Germany's policy of Weltpolitik and events in the Balkans, led to two alliance blocs that, by 1907, saw Germany, Austria-Hungary and, possibly, Italy, lined up against Russia, France and Britain.

Countries made alliances out of fear of being isolated. They realised that they had rivals or enemies but if those enemies were shared by other countries, an alliance gave a degree of security. The alliances were all defensive meaning that support was only offered if an ally was attacked. But they led to military planning (and that meant attacking the enemy), including plans for mobilisation.

The Triple Alliance can be seen as a natural alliance: Germany and Austria-Hungary both Germanic (at least Austria was) and Germany and Italy both new powers with Prussia helping Italy in its quest to unite. The Triple Entente, however, shows the sense of nervousness in Europe for it brought democratic France together with autocratic Russia, then Britain and France, colonial rivals and then Britain and Russia, again colonial rivals and again, a democracy allied with an autocracy.

The alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary was very important because it potentially brought Germany into Balkan conflicts in support of Austria-Hungary, and indeed it did. For Germany, however, it felt it had gained a firm ally as it embarked on its policy of Weltpolitik. The fact that France had allied itself to Russia was also very important. For, though like Germany, it would feel more secure for having an ally, again like Germany, it, too, could be dragged into a Balkan crisis in support of Russia. What is more, the terms of the treaty included French loans for railways

which France made sure were spent on lines that would help Russia mobilise on its western borders.

The Franco-Russian Alliance, much as it may have been a defensive alliance, had to be seen as a threat to Germany. A hostile, or at least potentially hostile, power to its east and to its west. What is more, with Germany's failure to reach an agreement with Britain, Germany was wholly reliant on Austria-Hungary (Italy's support could never be relied on and Germany knew that) and it led Germany to see itself, not Britain and not France any longer, as almost isolated and encircled by hostile powers. It was a significant turning-point.

In 1894 only Britain was outside the system of alliances and, in truth, it never got fully involved (ententes and agreements were not quite the same as alliances). As the nineteenth century was coming to an end, Britain was actually more worried about France and Russia and leaned towards some sort of working relationship with Germany but the naval race (and then the Moroccan crises) drew Britain towards first France, and then Russia, but it never committed itself to military support.

The essential terms of the different alliances are given below.

| The Alliances |
|---|
| <p>The Dual Alliance, 1879</p> <p>Between Germany and Austria-Hungary.</p> <p>If either country was attacked by Russia, the other would come to its aid. If either was attacked by any other country, then the other power would at least be neutral if not lend assistance. If Russia supported another country that attacked either power, then the partner would come to its aid.</p> <p>Russia was clearly seen as the most likely threat by each power.</p> |

The Triple Alliance, 1882

Between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.

If Italy was attacked by France, Germany and Austria-Hungary would come to its aid. If Germany was attacked by France, Italy would come to its aid.

If any one or two members of the alliance were attacked by two or more Great Powers, then the member(s) of the alliance not involved would lend their support.

If any one of the allies felt it necessary to declare war on another Great Power, then the other members would at least provide benevolent neutrality (offering support short of military support).

Again, potential enemies were identified.

From 1902 Germany and Austria-Hungary had little faith in Italy's reliability. This was largely because of the Franco-Italian agreement made in that year.

The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1894

Russia would support France if it was attacked by Germany, or if Italy attacked France with German support.

In return, France agreed to support Russia if Germany, or Austria-Hungary supported by Germany, attacked it.

The alliance was clearly in response to the Triple Alliance and so, represented an escalation of the fear and mistrust.

The Franco-Italian agreement in 1902

Italy assured France that it would remain neutral in the event of France being attacked or by France declaring war 'as the result of direct provocation'.

The 'Entente Cordiale', 1904

Between France and Britain.

The treaty settled the colonial differences between the two powers, notably French interests in Morocco and British interests in Egypt.

This was not an alliance but it did open the way for further negotiations and in January 1906 military and naval discussions began.

The nearest to any formal agreement was not made until November 1912 when Britain agreed to consultations should either country be threatened with attack, but Britain refused to guarantee support for France in the event of a German attack.

A series of agreements between Britain and Russia in 1907

As with the 'Entente Cordiale', it settled colonial disputes and opened the possibility of cooperation.

It essentially created a 'Triple Entente'.

So, from 1907 Europe was divided into equally suspicious, equally anxious camps. The Triple Alliance, created a need for Russia and France, both left feeling vulnerable, to form their own alliance, and for Britain, suddenly feeling vulnerable too, to join them. This, in turn, left Germany feeling encircled. But it was essential that each alliance held firm. So, Germany became ever more tied to Austria-Hungary, and France to Russia. This meant that the Balkans had a real potential to draw them all in. Only Britain was left with any flexibility.

The Arms Race

The Kaiser had long been in love with boats. As a young boy he was in awe when visiting Portsmouth and Plymouth, and as a young man he could not help but jealously admire the British navy when he represented his family at the naval review which was a highlight of Queen Victoria's Gold Jubilee in 1887. He could not have been more pleased when Queen Victoria made him an honorary admiral of the British navy after his accession to the throne. He repeatedly wore the uniform that went with the honorary title and sent his grandmother a portrait of himself in it.

But it was the 'Naval Race' between Britain and Germany that was to be the most significant example of the arms race.

Germany looked at Britain and its empire and wanted the same. A large naval fleet would be a part of that dream. It was a means to gain world power status, something Wilhelm craved. That is why the symbolic power of the 'ships of the line' or 'capital ships' as they were called - big armoured battleships and heavily armoured cruisers - were more important to the Kaiser than the more practical fast cruisers, torpedo boats and submarines. But also because Alfred Tirpitz, Secretary of State for the German Navy from 1897, believed that, if it came to war between Germany and Britain, there would be a battle somewhere in the North Sea, and it would be decisive. A third factor behind the German decision to build a powerful navy was that they felt it was bound to bring Britain to seek an alliance with Germany, and this time Germany would be in a position of strength when its terms were negotiated. It was a big decision though, because it not only meant a commitment to developing the new technology behind the dreadnought (a revolutionary new kind of battleship - see below) and all the costs that entailed, but it meant widening the Kiel Canal that linked the relatively safe ports on Germany's Baltic coast with those on the North Sea, and it also meant sacrificing money for the army at a time when Russia was planning to expand its army.

For Britain, however, naval power was vital if its world empire as well as its own shores were to be protected. The historian, Margaret Macmillan, expressed it perfectly when she described the navy as being at one and the same time, Britain's main means of defence, its means of reaching out to the wider world as well as its means of projecting strength. Any challenge to its naval supremacy, therefore, had to be met. What is more, Britain raised the stakes

when, in February 1906, the first dreadnought, HMS *Dreadnought*, was launched, making virtually obsolete any other capital ship. This was a new super battleship; bigger, with greater fire power and heavier armoured shielding than any ship built before, yet, with the new turbine engines, it was very fast. Britain had well and truly joined Germany in a naval race. The German's however, were just as determined to sustain their challenge. If there was a "race", as far as the Kaiser was concerned, it was Britain's fault. Why shouldn't Germany have a powerful navy?

| The Anglo-German Naval Race | |
|--|---|
| German initiatives | British responses |
| The first Navy Law in 1898 Identified the types and number of ships required so that by 1904 there would be a flagship, 18 battleships, 8 armoured cruisers, 12 large and 30 light cruisers, plus 8 armoured coastal ships. This meant adding twelve battleships to an existing fleet of seven. | |
| The second Navy Law in 1900 Doubled the number of battleships from 19 to 38 to be constructed over 17 years so that by 1917 there would be 2 flagships, 36 battleships, 20 armoured cruisers and 38 light cruisers. | 1903 A new naval base at Rosyth was built and Parliament approved plans for a new North Sea fleet. |
| The third Navy Law in 1906 Increased the tonnage of the ships as well as adding six battleships (the last pre-Dreadnought ships) to the annual programme. It was later amended to six armoured cruisers. It also provided for the widening of the Kiel Canal to enable ships of Dreadnought size to pass through. | 1906 The first Dreadnought was launched. |
| In 1908, an amendment to the second Navy Law provided for six Dreadnoughts, two per year, as well as submarines. | 1909 Alarmed at the size of the projected German fleet (Balfour forecasted thirteen German Dreadnoughts to Britain's twelve by 1911), Britain announced the building of eight Dreadnoughts instead of three. |
| The fourth Navy Law in 1912 added three more Dreadnoughts to | 1912 A Franco-Russian naval convention |

| | |
|---|---|
| be built each year so that there would be a fleet flagship and 3 squadrons of 8 battleships, 8 battlecruisers and 18 light cruisers | is agreed and too, an Anglo-French agreement. British ships will be transferred from the Mediterranean to the North Sea and French ships from Brest to the Mediterranean, so enabling both countries to concentrate their forces. |
|---|---|

*I found it very difficult to reach a clear conclusion to the German Navy Laws as every source I used differed to the others. In all honesty, this is simply the best conclusion I could reach.

| The size of the respective fleets in 1914 | | |
|---|---------|---------|
| | Germany | Britain |
| Pre-Dreadnought Battleships | 22 | 40 |
| Dreadnoughts | 15 | 22+13 |
| Battlecruisers | 4+3 | 9+1 |
| Armoured Cruisers | 8 | 34 |
| Light cruisers, etc | 16 | 20 |
| Other Cruisers | 17 | 67 |
| Destroyers | 90 | 221 |
| Torpedo boats | 115 | 109 |
| Submarines | 31 | 73 |
| Coastal Defence Ships | 8 | |

+ figures indicate ships being built in 1914

So, there was a race, and it was won by Britain. It was a critical factor in explaining Britain's estrangement from Germany and its move towards the Triple Entente. Britain simply could not accept a naval rival that threatened not only its empire but its own shores as well.

As for the armies of Europe, three things need to be considered:

- the size of the standing army (that is the permanent peace-time army) and the size of the reserves, and this means we have to consider the length and type of military service,
- weaponry,
- and planning, which includes plans for mobilisation.

So, what was the state of Europe's different armies in 1914?

Spending on the Austro-Hungarian army was the lowest of all the Great Powers, less than half that of Russia's, its greatest rival.

Reforms were in place, but would not be completed until 1916. What is more, its railway lines were inadequate for an efficient mobilisation. Still, at the time of the Bosnian crisis in 1908-9, Austria-Hungary's army stood at 700,000 men and it was at least bigger and better equipped than Serbia's army. And in 1914, a new army bill was passed that would increase the size of its army (though not to the same extent as Russia).

Germany's army, in sharp contrast, was widely considered to be the best trained in the world, and with the best officers too. The changes to the size of Germany's standing army and its system of military service meant that in 1897 it had a standing army of 545,000 men, and an additional reserve of 3.4 million. The Military Law of 1912 brought about the biggest peace time increase of the German army, it meant that the size of the standing army would be increased to 665,000, with plans to increase it further to 750,000, an overall increase of more than 30%. But no sooner had the bill passed the Reichstag than the Army wanted more increases, as well as the formation of special units such as for machine guns. After the War Council at the end of 1912 they got what they wanted so that the size of the standing army in 1914 stood at 890,000 men.

By the time of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913 Russia's defence budget was more than double that of Austria-Hungary. The army's command system was reorganised and a more efficient system for mobilisation put in place. Training was improved and equipment updated. Also, dedicated units were formed, such as for field artillery, an area in which Russia set out to match Germany's firepower. The number of recruits was increased, too. Russia also responded to Germany's last pre-war Army Law by a programme of its own, the Great Programme of 1913, which, though too late to have a major impact on Russia's war effort (it was designed to last ten years), gave an immediate increase to the Russian army of 200,000 men. It had also decided to extend the length of military service which had the effect of adding another 270,000 to its standing army. So that in 1914 Russia could mobilise more than three million men. However, for all the improvements, there were still problems with communications and supplies over what would be a huge gap between the two fronts. Russia would have to attack both Austria-Hungary in the south and Germany in the north before it had fully mobilised, and when its enemies would have already done so.

The morale and prestige of the French army was at an all-time low. The army was poorly led, unwilling to adopt new ideas, new technology, different tactics. The debate about artillery was the best example. The French were unsure of the value of artillery. What was best: light field artillery or heavy artillery? And how to use it: to soften up the enemy before an attack or during the attack in support of its advancing troops? In the end they opted for field artillery, better in an offensive war. Consequently, they were behind Germany in the number of heavy guns at their disposal. Not until 1911 did things begin to change. When Germany introduced its plans to increase the size of its army in 1912, France responded by lengthening military service from two years to three in 1913. This increased the number of men France would have to face Germany to 700,000.

Britain, as an island, had never had need of a large standing army, and it was alone amongst the Great Powers in not resorting to military service to man its army and keep a reserve. The navy was the means by which it would be protected. This was enough expense, however, and never more so than as a result of the great naval race with Germany, and Britain did not look for reasons to spend on its army too. Indeed, the army only received half of what the navy did from the defence budget. And it was the naval race, with its cutting-edge technology, that explains why 40% of the overall British budget went on defence. The confidence of the British army took a knock when it struggled to overcome the two small Afrikaner republics in the Boer War and it was discovered that 60% of British volunteers were rejected because they were unfit to serve.

After the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, everyone's defence commitments increased. Austria-Hungary, Russia, Germany and France all looked to build up the size of their armed forces. Britain, too, though its focus was still on its navy. But it wasn't just the Great Powers. Serbia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, and in Europe, Belgium too, were increasing the size of their armies. Germany and Russia were the big spenders in the years before the war. Germany's spending on defence went from £88 million in 1911 to £118 million in 1913, whilst Russia's went from £74 million to £111 million.

| Numbers mobilised in 1914 | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| Austria-Hungary | Germany | Russia | France | Britain |
| 3 million | 4.15 million | 4.4 million | 3.5 million + | 711,000 including troops from the Empire |

All the powers claimed that they were strengthening their armies only in order to defend themselves; but at the same time what they were doing could be seen as a very real threat to their enemies. They could be seen as a deterrent but they also undoubtedly raised the tension. They also increased the temptation to go to war whilst an advantage was held, because that advantage could soon be lost, or even worse, swing in the enemy's favour. What was more, the belief that mobilisation couldn't be delayed for long before the "other side" gained too big an advantage only added to the level of tension in times of crisis.

War Plans

The alliances may have been defensive but we have noted that they identified the enemy. What is more, the war plans were all offensive, i.e. they all went on the attack. They identified the preferred battlefields, the means to get there as quickly as possible and the way in which it was intended the battles would play out.

Germany's war plan, the most famous of all the war plans, also the most notorious and certainly the one invoking most debate, was the work of the head of the German army between 1891 and 1905, General Alfred von Schlieffen, though it was repeatedly modified. The essence of the Schlieffen Plan was to use the distinct majority of Germany's forces against the French, with the remaining forces used to defend Germany's borders with Russia. The aim was to defeat France in just forty days of fighting. With France defeated, Germany could then turn its full attention to Russia. But to defeat France so quickly the bulk of the German army would need to bypass the French defences and go through Belgium, a neutral

country, its neutrality protected by an international treaty that Germany (or Prussia) had signed.

The Russian plan, Plan 19A, finalised in February, 1912, put Russia on the offensive on every front: against Austria-Hungary, against Germany and also included an assault to gain control of the Straits.

The French plan, Plan 17, was to hold the German offensive east of Liege and up to northern Lorraine, and instigate its own offensive on its north-eastern border.

As for British plans, such as any existed, Britain anticipated sending about 150,000 men to support France: six infantry divisions and two brigades of cavalry.

Conclusion

So, in 1914 alliances had been made, armies had been strengthened and plans had been made. There was not a plan to start a war though as we noted in 'Events in the Balkans', in the War Council that the German Kaiser had called as a result of the Balkan Wars, Moltke, the head of the German army, had advised that Germany would have a better chance of winning a war before Russia's plans to improve its army's strength had been completed. Some historians look at this period as one of international anarchy, a period where the norms of international order - diplomacy, negotiation and compromise - seemed to have broken down, replaced by anarchy, i.e. without rules, without a sense of order, events and decision-makers seemed to be out of control.

The Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the July Crisis

The July Crisis actually began in June with the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand on June 28th, 1914 and ended on August 6th when Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia, but most of what unfolded happened in July and so 'the July Crisis' is what historians have named it.

There are two sets of questions for you to consider. The first set consider only military factors:

- Who mobilised first?
- Who declared war first?
- Which major power first declared war on another major power?

The second set of questions still consider military factors but also consider wider factors:

- What responsibility does Germany have?
- Would you say Germany should be blamed?
- What responsibility do other countries have?
- What's the difference between responsibility and blame?

The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was visiting Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, along with his wife, Sophie. He had gone to Bosnia to watch manoeuvres by Austro-Hungarian forces (manoeuvres for a possible attack on Serbia). As Bosnia had only recently and controversially been annexed by Austria-Hungary when Serbia thought, by rights, it should become part of a Greater Serbia, it was a provocative act. But that they were taking place on Serbia's greatest national day, honouring their patron saint, Saint Vitus, and also the day that they honoured the fallen Serbs in their greatest defeat at the hands of the Turks in the Battle of Kosovo on 28th June, 1389, it was extremely provocative. For it was the defeat that had ended Serbian independence at the time.

In Bosnia a group of young Bosnian patriots, passionately opposed to Austro-Hungarian control of Bosnia, planned to use the

archduke's visit to further their nationalist cause. They were passionate nationalists, idealists, inspired by Serbian victories in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, and committed to the cause of freeing Bosnia from Austro-Hungarian rule. They, and other nationalists, had the support of members of the Serb government (though not the government itself) as well as its military which provided both arms and money wherever it might be put to use in opposing Austrian influence in the region. The young Bosnian nationalists had made their decision to try and assassinate the archduke in Sarajevo. They were provided with six bombs and four revolvers by a sympathetic general in the Serbian army and they secretly crossed the Serb-Bosnian border with the help of Serbian officials.

The imperial couple began their visit to Sarajevo in an open touring car. There were seven conspirators in total positioned among the crowds that had gathered along their route. One of them hurled a bomb at the archduke's car but it exploded under the following car and some of the passengers were wounded. The visit proceeded as planned until the archduke decided to visit the wounded at the hospital where they had been taken. The cars in front of the imperial couple took a wrong turning and their car followed until, realising the mistake, the governor of Sarajevo, ordered the driver to stop and head back onto the right route. It was at this point that Gavrilo Princip, one of the conspirators, saw them, stepped up on the running board and shot and killed the archduke and the duchess.

It was, then, an accident of history. Bad luck. The first assassination attempt had failed. The second, wouldn't have happened if the archduke hadn't have decided to visit the injured in hospital, and if the car hadn't have stopped, and if the young Princip (he was just nineteen years old) hadn't been drinking in a café when it passed before stopping.

But the assassination led to a chain of decisions that only ended when all the great European powers – Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France and Britain – were at war.

Although Princip was a Bosnian it was known that Serbs were behind the Black Hand, the secret organisation to which he belonged.

Austria-Hungary's first move was to make sure of Germany's support. On July 4th it sent a special envoy to Berlin and on July 5th both the Kaiser, Wilhelm II, and the German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, gave them their unconditional support, Germany's infamous blank cheque. Bethmann-Hollweg gave a clear message, saying that Austria must judge how best to respond but that, whatever it decided, Germany would back it.

The Kaiser urged speedy action. To avoid a general war, Austria-Hungary had to act quickly, and it had to make sure that it was Serbia that would be blamed for hostilities breaking out. Still, it was not until July 23rd that Austria-Hungary's ultimatum was sent to Serbia.

Such is its significance that its terms need to be spelt out:

- The Serbian government was accused of allowing criminal activities to take place.
- It demanded an end to these activities,
- that nationalist government officials or officers in the Serbian army that Austria-Hungary named should be dismissed,
- that nationalist societies be dissolved,
- and that nationalist newspapers be closed and that the curriculum in schools get rid of anything that could be construed as anti-Austro-Hungarian propaganda.
- The Serbian king would be required to issue a public statement that Serbia would no longer promote a Greater Serbia.
- It demanded that Serbia agree to Austro-Hungarian involvement in suppressing subversion within Serbia's border,
- and Austro-Hungarian involvement in an investigation and trial of Serbian conspirators responsible for the assassination.
- To ensure the demands were carried out, Austria-Hungary would be permitted to establish a special agency in Belgrade.
- Serbia was given forty-eight hours to reply.

The other powers were shocked by the severity of Austria-Hungary's ultimatum. Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, described it as 'the most formidable [state] document' he had ever seen.

The deadline for a response was 6pm, July 25th. The first thing they did was to ask for Russian support. Though they also made

preparations for the country's defence. Austria-Hungary was then asked for more time for Serbia to respond, but they refused. On the day of the deadline Russia informed the Serbs that it would 'go to the limit' to support them which must have encouraged the Serbs in finalising their response. Over the weekend of July 25th-26th, German spies reported that preparations were underway for Russian mobilisation. Serbia's response tried to show sympathy to Austria-Hungary but they couldn't accept Austro-Hungarian involvement in the investigation into the assassination.

On July 28th Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia but what kind of war was it to be? A localised war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia alone, or a general war involving the other major European powers?

On July 29th Russia did mobilise, ignoring German demands to stop. Government ministers, diplomats and the royal families of Europe (they were related to each other) were making telephone calls, sending telegrams in attempts to either reach a compromise or bully their foes into backing down. On July 31st Germany made the decision to mobilise. An ultimatum was sent to Russia to stop its mobilisation within twelve hours. The Germans also wanted France to declare its neutrality within eighteen hours, and as proof France was to hand over key frontier fortresses.

This was the army that was most feared. The army with the Schlieffen Plan, to fight on two fronts. A plan to attack France by marching through Belgium and defeat it in just four weeks. A plan that required a speed of mobilisation second to none. Once underway it was very unlikely that it would be halted.

On August 1st, with no reply from the Russian, the Kaiser ordered the mobilisation of Germany's forces. France ordered the mobilisation of their troops too.

On August 2nd the French started their mobilisation. The same day, Russian troops crossed into Germany and German troops marched into Luxembourg, like Belgium, neutral, and like Belgium, its neutrality guaranteed by the major powers, Germany included. Germany demanded that Belgium allow its troops free passage through its country but it refused. The Belgian king wrote to George V asking for British support.

On the evening of August 3rd Germany declared war on France. The excuse, totally without evidence, was that French forces had advanced into Alsace and French planes had dropped bombs.

On August 4th, Britain gave Germany an ultimatum, that it either promised to respect Belgian neutrality or at 11pm that evening (midnight, German time), Britain would declare war. When the deadline duly passed without a response from Germany, Britain finally entered the war. German troops were already in Belgium.

A bitter irony was that it wasn't until August 6th that Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia. So, not until the rest of Europe was at war, did the two powers that had for decades contested the Balkans find themselves at war with each other.

At this point, there are two things that you need to be clear about. The first, just what is meant by mobilisation. It is the process of getting a country's troops, equipment and supplies to the location at which it plans to fight the enemy. It is not, in itself, a declaration of war. However, it puts those troops, and that country, at an advantage and, in reality, compels its enemy to also mobilise. Still, there is another factor to consider and that is how quickly countries were able to mobilise. Germany was the fastest, then France. Austria-Hungary would be much slower and Russia, with its vast distances, slowest of all (though not as slow as was expected). Britain, of course, had to get its troops to ports and then across the English Channel to France.

The second, the difference between responsibility and blame. It might be useful if you thought of responsibility as mistaken actions or errors of judgment; whereas blame would be the result of deliberate actions taken fully aware of the consequences.

With these two things clear in your head, your responses to the questions set at the beginning of this section, might be usefully placed in a framework like the one below

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Who mobilised first? | <i>These answers might only require a simple sentence but you might want to add a sentence or two to indicate how significant you think each answer is.</i> |
| Who declared war first? | |
| Which major power first | |

| | |
|---|--|
| declared war on another major power? | |
| What responsibility does Germany have? | <i>These answers require you to evaluate the degree of responsibility of each of the powers with adjectives like “extremely” or “hardly”. But you should also provide evidence to support your judgment.</i> |
| Would you say Germany should be blamed? | <i>If you think there is a case for German blame, explain why; if not, explain why.</i> |
| What responsibility does Austria-Hungary have? | |
| What responsibility does Serbia have? | |
| What responsibility does Russia have? | |
| What responsibility does France have? | |
| What responsibility does Britain have? | |
| What’s the difference between responsibility and blame? | <i>I have given you a way to distinguish between responsibility and blame, here you could give examples from the evidence you have provided above.</i> |

Setting the July Crisis in Context

I think you can take it as a given that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand alone would not have caused a general war. It was, however, clearly the trigger for a general European war and if the archduke hadn’t been assassinated in June, 1914 then there would not have been a general war in 1914.

That, then, leaves us questioning how significant was his assassination and the resulting July Crisis in comparison with other factors. To answer that, we need to link it to those other factors: Weltpolitik, events in the Balkans, the alliance system, and the arms race.

The framework below will help you:

| | |
|--|--|
| Why did Austria-Hungary feel it had to resolve the issue with Serbia once and for all? | <i>You have to go back and consider the multi-national nature of the Austro-Hungarian empire and its relationship with Serbia, the likelihood that the Ottoman Empire was about to collapse, and Austria-Hungary’s rivalry with Russia in the Balkans.</i> |
|--|--|

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Why did Germany feel it had to support Austria-Hungary no matter the consequence, and give its blank cheque?</p> | <p><i>Here you have to go back and think about the consequences of Germany's policy of Weltpolitik, particularly the feeling in Germany that it was encircled by hostile powers. Did Russia feel it had to support its only secure ally? Though Russia's increasing military power was also a factor.</i></p> |
| <p>Why did Russia feel it had to support Serbia?</p> | <p><i>With Russia you need to look at events in the Balkans. Why did Russia feel that enough was enough?</i></p> |
| <p>Why did France support Russia?</p> | <p><i>With France you should consider the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany and France's fear that its neighbor was only getting stronger.</i></p> |
| <p>Why did Britain enter the war?</p> | <p><i>With Britain you need to consider Britain's long-held policy of maintaining a balance of power in Europe and its determination to keep Holland and Belgium free from dominant powers. And the increasing suspicion, a result of Weltpolitik and in particular Germany's naval race with Britain, that Germany was a threat.</i></p> |

The debate about blame

Article 231, the infamous “Guilt Clause”, of the Treaty of Versailles left no doubt as to who was to blame:

‘The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.’

Article 177 of the treaty of St Germain read exactly the same but with “Austria” substituted for “Germany”.

Wilhelm, as German Kaiser, was singled out for personal blame, ‘for the supreme offence against international morality and the sanctity of treaties’. There were attempts to bring Wilhelm to account in an international trial but the Dutch (he had fled to Holland on abdicating the German throne) refused to hand him over.

Before the war had started, Wilhelm was very clear as to where he thought the blame lay. On July 30th, 1914 he received a telegram from his ambassador in St Petersburg informing him that the Russian mobilisation would go ahead, no matter the consequences. His response was to throw the blame firmly on the Entente powers who were using the crisis, he claimed, as an excuse for war in order to destroy both Germany and Austria-Hungary.

He blamed England most of all, and both Edward VII and George V personally. And he talked of the ‘famous encirclement.’

But what about you? If you are anything like me, you will find allotting blame or responsibility a very difficult task. It is, after all, one of the most complex and controversial issues in history. And it might not be a matter of looking at what different countries did, it might not be a matter of “responsibility” or “blame”, the cause may lie in the events.

You need to weigh up the degree to which you think the cause lies essentially in the events – Weltpolitik, including the Moroccan

crises, the different Balkan crises, or the build-up of alliances and the arms race, particularly the Anglo-German naval race – that unfolded prior to 1914 or in the July Crisis itself.

And then, the extent to which you blame Austria-Hungary,

So, two major tasks to begin with:

1. Consider each event or factor – Weltpolitik, including the Moroccan crises, the different Balkan crises, the build-up of alliances and the arms race, particularly the Anglo-German naval race, and the July Crisis – and evaluate the significance in your point of view. An

Do make sure to include evidence from your notes or your reading to support each factor. Note, the best work will make links to the other factors where appropriate.

2. Now, for the two most important factors in your judgment, write an argument for both (a) German blame and (b) shared responsibility, and add a conclusion.

Again, make sure to include evidence from your notes or your reading to support them. You might also use evidence that challenges the viewpoint, but say why you don't find it convincing enough. And again, note the best work will make links to the other factors where appropriate.

Your conclusion, if you so wish, could take the middle ground, i.e. that Germany was mostly to blame but that responsibility lay elsewhere too. But always justify your conclusions.

afterthought

At his trial, Gavrilo Princip declared himself to be a Yugoslav nationalist, aiming to unify all Slavs and make them free from Austria. Adding the Archduke Ferdinand had to be assassinated as he stood in the way of unification.

What was the war like?

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Reasons for hating Germans | Whether hate of Germans was justified |
| | <i>Again, look ahead and think about the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Was it impossible to treat Germany more fairly?</i> |

For me, other than the testimonies of WW1 veterans, Jack Beatty best sums up the horror of WW1 in his book, 'The Lost History of 1914' when he describes the fear soldiers experienced. Fear of the death they might face: by sniper, by gas or by drowning in mud, amongst other equally horrific ways. But also fear of what the experience might do to them: drive them mad, drive them to suicide or show them as cowards.

The experience of war was certainly different from what so many had expected.

The dominant and lasting image of WW1 is that of trench warfare as both sides literally dug in along the length of the Western Front. The trenches extended from the Belgium coast to the Swiss border.

Life was never comfortable on the front line at least and, in reality, some trenches were little more than water-filled holes in a sea of mud. At their most substantial, however, which would become the norm, a system of trenches developed: the front line, a second support line and often a third, for reserves, supplies and casualty stations. These would be connected by communication trenches.

Soldiers wouldn't spend their whole time on front line but would rotate between the three trenches as well as take regular leave. On average they would spend 7-10 days in the front line trench. However, in the front line and even in the reserve trenches, soldiers faced the constant threat of death from snipers, gas, shells or bombs.

Night patrols into 'No-Man's land', the gap between the two sets of trenches, would also be deployed to carry out repairs to the barbed wire that protected their trenches from frontal assaults or else to

cut the enemy's wire if an attack was planned, to spy on the enemy, seize prisoners for interrogation and intelligence gathering, or else to recover wounded as well as the dead after an attack. These night patrols were always very dangerous and resulted in heavy casualties.

The site of death, the smell of death, must have been profoundly traumatic. I have no wish at all to sensationalise but it was simply the reality of life on the front line that men could be splattered by the brains of a comrade, or hit by a flying limb. The site of rats crawling in and out and feasting on the dead bodies of friend and foe. The stench of rotting flesh, human and horses. These were not unusual experiences.

Roland Leighton, a friend of Vera Brittain's brother to whom she would become engaged to before he set off to war (Vera Brittain wrote the best-selling, autobiographical *Testament of Youth*), wrote to her very soon after joining the front, telling her of the horrors he had already seen. He had already concluded that too great a price had been paid in human lives to make any victory hollow.

The artillery would so destroy the human body, and if it didn't it could destroy the corpses of the dead, that hundreds of thousands of the dead would have 'no known grave.' And the living were left with the memory that their loved one's had been lost without trace.

The daily dangers, and I'm not talking about the mass attacks but routine life in the trenches, were real, very real. But the daily grind of surviving in miserable conditions - the mud, the water, the cold or else the sun, the lice and the rats, and the constant lack of sleep - also took a toll on men's morale. For example, there was trench feet and trench fever. Lice bred in the men's uniforms burying themselves in the stitching where they couldn't be got at. Lice fed twelve times a day and laid at least five eggs a day. The incessant itching drove men mad and their scratching led to bleeding sores, infections and much worse: typhus could also be contracted. Trench feet was a result of the wet constantly seeping into soldier's boots. In the worst cases toes nearly rotted off. With trench fever a very high temperature was accompanied by diarrhoea, leaving men weak and listless. And there was mud. Mud that could drown a man and, if not suck his body under, suck his morale.

Psychological disorder in different degrees was also a common consequence of the daily trauma men faced whilst in the trenches. 'Shell-shock', a psychological disorder from the terror of bombardments, but also from deafening gun fire, lack of sleep, the loss of comrades who had become close friends, gruesome sights and the stress of living in constant danger, was something that many men suffered from. By the end of the war, as many as 80,000 officers and men had been invalided out of the British army as a result of 'shell-shock'. Men returned home from the war displaying a violent nature that wasn't a part of their character before the war, or else unable to re-build relationships with their wives and children.

Daily life in the trenches was bad, very bad, but the tactic of the frontal mass attack used to dislodge the enemy from their trenches, given that it was used over and over again by both sides, beggars belief. Enormous bombardments that did insufficient damage to the enemy lines but turned no-man's land between the opposing lines into a desolate waste of mud with shell holes the only form of cover, preceded the attacks. The infantry would then charge toward the enemy defences even, under order, walk towards them, often carrying a heavy pack and armed with only a single shot rifle, a bayonet and grenades. They would be held up before the enemy trenches by barbed wire and as they tried to find a way through it, they were mowed down in their tens of thousands, by machine guns. Many survived the experience of "going over the top" only by resorting to the psychological armour that such horrific deaths happened to others but not "me".

It is also important to understand how war brutalizes those in the heart of it, taking away their moral code, their sense of right and wrong. The sheer terror of warfare, witnessing the most brutal deaths: the body wriggling on barbed wire as machine gun fire tears into it, the head of your best friend smashed by a snipers bullet, brains splattering over you if you are standing next to him, or the cries of agony as a comrade lies dying in no man's land from an artillery shrapnel that has blown his leg off. It turns a civilized man into a beast that only feels hatred for the enemy and lusts to revenge those deaths. And every enemy killed is an enemy that can no longer kill you. Thus the experience of war soon took away any respect for the enemy, any regard for their cause. They were the enemy, and they were hated.

For British and French soldiers this was fueled by German atrocities: the shooting of Belgian civilians as reprisals for suspected sniper fire on German troops (usually wrongly suspected), the Zeppelin and, later in the war, aircraft raids on London, Edinburgh and Leith, and above all else, the U-boat sinking of merchant and passenger ships.

Fear and the lust for revenge led to the killing of prisoners by both sides. Revenge could be the result of the bigger picture or from the more personal experiences, both highlighted above. It was also sometimes encouraged by officers who thought that it made their men more aggressive and so more effective soldiers. In this way it became, at times, semi-official policy. And as rumours spread on each side of prisoners being killed, so a vicious cycle of revenge spiraled. It is not known how many died this way, but it is safe to say it was a very small percentage of those who surrendered, but it did happen and it does serve to show how deeply the enemy came to be hated.

The experience of civilians

At the outset of the German advance into Belgium, General Moltke warned the Belgian people that there would be consequences for any civilian who got in the way of the German push. This was the German policy of *schrecklichkeit* or frightfulness.

As the Germans advanced, Belgians fled. Captain Spears in the British army witnessed something of the spectacle whilst he was at the headquarters of the French Fifth Army and recalled a terrified population running from the German onslaught. They had good reason to.

On September 2nd, the newly-appointed German Military Governor, Field-Marshal Baron von der Goltz, issued a proclamation in Brussels that made clear what Belgians could expect from the German occupying force: that not only the guilty would be punished for hostile acts but the innocent as well. This was followed by a further proclamation issued on October 5th that required the German troops to take hostages in all villages near railway lines and that should any attempt be made to destroy those lines or telegraph or telephone lines, then the hostages should be shot.

The Bryce Report, named after Viscount James Bryce who led it, investigated the German atrocities, and concluded: 'Murder, lust, and pillage prevailed over many parts of Belgium on a scale unparalleled in any war between civilised nations during the last three centuries.' Although most probably exaggerating what happened, it nevertheless still carried authority and would influence post-war feelings.

Life was hard in German-occupied northern France too. The citizens were totally cut off throughout the war. There was a complete absence of news from the front or from the rest of France. They suffered chronic food shortages and had to suffer the indignity of billeting German troops, the requisitioning of their goods, compulsory payments and forced labour. The Germans forced 25,000 men and women to move to Germany and work as farm labourers. To enforce cooperation wherever it was reluctant, hostages would be taken and sent to concentration camps, and anyone found helping the enemy were executed. And when the Germans retreated to the 'Hindenburg Line' all the abandoned territory was laid waste, villages and towns were destroyed, crops burnt, minefields planted and wells poisoned.

In Germany, all production concentrated on the needs of the military. Non-essential industries were closed down and all male Germans between seventeen and sixty were conscripted into war service, if not the army then arms production or supplying other military needs. Meat substitutes were produced. To save grain, the government ordered the slaughter of a million pigs though, in the long term, this led to less vegetables being produced as it destroyed a valuable source of manure. The lack of adequate food supplies in Germany led to many deaths. In 1915, just over 88,000 deaths had been attributed to the British blockade. This rose to over 120,000 in 1916. It was more of the same in 1917 when a quarter of a million lives were attributed to the British blockade. Both cats and dogs were being eaten by this point.

In Britain, the experience of war, though not the same as for those on the European continent who faced occupation or were forced to leave their homes and flee as the enemy advanced, or at least faced the threat of having to do so, the war still impacted in bitter ways. There were the bombing raids, by Zeppelin and by aeroplane,

and lives were lost and homes too. And there was often shock when men returned home on leave showing clear signs of the trauma they had faced, and would have to return to. There was also the dreaded telegram that told of the death of a son (and sometimes a daughter), a husband, a father. Often he would be reported as missing but it nearly always meant the same.

The war at sea, with Germany's use of unrestricted submarine warfare led to much bitterness (from the Americans too). For German U-boats, in their attempt to blockade Britain and starve it into submission, were sinking unarmed merchant ships without warning, and so without any chance for the crews to evacuate their ship and get into lifeboats. As a result many lives were lost. The Germans even sunk a passenger ship in 1915, the Lusitania, with the loss of more than eleven hundred passengers and crew. It was carrying munitions but that it was attacked still shocked the world and played a part in America's entry into the war.

The Final Cost

Although they tell nothing of the pain and suffering, you cannot avoid statistics when it comes to considering the cost of war. If we consider military deaths, it is estimated that the Central Powers and their allies suffered 3,500,000 deaths, while the Entente Powers and their allies suffered 5,100,000 deaths. On average, more than 5,500 died each day of the war. The British look to the first day of the Battle of the Somme on which it lost 20,000 men as the worst day in its military history, but on average that number of men died every four days in which the war continued. But this is only part of the statistics that should be taken into account. For every soldier who died, the war left almost three seriously wounded: seven million permanently disabled and another fifteen million seriously wounded. So that, out of the approximate 65,000,000 soldiers mobilised, close to half were either killed or seriously wounded. At the beginning of 1922, some two years since the end of the war, 50,000 former British soldiers were receiving government pensions for the continuing effects of shell-shock. If the men of the other armies suffered to a similar extent, this would mean 250,000 men were still suffering from the psychological effects of the war.

More than six and a quarter million civilian lives have also been attributed to the war. And the effects lasted a lifetime too: the war left 5,000,000 widows, 9,000,000 orphans. But we can look beyond even those appalling statistics for as the war took a disproportionate number of young men's lives, it also condemned hundreds of thousands of young women to spinsterhood. Birth rates dropped too so that for a time, populations became imbalanced, an aging population without the normal body of young adults to look out for them.

As I will never apologise for repeatedly saying: history is always about people.