

The origins of the First World War

In 1914 Europe was plunged into a terrible and costly war. The empires of France, Russia and Britain on the one side, and Germany, Austria and Turkey on the other, fought a brutal war of attrition which was to last four years and cost, at a conservative estimate, some 12 million casualties. The war impoverished Germany, bled France white, and shattered the Austrian and Turkish empires. It also led to the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia and Fascism in Italy. By inflicting serious and long-term damage on the European economies, it also ultimately led to Hitler coming to power in 1933 in Germany. Understandably, then, the causes of the First World War constitute one of the most hotly debated issues in modern history. The events leading up to the outbreak of the First World War are examined under the following headings:

- ★ The 'New Course' in German foreign policy and its consequences
- ★ Nationalism and worldwide imperial rivalries
- ★ Making of the Triple *Entente*
- ★ The second Moroccan crisis 1911 and its consequences
- ★ The Balkans and the Great Powers 1906–1914
- ★ Outbreak of the First World War 1914

The key debate on *page 53* of this chapter asks the question: Can it be argued that no one power alone bears the chief responsibility for the causes of the First World War?

Key dates

1894	Franco-Russian Alliance signed	1914	June 28	Sarajevo incident
1898	Fashoda crisis		July 28	Austria declared war on Serbia
1902	Anglo-Japanese Treaty		Aug. 1	Germany declared war on Russia
1904	Anglo-French <i>Entente</i>		Aug. 3	Germany declared war on France
1906	First Moroccan crisis		Aug. 4	German troops invaded Belgium
1907	Anglo-Russian Agreement			Britain declared war on Germany
1908	Bosnia and Herzegovina annexed by Austria			
1911	Second Moroccan crisis			
1912–13	First and Second Balkan Wars			

1 The 'New Course' in German foreign policy and its consequences

► To what extent can the 'New Course' in German foreign policy be considered a failure?

The end of the Reinsurance Treaty

Once Bismarck had been dismissed by Kaiser Wilhelm II, German foreign office officials advised his successor, General Leo von Caprivi, not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. They argued with some justification that it conflicted with the Dual Alliance of 1879 and the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887 (see pages 18 and 23–4). Instead, they decided to work for a new alliance system or 'New Course', which would associate Britain with Germany's two allies, Italy and Austria, and so hold in check both Russia and France. It was felt that Germany was now strong enough to give up Bismarck's complicated system of checks and balances and should ally with states with which it had apparently a common interest.

Britain's refusal to join the Triple Alliance

The problem for the Germans was that, while the British government was ready to settle colonial disputes with them, as eventually it also did with France and Russia, it was not prepared to negotiate binding alliances. Berlin refused to believe this, and remained convinced that sooner or later French and Russian pressure on Britain's large and vulnerable empire would end in war and force Britain to turn to Germany for help. 'For us', as Caprivi remarked in 1893, 'the best opening of the next great war is for the first shot to be fired from a British ship. Then we can be certain of expanding the Triple into a **Quadruple Alliance**.' Ultimately, however, this was wishful thinking, and the British were determined not to join the Triple Alliance, because, as Lord Salisbury (1830–1903), the British prime minister, observed, the 'liability of having to defend the German and Austrian frontiers against Russia is greater than that of having to defend the British Isles against France'.

Having failed to secure a British alliance, Germany now became increasingly dependent on Austria as its key ally, and consequently the Austrians were in a position to put pressure on the Germans to back them against Russia when the next major Balkans crisis erupted. It also accelerated the negotiation of the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance.

KEY TERM

Quadruple alliance
An alliance of four powers.

Kaiser Wilhelm II

1859	Born: his mother was British Queen Victoria's eldest daughter
1888	Ascended the throne
1890	Dismissed Bismarck
1896	Sent 'Kruger telegram'
1905	Visited Tangier
1914	Gave Austria unconditional support against Serbia
1916	Sidelined by Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff
1918	Abdicated
1919–41	Lived in exile in the Netherlands
1941	Died in German-occupied Netherlands

Wilhelm was an unstable and neurotic figure, who suffered from rapid mood swings and may even have

been mentally ill. His complex love–hate relationship with his English mother and Britain created considerable political problems in the years 1890–1914. When he came to the throne in 1888, he was determined to rule Germany himself. By 1897 he had greatly increased his own power at the expense of excluding genuinely independent-minded men from office.

In 1908 Wilhelm gave an interview to the *Daily Telegraph* which made him the laughing stock of Germany and effectively led to the end of his period of personal rule, although he still continued to intervene directly in military and foreign affairs until 1916. He was forced to abdicate in November 1918 and fled to the Netherlands. He was wanted as a war criminal by the Allies in 1918, but the Dutch refused to hand him over.



France and Russia draw together

The Kaiser's **state visit** to London in July 1891 convinced the Russians – wrongly of course – that Britain and Germany had signed a secret alliance. Nikolay Giers (1820–1895), the Russian foreign minister, therefore suggested to **the French that the two states should begin to negotiate an entente**. Talks began **almost immediately**, and the French fleet visited the Russian base of Kronstadt as a symbolic act of friendship. Within a month the two states had already agreed 'to take counsel together upon every question of a nature to jeopardise the general peace'.

A year later this was backed up with a secret defensive military agreement which was approved by both governments in January 1894 (see Source A on page 31).

The treaty marked the end of France's isolation in Europe and, even though its precise terms were secret, fuelled German fears that in any future war France and Russia would be allies.

The potentially dangerous situation in which Germany now found itself was partly obscured by the shift of European rivalries in the 1890s from Europe and the Balkans to Africa and China. Outside Europe, Germany, France and Russia were able often to co-operate at the cost of the British Empire. For a time Germany still remained confident that Britain, whose huge and vulnerable empire was coming under intense pressure, would be forced into an agreement on Germany's terms with the Triple Alliance, but this, as we have seen, was a miscalculation.

SOURCE A

From the **Franco-Russian Treaty 1892**, quoted in Yale Law School, The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/frumil.asp

1. If France is attacked by Germany, or by Italy supported by Germany, Russia shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany. If Russia is attacked by Germany, or by Austria supported by Germany, France shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany.

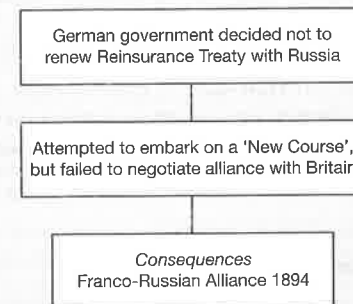
2. In case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or of any one of the Powers belonging to it, should be mobilized, France and Russia, at the first news of this event and without previous agreement being necessary, shall mobilize immediately and simultaneously the whole of their forces, and shall transport them as far as possible to their frontiers.

3. The available forces to be employed against Germany shall be, on the part of France, 1,300,000 men, on the part of Russia, 700,000 or 800,000 men.

Study Source A. What were the terms of the Franco-Russian Alliance?



Summary diagram: The 'New Course' in German foreign policy and its consequences



2 Nationalism and worldwide imperial rivalries

Why did imperial rivalries in Africa and China not lead to a major war between the Great Powers?

The 1890s witnessed a renewed scramble for territory and influence in Africa and Asia by the Great Powers, joined by Japan. However, contrary to expectations, imperial rivalries in Africa and China did not lead to the outbreak

KEY TERM

State visit Ceremonial visit by a head of state.

of a major war between the European powers, but they did encourage the growth of nationalism, imperialism and militarism in each European country (see pages 2–4).

The struggle for empire was at its most intense in the following regions:

- the Upper Nile
- South Africa
- China.

The Upper Nile and Fashoda crisis

The French, bitterly resentful of Britain's dominant position in Egypt, which it had acquired in 1882, intended to seize a wide strip of territory right across central Africa from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. Both Britain and France raced to control the territories of the Upper Nile. In September 1898 a small French force reached the Upper Nile first and hoisted the French flag at Fashoda, but was confronted a few days later by an army under General Kitchener (1850–1916), which had just defeated the Sudanese forces at Omdurman. An armed clash that could have led to war was avoided when Kitchener decided not use force to eject the French. Instead, it was left to the two governments to find a diplomatic solution. France, lacking any support from the other powers, had little option but to concede totally to British demands in the Sudan.

Fashoda has been called by the historian J.V. Keiger, 'the worst crisis in Franco-British relations since **Waterloo**'. Yet, paradoxically, it also led to an improvement in Anglo-French affairs, as influential voices in Paris began to argue that France should cut its losses, write off Egypt and gain British backing for the annexation of Morocco.

South Africa

The Jameson raid and the Kaiser's response

Here the British faced similar threats to their colonial ambitions but this time from the Germans, who they feared would try to extend their power eastwards from German South West Africa to the borders of the **Transvaal**. This would effectively block any northward British expansion. The economic significance of the Transvaal had been transformed by the discovery of gold there in 1886, and by 1894 its economy was dominated by the Germans. German bankers controlled the Transvaal's National Bank and some 20 per cent of the foreign investment in the state came from Germany.

The independence of the **Boers** in the Transvaal was, however, threatened by the large number of British prospectors and adventurers who poured in. When Cecil Rhodes, the prime minister of Britain's Cape Colony, illegally launched a badly planned and unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Boer government, the so-called **Jameson raid**, in 1895, the Germans could hardly remain indifferent to it. The Kaiser at first wanted to declare the Transvaal a German protectorate,

send military aid to Paulus Kruger, the president of Transvaal, and then summon a congress in Berlin, which would redraw the map of South Africa, but in the end he was persuaded by his own diplomats that because of British sea power, these were just empty threats. Instead, he sent a telegram to Kruger congratulating him on preserving the independence of his country against attack.

This caused intense resentment in Britain as it was perceived to be Germany meddling in the private affairs of the British Empire. Windows belonging to German-owned shops were smashed and for the first time popular anti-German feeling became widespread and intense.

The Boer War and the absence of a Continental League

Four years later Kruger, who had rebuilt the Boer army and equipped it with modern German artillery, declared war on Britain, believing that France, Germany and Russia would intervene and force Britain to make concessions. 'There could never be', as the historian A.J.P. Taylor observed, 'a more favourable opportunity, in theory, for the Continental Powers to exploit British difficulties.' Yet nothing happened both because British control of the seas made military intervention physically impossible and because neither France, Russia nor Germany could in the final analysis agree to co-operate. Britain was therefore able to defeat the Boers in a long, drawn-out war, which ended only in 1902.

SOURCE B

From a speech by the British prime minister, Lord Salisbury, on 4 May 1898 to the Primrose League at the Albert Hall, London, quoted in J. Joll, editor, *Britain and Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 192–4. The League was part of the Conservative Party.

You may roughly divide the nations of the world as the living and the dying. On the one side you have great countries of enormous power growing in power, every year, growing in wealth, growing in dominion, growing in the perfection of their organisation. ... By the side of these splendid organisations there are a number of communities, which I can only describe as dying. For one reason or another – from the necessities of politics or under the pretence of philanthropy – the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying, and the seeds and causes of conflict among civilised nations will speedily appear ... These things may introduce causes of fatal difference between the great nations whose mighty armies stand opposite threatening each other ...

China

As in Africa, Great Power rivalry in China was determined by a mixture of political, economic and strategic factors. Up to the 1890s Britain had been able to dominate China's foreign trade and, through its superior sea power, block any attempts by other powers to divide up the Chinese Empire; but the construction

Study Source B. What is Lord Salisbury's assessment of the global situation?

KEY TERM

Philanthropy The desire to help humanity.

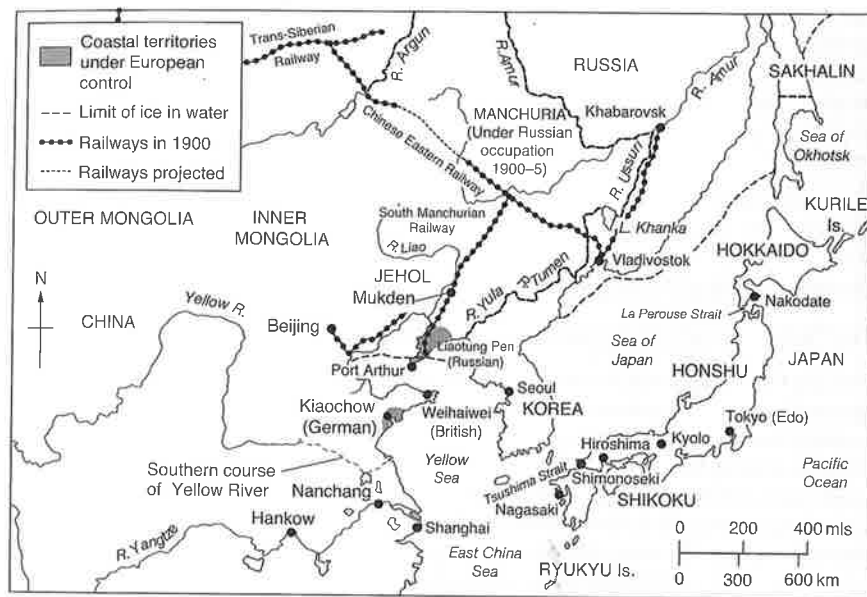
KEY TERMS

Waterloo In 1815 the British defeated Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo.

Transvaal This was an independent state, although by agreement with the British in 1884 it could not conclude treaties with foreign powers without their agreement.

Boers Descendants of Dutch settlers who had originally colonised South Africa.

Jameson raid Armed intervention in the Transvaal led by the British politician in Cape Colony, Leander Starr Jameson, over the New Year weekend of 1895–6.



Map of northern China, Manchuria and Japan, showing the growth of the railways by 1900.

? How vulnerable was China to European and Japanese penetration?

KEY TERM

Ice-free port A seaport that can be used throughout the year.

of the trans-Siberian railway by Russia, which commenced in 1891, completely changed the situation as Russia would now be able to deploy troops to back up its demands. Russia's main aim in China was to annex Manchuria and gain an **ice-free port** in Korea. In China, unlike Africa, Britain now faced the prospect of a challenge to its commercial position from a major power, which could deploy troops to assert its aims. Russia could usually rely on the backing of France and Germany in China, while Britain's only potential ally was Japan, which saw Russian expansion into Korea and Manchuria as a threat to its own security.

The Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902

To protect their interests, Japan and Britain negotiated a defensive alliance. Japan recognised Britain's interests in China, while Britain accepted that Japan was 'in a peculiar degree politically as well as commercially and industrially' interested in Korea. Both powers then went on to agree in January 1902 that if these interests were threatened, each power should be free to take the necessary action to protect them. In the event of war between Japan and another country, Britain would remain neutral unless a third power came to Russia's assistance. Similarly, if Britain were involved in a conflict in the Far East, Japan would only intervene if a third power declared war against Britain.

China and Japan: two contrasting histories

Both empires were in 1800 **isolationist** and hostile to Western contacts, but Japan adapted to Westernisation and emerged as an important regional power by 1900, while China seemed to be on the verge, like Africa, of being divided up between the Great Powers. A major step in opening up China to Western influence was the Treaty of Nanking of August 1842. The British forced the Chinese not only to import opium from India, but also to cede them the island of Hong Kong and to open up five coastal cities to foreign traders. Over the next 50 years further concessions were forced out of the Chinese.

Japan's isolation ended when the USA sent a fleet in 1854 and persuaded its government to open up two ports for trade and the use of the US navy. In 1868 a political revolution took place in Japan, the so-called Meiji Restoration, which gave greater power to the emperor. He then rapidly transformed Japan into a modern state.

KEY TERM

Isolationist Remaining aloof from international politics.

The Russo-Japanese War 1904–5

When it became clear by 1904 that Russia would not withdraw troops from Manchuria and cede to Japan a dominant position in Korea, the Anglo-Japanese Treaty enabled Japan to launch a surprise attack on Port Arthur. The subsequent Russo-Japanese War was fought in isolation. Neither France, which had just signed a colonial agreement with Britain, 'the Entente' (see page 39), nor Germany wanted to fight Britain, and each feared that its involvement in a Far Eastern war would make it vulnerable to an attack in Europe. After the defeat of their fleet at Tsushima and of their army at Mukden, the Russians, paralysed by revolution at home (see page 8), agreed to mediation by the US president in August 1905. By the terms of the Treaty of Portsmouth (New Hampshire), Russia ceased to be an immediate threat to either Britain or Japan in the Far East and withdrew from Korea and Manchuria.

Summary diagram: Nationalism and worldwide imperial rivalries

Africa	Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt and the Sudan came to a head at Fashoda 1898 Anglo-German rivalry fuelled by German support for Kruger 1896 Yet neither France nor Germany was able to organise a Continental League during the Boer War 1899–1902
China	Construction of trans-Siberian railway opened up northern China to Russian influence This challenged Britain's monopoly of trade and Japan's influence in Manchuria and Korea
Russo-Japanese War	Japan and Britain signed a defensive alliance 1902 In 1905 this enabled Japan to defeat Russia and halt Russian expansion in China

3 Making of the Triple *Entente*

- ▶ To what extent did the Triple Entente mark a 'diplomatic revolution'?
- ▶ Why was the Anglo-French Entente agreement negotiated?

At the end of the nineteenth century it was the British Empire that was under pressure and a war between Britain and Russia over China seemed imminent. Although Germany faced a potentially hostile Franco-Russian Alliance in Europe, in Africa and the Far East it was often able to co-operate with these two powers against Britain. By 1907, however, the international situation had dramatically changed. It was Germany that was isolated and Britain had settled its most acute disagreements with both Russia and France. Anglo-German relations had sharply deteriorated to a point where war between these powers was a distinct possibility. In any war between the Dual Alliance and the Triple Alliance, it was safe to predict that by 1907 Britain would join France and Russia. The main causes of this dramatic change, which some historians call a **diplomatic revolution**, are as follows:

- There was growing Anglo-German commercial rivalry.
- The construction of the German fleet combined with an aggressive or clumsy *Weltpolitik*, which forced Britain into taking action to preserve its position as a Great Power.
- The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 made Britain independent of Germany in the Far East.
- The Franco-British Agreement of April 1904 at last marked the end of Anglo-French hostility over Egypt.
- Germany's violent reaction to French claims to Morocco in 1905 only cemented the Franco-British *Entente* even more.
- Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905 made Russia less of a threat to British interests in China and made possible the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907.

Anglo-German economic rivalry

Between 1900 and 1914 Germany became an economic giant. The German steel and iron industries, protected from foreign competition by tariffs, could undercut rivals abroad by selling at some 40 per cent below the current price. Germany had also made startling progress in developing chemical, electrical and engineering industries which were in the forefront of the **second industrial revolution**. By 1910 Germany also possessed the second largest merchant fleet in the world (second only to Britain) and after Britain and France was the third largest **creditor nation**. German exports dominated the Middle Eastern, South American and South African markets and had largely displaced British goods there.

KEY TERMS

Diplomatic revolution

A complete change in alliances and relations between states.

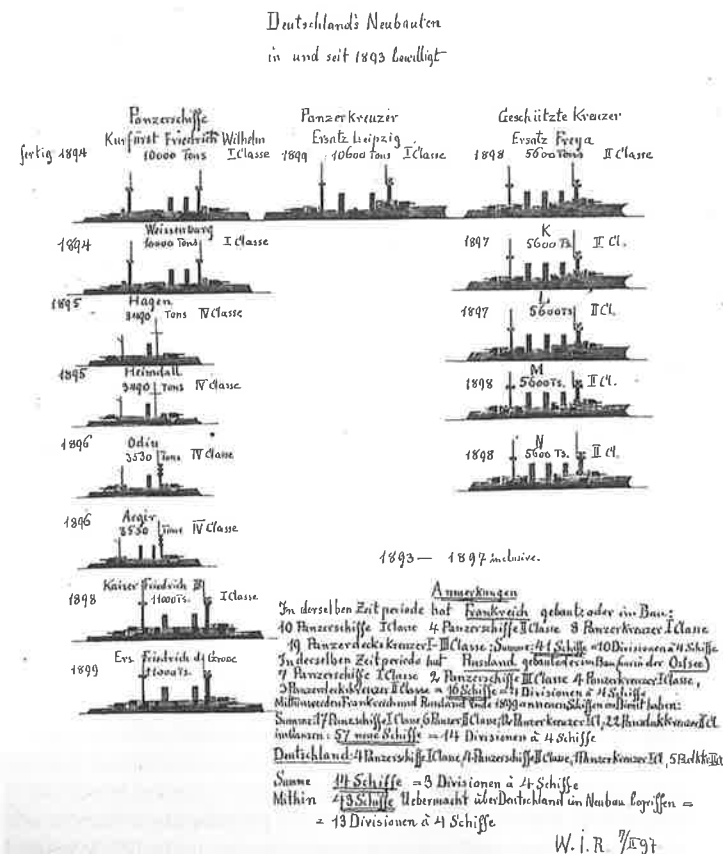
Second industrial revolution

The development of electrical, chemical and engineering industries beginning at the end of the nineteenth century.

Creditor nation A state which lends or invests surplus capital abroad.

Inevitably, the German 'economic miracle' was a challenge to Britain's long commercial and industrial supremacy and caused considerable anxiety and hostility. A popular book by E.E. Williams, *Made in Germany* (1896), argued with considerable exaggeration that 'on all hands England's industrial supremacy is tottering to its fall, and this result is largely German work'. In retaliation against German imports there were growing demands in Britain for the end of **free trade** and the introduction of tariffs. This in turn led to German fears that their exports were about to be shut out of British markets and to increased demands for the acquisition of a larger German colonial empire.

SOURCE C



KEY TERM

Free trade Trade between nations unimpeded by tariffs.

Study Source C. What does this illustration show about Kaiser Wilhelm's thinking on the question of sea power?

A naval chart drawn in 1897 by Kaiser Wilhelm. He heads the chart with 'Germany's new ships [planned and] approved since 1893'. Below in the right-hand corner he notes how many ships France ('Frankreich') and Russia ('Russland') had built during the same period.

Anglo-German naval rivalry

It was above all the Anglo-German naval arms race that inflamed public opinion in both countries. The launching of the German naval programme in 1897 alarmed Britain, and led to an escalating arms race between the two states, which by 1912 – in the words of the Austrian foreign minister – had become the ‘dominant element of the international situation’. The construction of the German navy struck at the core of British power: in order to preserve its empire, Britain had to retain control of the seas. As long as Germany continued to build up its navy, Britain would therefore ultimately be numbered among Germany’s enemies.

KEY FIGURES

Alfred von Tirpitz (1849–1930)

German naval minister. His intention was to create a powerful German fleet which would be able to force the British to make major colonial concessions.

Theophile Delcassé (1852–1923)

French foreign minister 1898–1905. He was forced to resign by the Germans in 1905, but during 1911–13 he was naval minister and 1914–15 again foreign minister.

KEY TERMS

Fixed ratio A scheme whereby Germany would agree not to increase the number of ships beyond a certain percentage of the British fleet.

Protectorate A territory that is controlled and protected by another state.

The German government intended to build within twenty years a German fleet of 60 battleships, which was to be aimed against British naval bases in the North Sea. Admiral Tirpitz, the head of the German navy, was convinced that this would ultimately force Britain to make major colonial concessions to Germany. This programme was also genuinely popular in Germany and appealed to the new German nationalism.

The British government responded to the challenge by modernising the Royal Navy and designing in 1906 the new *Dreadnought* battleship, which made every other ship afloat obsolete. This, however, only made it easier for the Germans to catch up as it inevitably reduced Britain’s overwhelming lead. Thus, when in 1908 the Germans announced a supplementary programme consisting of four capital ships per year for the next four years, often hysterical demands in the British popular press and skilfully orchestrated campaigns by the Navy League pressure group pushed the British government into agreeing to build eight new battleships in 1909 and a further ten over the next two years.

In 1909–10 and then again in 1912 attempts were made to find a formula which could defuse the dangerous tensions generated by the naval race, but each time there were insuperable objections to a settlement. Britain wanted to safeguard its naval supremacy by negotiating a **fixed ratio** for capital ships, while the Germans wanted a cast-iron assurance that Britain would remain neutral if Germany had to fight France and Russia. Britain could not afford to stand aside and see another defeat of France by Germany, which would lead to the German domination of the European continent.

The making of the Anglo-French Entente

After their humiliation at Fashoda, the French were determined to occupy Morocco (see page 32). Once it was clear that the Germans would not help them, Delcassé, the French foreign minister, began to look to London. Britain had initially been hostile to the prospect of a French **protectorate** in Morocco, as it might threaten the great British naval base in Gibraltar, but by 1902 Morocco was on the verge of civil war and the restoration of order by the French seemed the better option. The looming war in the Far East between Japan and Russia

also played an important part in pushing the states into agreement as both feared what the historian John Lowe has called the ‘nightmare scenario of Britain and France having to fight each other as the “seconds” of their allies’ (see page 34).

Ultimately, of course, the French hoped to associate Britain with the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance, while the British government hoped that an **Anglo-French colonial entente** would lead to a similar agreement with Russia. The agreement was signed on 8 April 1904 and settled Anglo-French colonial problems in three main areas:

- The French exchanged their fishing rights around Newfoundland for territorial compensation in west Africa.
- Siam (present-day Thailand) was divided into two zones of influence and a **condominium** was set up in the New Hebrides.
- France agreed not to block British plans for financial reform in Egypt, provided Britain recognised France’s right to maintain law and order in Morocco. Secret clauses then made provision for the establishment of a protectorate at some future date by France over Morocco and by Britain over Egypt.

While it improved Anglo-French relations, it is important to grasp that this agreement was not an alliance since neither country was committed to come to the help of the other in the event of war. Arguably, together with the Japanese Alliance, it made Britain even more independent of Continental entanglements and it was only Germany’s violent reaction to its provisions for the French control of Morocco that turned the agreement into a virtual Franco-British Alliance against Germany.

The German reaction: the first Moroccan crisis 1905–6

The German chancellor, Count Bernhard von Bülow (1849–1929), decided to challenge the right to control Morocco which had been given to France by the Anglo-French Agreement. Optimistically, he believed that he could destroy both the Dual Alliance and the *Entente cordiale*, and that a new Russo-German Alliance would emerge, which would effectively isolate France.

In early 1905 the French government, ignoring all warnings from Berlin, began to reform the Moroccan administration. The Kaiser interrupted his Mediterranean cruise to land at Tangier and greeted the Sultan of Morocco as an independent ruler. The Germans then demanded a conference on the future of Morocco and the resignation of Delcassé. At first it seemed that Berlin really would win a significant success. The French cabinet agreed to a conference and forced Delcassé to resign. Then, in July, the Kaiser and Nicholas II of Russia met at Björkö and signed a defensive alliance to co-operate against any hostile power in Europe.

Yet all these successes were purely temporary and by April 1906 Germany had suffered a crushing defeat. The Russian government never ratified the Björkö

KEY TERMS

Anglo-French colonial entente An understanding reached by Britain and France on colonial issues, sometimes called the *Entente cordiale* because it led to the restoration of good Anglo-French relations.

Condominium Joint control of a territory by two states.

KEY TERMS

Schlieffen Plan Planned a two-front war against France and Russia. France was to be defeated within a month by a flanking movement through Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and then the mass of the German army would move eastwards to deal with Russia. The plan was later revised to omit the Netherlands.

Two-front war A war in which fighting takes place on two geographically separate fronts.

? Study Source D. Why did Lloyd George welcome the Anglo-French Entente in 1904, while Lord Roseberry was fiercely critical of it?

Agreement and let it lapse, and France was significantly strengthened when the British government came down firmly on the side of the French over Morocco.

When the conference opened at Algeçiras in January 1906, Germany secured the backing of only Austria and Morocco. The other nine states agreed that France had a special interest in Morocco. Together with the Spanish, the French were therefore entrusted with the supervision of the Moroccan police, while France was also given control of the state bank. However, the Germans did win the concession that all the powers should enjoy equal economic rights within Morocco.

The Moroccan incident was, as the historian A.J.P. Taylor has stressed, 'a true crisis, a turning point in European history'. For the first time since 1870 a Franco-German war seemed a real possibility. There were no armies or fleets mobilised, but the senior official in the German foreign ministry, Friedrich von Holstein, and the German military high command were certainly ready to risk war, as Russia was weak and the French army was inadequately equipped. In December 1905 the Schlieffen Plan was perfected for a two-front war, while the British and French military staffs also began seriously to discuss what action should be taken if Germany invaded France.

SOURCE D

From David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Odhams, 1938, p. 1.

In the year 1904 on the day when the Anglo-French entente was announced, I arrived at Dalmeny [in Scotland] on a couple of days' visit to the late Lord Roseberry. His first greeting to me was: 'Well, I suppose you are just as pleased as the rest of them with this French agreement?' I assured him that I was delighted that our snarling and scratching relations with France had come to an end at last. He replied: 'You are all wrong. It means war with Germany in the end!'

... Had anyone then told me that before I ceased to hold office in the British Cabinet I should ... have witnessed a war between Britain and Germany ... I should have treated such a forecast as [a] ... wild prediction ...

The Anglo-Russian Entente 1907

The Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907, like the Anglo-French Agreement, was not initially aimed at Germany. The British had long wished to negotiate a compromise with Russia that would take the pressure off Afghanistan and northern India. On the Russian side, the Anglo-French Entente and Japan's victory in the Far East made an agreement with Britain increasingly necessary. It had little option but to improve its relations with London if it was to maintain its alliance with France.

The Anglo-Russian Agreement was signed in August 1907. Like the Anglo-French Agreement it was concerned only with colonial matters:

- The Russians gave up all claims to Afghanistan and recognised British interests in Tibet.
- Persia (present-day Iran) was divided into zones of influence: the north went to Russia, the south to Britain, with a neutral zone in between.
- Both empires recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

Germany on the defensive

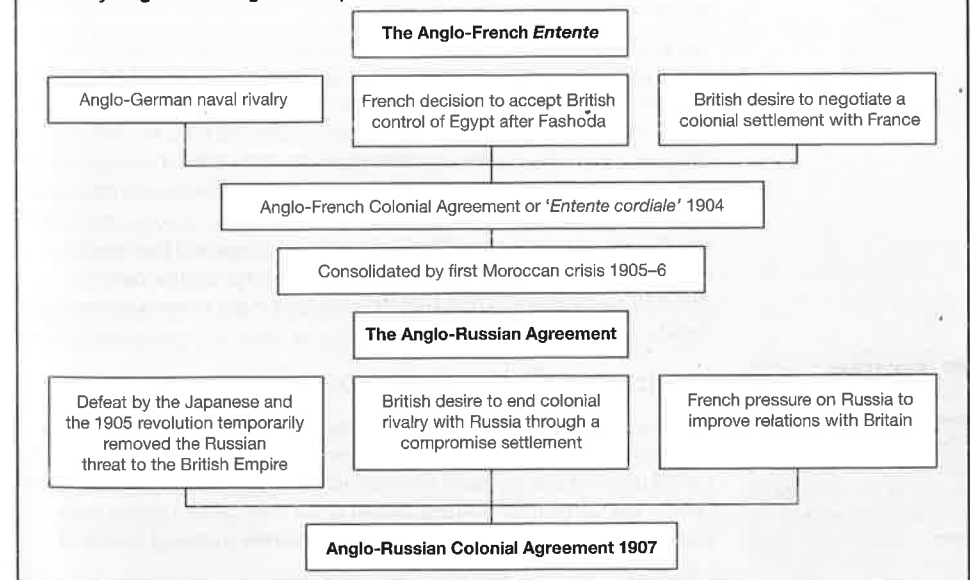
The **Triple Entente** was not a formal alliance system, but it did mark a shift in the balance of power in Europe. No longer could the Germans assume that an Anglo-Russian war would break out that would enable them to force Britain – or Russia – into becoming a subordinate ally. The ententes did not, however, completely remove all friction between their members. Anglo-Russian friction continued, for instance, in Persia. Nor did they necessarily mean that Germany would be isolated and encircled. There were influential voices in France arguing for a settlement with Germany. In 1909 the French and Germans even signed an agreement for economic co-operation in Morocco.

Yet by the end of 1910 Franco-German relations were again rapidly worsening, as local French officials in Morocco were breaking the Algeçiras Agreement by steadily increasing their power in administrative, economic and financial affairs. In Germany, the new foreign secretary, von Kiderlen-Wächter, was also determined to pursue a more decisive and aggressive foreign policy.

KEY TERM

Triple Entente The name often applied to the co-operation of Britain, France and Russia in 1907–17.

Summary diagram: Making of the Triple Entente



4 The second Moroccan crisis 1911 and its consequences

What were the causes and consequences of the second Moroccan crisis?

Kiderlen-Wächter's opportunity to reassert Germany's rights in Morocco came when in May 1911 French troops intervened in Fez after riots against the Sultan of Morocco had broken out. It soon became clear that France, contrary to the agreement of 1906, was going to occupy the whole country. The German government immediately insisted on territorial compensation from territory in the French Congo, and on 1 July sent the *Panther*, a gunboat, to the south Moroccan port of Agadir. The hope was, as Kiderlen-Wächter expressed it, that 'By seizing a [territorial] pawn, the Imperial government will be placed in a position to give the Moroccan affair a turn which should cause the earlier setbacks of 1905 to pass into oblivion.'

Initially, the French government was ready to negotiate with the Germans as the Russians, still resenting the lack of French help during the Bosnian crisis (see page 46), made it clear that they could offer the French no military assistance at all. But then on 21 July Britain intervened decisively. The chancellor of the exchequer, David Lloyd George (see page 89), voiced his government's policy when he stated that Britain could not 'be treated where her interests were vitally affected as if she were of no account'.

The British were anxious to prevent a German diplomatic success which they feared would destroy the *Entente*, but they were also signalling to the French that Britain must not be ignored in any new Moroccan agreement. In fact, the warning was seen as an ultimatum against Germany and it made a Franco-German compromise much more difficult to achieve. In the end, through secret negotiations, the French reached an agreement with the Germans in November 1911, which allowed France to establish a protectorate over Morocco, provided that Germany was given a small part of the French Congo and its economic interests in Morocco were respected. Essentially this was another diplomatic defeat for the Germans as they failed to extract any major concessions from the French.

KEY TERM

Wehrverein Literally 'defence league'. This pressure group was founded in Germany in 1912 to press for an increase in the size of the army.

The acceleration of the arms race

The second Moroccan crisis had very serious consequences for the peace of Europe. It heightened tension between Germany and Britain and France, which fuelled the arms race and made Germany increasingly desperate for a diplomatic victory. The German government, pushed by the army, public opinion and a highly effective pressure group called the **Wehrverein**, increased the size of

the army by about 29,000 men in 1912 and then a year later a further increase of 117,000 men and 119 officers and non-commissioned officers was approved. In Britain, the Navy League (see page 38) and the **National Service League** subjected their own government to similar pressures.

The French meanwhile compensated for their smaller population by extending the period of conscription from two to three years and by modernising their artillery and equipment. Russia had to rebuild its armed forces after the disaster of the Russo-Japanese War. By the financial year 1913–14 Russia was spending over 800 million roubles on rearmament. By June 1914 the peacetime strength of the Russian army was on target to reach almost 2 million men, which was three times as large as Germany's.

The strengthening of the Triple Entente

When Poincaré became French prime minister in 1912 he was determined as a consequence of the second Moroccan crisis to strengthen the Triple Entente:

- A Franco-Russian naval convention was signed in July 1912 in which both navies agreed to work out joint tactics in the event of war.
- The French and Russian military chiefs of staff also met and decided that should war break out with Germany both armies would immediately attack.
- At the same time, talks between the British and French naval staff also took place about the part each navy would play in the event of war with Germany in the Mediterranean and the English Channel.

In November the French and British governments exchanged letters defining the *Entente*. In essence they stated that the naval and military agreements between the two countries did not constitute a proper alliance, but if either state were attacked by a third power, they would immediately meet to discuss whether they would take any joint measures. This was as far as the British cabinet was willing to go.

By the end of 1912 both the Dual Alliance and the Anglo-French *Entente* had been greatly strengthened. Germany, facing isolation, was consequently all the more determined to cling to its alliance with Austria. It was this that was to make the Balkan crises of 1908–14 so dangerous.

KEY TERM

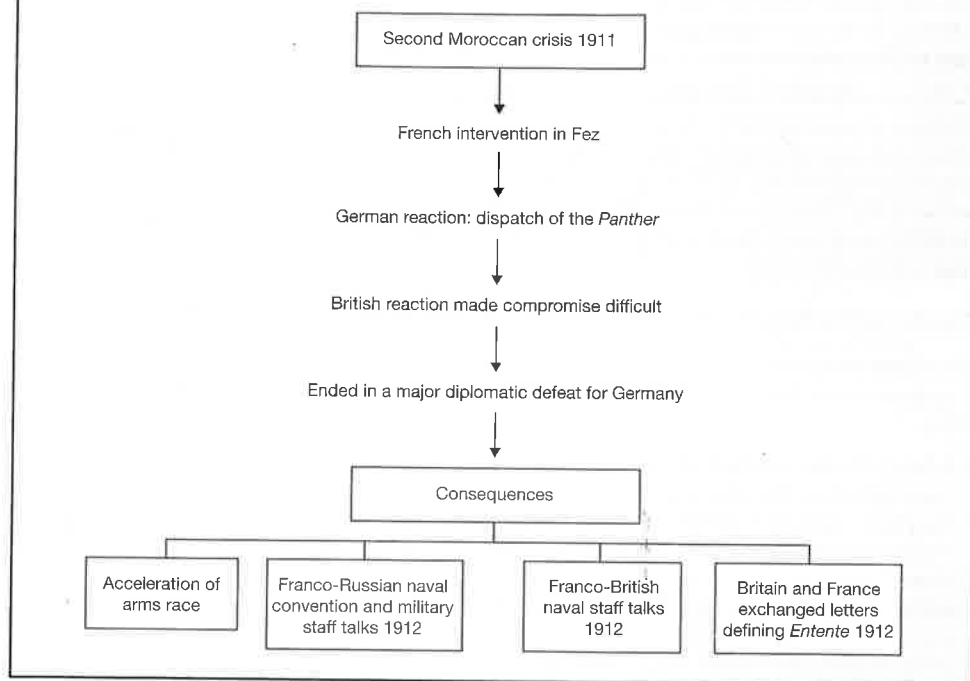
National Service League

A British pressure group founded in February 1902 to alert the country to the inability of the army to fight a major war and to propose the solution of national service.

KEY FIGURE

Raymond Poincaré (1860–1934)

A popular right-wing patriot, as prime minister and then president he did all he could to strengthen France's relations with Russia and Britain.

Summary diagram: The second Moroccan crisis 1911 and its consequences

5 The Balkans and the Great Powers 1906–14

► Why were the Balkans a major crisis point during the years 1906–14?

Between 1890 and 1905 the Balkans remained relatively quiet. Britain was no longer concerned by the Russian threat to the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as it could now protect its interests in the eastern Mediterranean from bases in Egypt. As Russia wished to concentrate on the Far East, in May 1897 it signed with Austria an agreement whereby both states would do as little as possible to disturb the existing situation in the Balkans and Near East. In 1905, weakened by defeat in the Far East and the subsequent turmoil at home, the Russian government hoped to maintain this agreement, but Russia's very weakness upset the balance of power in the Balkans and tempted Austria to take advantage of it to defend its interests against an increasingly aggressive Serbia.

In 1903 the pro-Austrian Serbian king, Alexander Obrenovich (1876–1903), had been assassinated by Serbian nationalists and replaced by Peter (1844–1921), of the rival Karageorgevich dynasty. Peter followed a fiercely anti-Austrian and strongly nationalist policy, which he hoped would attract Russian support. Ultimately, his aim was to free the South Slavs, who increasingly resented being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria's main aim in the Balkans was now at all costs to weaken Serbia.



The growth of Balkan independence 1822–1913, showing the decline of the Turkish Empire within Europe.

How far does this map explain the growing threat to Austria caused by the decline of the Turkish Empire in Europe?

The Bosnian crisis 1908–09

In 1908 a group of army officers seized power in Turkey. This temporarily revived Austro-Russian co-operation as both powers feared that this would lead to the strengthening of the Turkish Empire. In September 1908 the Russian and Austrian foreign ministers approved an agreement whereby Russian warships would be able to pass through the Straits, while this right would still be denied to the other powers. In exchange, Austria would be able formally to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina, which it had in fact administered since 1878 (see page 17). The Russian foreign minister claimed that any Austrian move would have to be confirmed later by a European conference, but this was never put down on paper, a fact that explains much of what was to follow.

The Austrians went ahead and annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in October, while the Russians found little international support for their plans at the Straits. The annexation, however, met with a storm of complaint throughout Europe. In Russia and Serbia, which eventually hoped to make these provinces part of a greater Serb state, there were demonstrations calling for war against Austria. Facing strong criticism in the Russian press, Isvolsky, the Russian foreign minister, demanded the calling of the European conference, to which he insisted the Austrians had in principle agreed. The Austrian government immediately vetoed this proposal as it feared a repetition of what had happened at Algeçiras, where Germany and Austria had been heavily outvoted (see page 40).

What made the crisis so dangerous was that Austria, which had the unconditional backing of Germany, was ready to fight Serbia even if supported by Russia. However, the Russians received no backing from the French, who **were busy negotiating an economic agreement covering Morocco** (see page 41) **with Germany, and were ready to accept the annexation.**

The dangerous consequences of this crisis were that it did long-term and serious damage to Russia's relations with Germany and Austria and made co-operation in the Balkans much more difficult, while at the same time bringing Russia and Serbia together.

SOURCE E

From a communication by Lord Hardinge, the head official at the British foreign office, to the British ambassador in Vienna in 1909, quoted in M. MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace*, Profile Books, 2014, p. 410.

I entirely share your views as to the absolute necessity of an understanding of some kind between Austria and Russia as to the policy in the Balkans, otherwise it is unlikely that unbroken peace will obtain in those regions for many years ... Any other policy would inevitably result in European war.

? Study Source E. Why, in the aftermath of the Bosnian crisis, did Hardinge believe that an Austro-Russian understanding was so vital?

The First Balkan War 1912

In 1912 the Italians invaded Libya, which was legally still part of the Turkish Empire. This prompted the Balkan states to overcome their internal rivalries, and declare war against Turkey. Within three weeks the Turkish Empire in Europe had collapsed, and Bulgarian troops were advancing on Constantinople. The sheer speed and scale of the victory created an acute crisis for the Great Powers. What made the situation so tense was the following:

- Austria faced a strengthened Serbia, which had occupied part of Albania. Austria, however, was determined to make Albania an independent state so as to deny Serbia access to the Adriatic. At first, Russia supported Serbian claims. Austria began to concentrate troops near the Russian frontier.
- Russia was equally determined to stop Constantinople falling to Bulgaria, as the Straits were becoming increasingly vital for its economic development. Between 1903 and 1912 a growing percentage of Russian exports, particularly of grain, which was the main export, were passing through them.
- The crisis also threatened to activate 'the alliance system'. Behind Austria stood Germany; behind Russia stood France. Although neither wanted war, both powers made clear that they would stand by their ally.
- The German declaration on 2 December 1912, promising help to Austria if attacked by a 'third party', was answered by a statement from London stressing that Britain would not remain neutral in a major conflict.
- Partly in response to this, on 8 December the Kaiser called a conference of his service chiefs. Von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff, argued for 'War – the sooner, the better', but Tirpitz insisted on waiting until the Kiel Canal had been widened to take modern battleships.

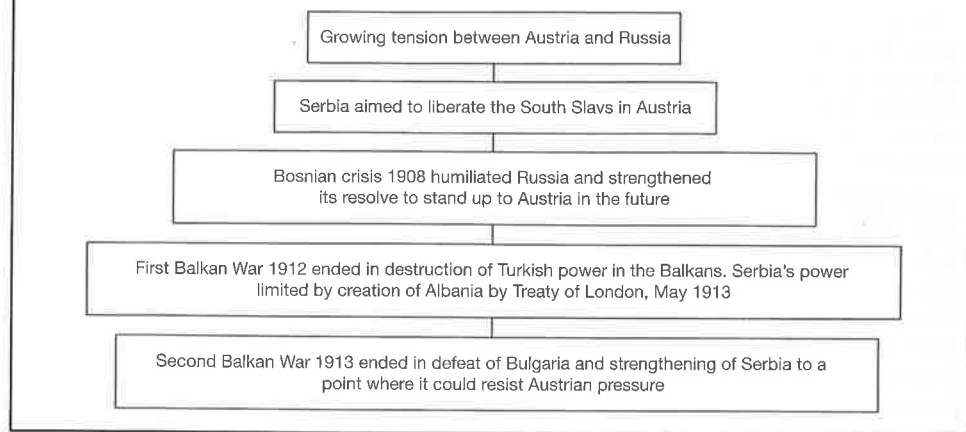
The immediate danger to Russia passed when Bulgaria failed to take Constantinople and the Balkan states signed an armistice with Turkey on 3 December. The Great Powers then agreed to call a peace conference in London to settle the territorial problem in the Balkans. By the Treaty of London of 30 May 1913 the Turks gave up all their territory in the Balkans except for a small zone around the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, which satisfied Russia, while Austria's demand that an independent Albania be set up was also agreed.

The Second Balkan War

At the end of June 1913 the Second Balkan War broke out when Bulgaria, which felt cheated of its just share of territory, attacked Serbia. The Greeks, the Romanians and the Turks all supported Serbia and within a month Bulgaria was defeated. The subsequent Treaty of Bucharest increased the territories of Serbia, Greece and Romania, while Turkey, through the Treaty of Constantinople, regained some of the territory it had lost to Bulgaria.

The clear loser in the Second Balkan War was Austria, even though it was not a belligerent, because Serbia had now emerged stronger, and was in a position to resist pressure from Vienna.

Summary diagram: The Balkans and the Great Powers 1906–14



KEY TERMS

Black Hand This secret terrorist organisation was founded in May 1911 and by 1914 probably had about 2500 members. They included a considerable number of the army officers who had taken part in the Serbian revolution of 1903. Its aim was to work for the union of the Serbs living in the Austrian and Turkish Empires with Serbia.

Blank cheque A free hand, unconditional support.

KEY FIGURE

Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg (1856–1921)

A Prussian civil servant before becoming Reich minister of the interior in 1907. He was appointed Reich chancellor in 1909 and forced to resign by the army in 1917.

6 Outbreak of the First World War 1914

Why did Germany give Austria a 'blank cheque'?

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife were assassinated in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip, who had been recruited by the Serb terrorist group, the **Black Hand**. The assassination at last provided Austria with an excuse to eliminate the Serb threat to Bosnia and its South Slav territories. To succeed, however, Vienna needed to gain German backing in case of Russian intervention and also to move quickly while the horror of the assassination was still fresh in the minds of the European governments. The German government agreed with the Austrian analysis of the Serb threat, and on 5 July the Kaiser and his chancellor, **Bethmann Hollweg**, gave the Austrians their unconditional support: the so-called **blank cheque**, as it was later called.

What did they hope this would achieve? Neither was intending to unleash a major European war, but Bethmann Hollweg believed that a brief punitive war against Serbia could be kept localised. He gambled that Russia would not in the end intervene both because it was financially not ready for war and because it would see the war as justified retribution for the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne. Bethmann Hollweg hoped that the rapid defeat of Serbia would

SOURCE F



Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie, one hour before their assassination in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 by the Serb terrorist group the Black Hand.

restore the prestige of the Dual Alliance, weaken Pan Slavism and Russia, and subsequently enable Germany to exploit Austria's success to improve relations with the *Entente* powers from a position of strength.

The Austrian ultimatum

Possibly, if Austria had moved quickly, the plan might have worked. On 7 July the Austro-Hungarian ministerial council met to consider what action to take. The chancellor, Count Leopold von Berchtold (1863–1942), was ready to launch a surprise attack on Serbia but on the advice of the Hungarian prime minister, Count Stephen Tisza (1861–1918), he agreed first of all to present Serbia with an ultimatum, and then only declare war if this was rejected.

The crucial part of the ultimatum insisted that Serbia should carry out, under the supervision of Austrian officials, a whole series of anti-terrorist measures. The Austrians calculated that Belgrade would reject this demand, as acceptance would give Vienna effective control of Serbia's security forces, and enable it to intervene in Serbia's internal affairs. It was sent to Belgrade on 23 July.

Study Source F: What was the significance of Franz Ferdinand's murder?

The Serbs reject the ultimatum

The Serb reply to the ultimatum was skilfully drafted. It rejected, as Vienna expected, and indeed hoped, the crucial demand that Austrian officials should supervise the anti-terrorist measures, yet its tone was so conciliatory that it cunningly appeared to offer Austria most of what it wanted. The Austrians were not fooled by this 'masterpiece of public relations'. They broke off diplomatic relations and then on 28 July declared war on Serbia.

The reaction of the Great Powers

Russia

The Russians accepted the Austrians' right to demand an inquiry into the assassination at Sarajevo, but they were not ready to tolerate the destruction of Serbia and Austro-Hungarian domination of the Balkans. On 28 July, the day Austria declared war on Serbia, the Russian government ordered the **mobilisation** of the military districts of Odessa, Kiev, Kazan and Moscow. Two days later this was changed to full mobilisation despite the initial reservations of the tsar and a personal appeal from the Kaiser. This move certainly heightened the tension, although it would take at least six weeks before the Russian army would be ready for war.

Germany

Russian mobilisation made German mobilisation inevitable given the Schlieffen Plan (see page 40) which depended on defeating the French *before* the Russian army was fully ready. By 28 July the German **general staff** was already urging its government to prepare for war. Germany, therefore, had little option but to act quickly. On 31 July it dispatched an ultimatum to Russia warning its government that unless it stopped mobilisation within twelve hours, Germany would fully mobilise its armed forces. When the ultimatum expired, Germany declared war on Russia. Politically, the fact that the Russians started to set their army on a war footing before the Germans enabled Bethmann Hollweg to claim

SOURCE G

From the diary of Kurt Riezler, the secretary of Bethmann Hollweg, the German chancellor, 7 July 1914, quoted in I. Porter and I. Armour, *Imperial Germany*, Longman, 1991, pp. 99–100.

The Chancellor talks of difficult decisions. Murder of Francis Ferdinand. Official Serbia involved. Austria wants to bestir herself ... If we encourage them, they will say we pushed them into it; if we try to dissuade them, then we are supposed to have left them in the lurch. Then they turn to the western powers whose arms are open and we lose our last halfway reliable ally. This time it's worse than 1912; for this time Austria is on the defensive against the subversive activities of Serbia and Russia. A move against Serbia can lead to world war.

that Germany was only acting defensively against the Russian threat. This was to prove an important factor in gaining the support of the German working classes for the war.

France

French reactions to the crisis were confused by the fact that both the French president and prime minister were at sea returning from a visit to St Petersburg and **did not reach Paris until 29 July. However, the war minister had taken** the precaution of discreetly recalling soldiers from leave and moving some key units back from Morocco.

On 31 July the French cabinet ordered mobilisation to start on the following day. The German ambassador was instructed from Berlin to ask what France's attitude would be to a Russo-German war. If France chose to remain neutral, it would have to surrender the two fortresses of Toul and Verdun to Germany as a pledge of good faith. The prime minister merely commented that 'France will act in accordance with her interests.' In reality, France had little choice. The Dual Alliance bound France to come to the help of Russia. The French could not stand back and allow the defeat of Russia, which would immeasurably increase German power. The Germans, however, could not afford to wait for France to declare war. They had to implement the Schlieffen Plan, part of which involved a flanking attack against France through Belgium as soon as possible. On 2 August they sent an ultimatum to Belgium demanding a free passage for their troops. When this was rejected the following day, orders were given to the German army to advance into Belgium and war was declared on France.

Great Britain

As the seriousness of the crisis in the Balkans became clear, the British foreign minister, **Sir Edward Grey**, on 27 July suggested a conference in London to discuss the crisis. The Italians and the French backed it, but the Germans argued that only direct Austro-Russian negotiations could solve the problem. That same day the cabinet decided that the British fleet, which had just finished manoeuvres, should not be dispersed to its peacetime bases. Ominously, Grey also raised with the cabinet the possibility that Britain might declare war on Germany, should France be attacked.

With the announcement of Russian mobilisation and the German declaration of war on Russia, pressure from both France and Russia on Britain to enter the war increased, while Germany attempted to persuade Britain to remain neutral. The French argued that Britain was morally committed to back them. However, on the vital issue of peace or war the cabinet was divided. On 29 July it could only agree that 'at this stage' it was 'unable to pledge ourselves in advance either under all circumstances to stand aside or on any condition to go in'.

It was finally the German violation of Belgium on 4 August that enabled Grey and the **'war party'** to win over the majority of those in the cabinet, who still

KEY TERMS

Mobilisation Preparing the armed forces for war.

General staff A group of officers which plans operations and administrates an army.

KEY FIGURE

Edward Grey (1872–1933)

British foreign minister, 1905–16, and Liberal MP. He became a great champion of the League of Nations.

KEY TERM

War party A group of ministers supporting Britain's entry into the war.

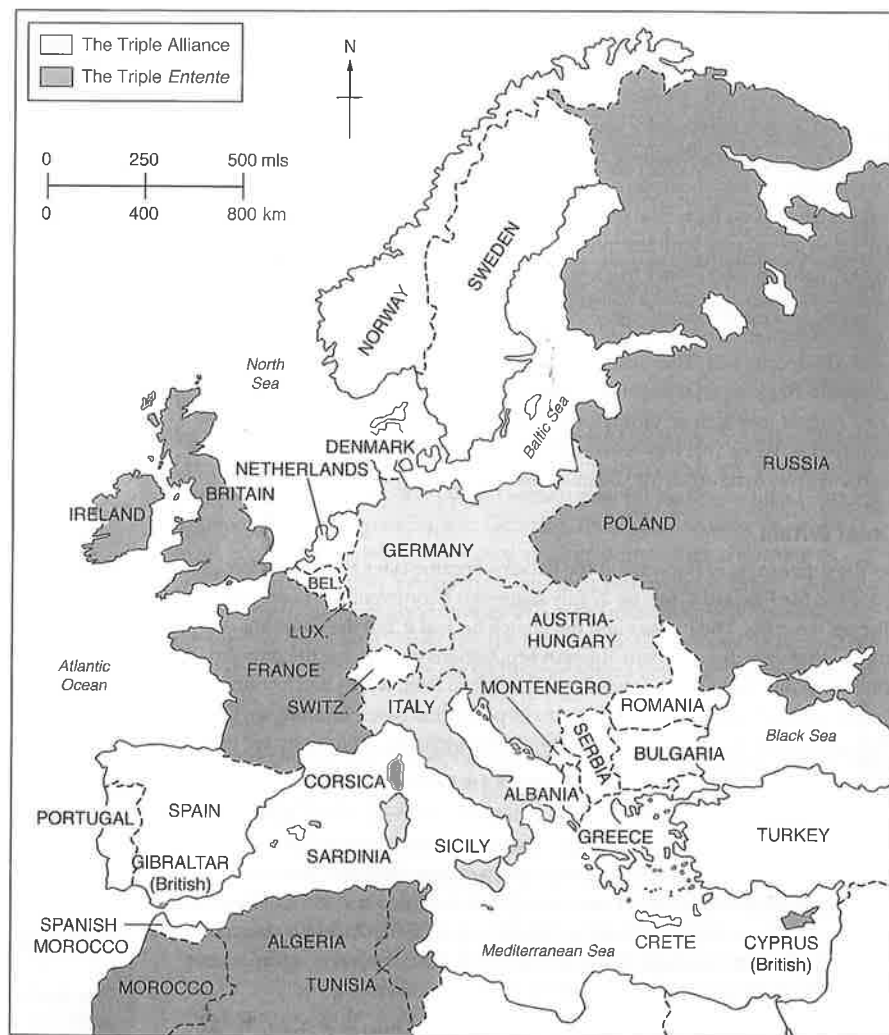
According to Riezler in Source G, why does the murder of Franz Ferdinand confront Bethmann Hollweg with 'difficult decisions'?

clung to the hope that Britain could keep out of the war. An ultimatum was sent to Berlin at 2p.m. that afternoon and when it expired at midnight (German time) Britain was at war with Germany.

Italy

Throughout the critical days in late July, Italy, despite being a member of the Triple Alliance, refused to align itself with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

? What does this map tell you about Germany's position in Europe?



The European alliance system shortly before the outbreak of war in 1914.

There was little public support for Austria, who was still viewed as the 'traditional enemy' (see page 19), and also an awareness of how vulnerable Italy's coastline would be to British and French naval attacks. After the war in Libya (see page 46) the army, too, needed to be re-equipped and rested. However, the Italian prime minister did not rule out eventual entry on either side if promised sufficient territorial reward.

Summary diagram: Outbreak of the First World War 1914



7 The key debate

► Can it be argued that no one power alone bears the chief responsibility for the causes of the First World War?

The causes of the First World War are one of the most controversial debates in modern history. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 (see Chapter 5) the Allied powers had little doubt that 'this responsibility rests first on Germany and Austria', but in the 1920s and 1930s this view was rejected by historians not only in Germany but in the USA, Britain and even France.

The 'European system' 1871–1914

Revisionist critics after 1919 insisted that the real causes of the war were far more complex and were a result of the 'European system' that came into existence in 1871. In their opinion the key causes were:

- the alliance system
- nationalism
- militarism
- imperialism
- the arms race
- economic rivalry.

Most modern historians accept that nationalism, militarism and imperialism certainly helped to create the atmosphere which made war acceptable and exciting. These ideologies radicalised large sections of public opinion in the European states, but, as Margaret MacMillan argues, by themselves they did not *cause* the war. Indeed, the historians Niall Ferguson and Mark Hewitson stress that by 1914 militarism and imperialism were in decline. For instance, in July 1914 Bethmann Hollweg was worried that the German Socialist Party, the SPD, would not support war unless it was seen to be a defensive struggle against **autocratic** Russia. Neither did economic rivalry, despite Marx's and Lenin's teachings to the contrary, make the war inevitable. The German 'economic miracle' during the period 1890–1914 challenged Britain's former economic supremacy, but the two countries became major trading partners, and British and German banks worked closely together. While strident nationalists in Germany demanded ever more armaments, the majority of the German people saw no need for war and were proud of Germany's progress.

EXTRACT 1

From Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War*, Berg, 2004, pp. 224–5.

This study has argued ... that the largest parties and most popular newspapers [in Germany] harbor reservations about 'offensive' wars, especially those waged against increasingly familiar and allegedly weaker west European states such as France or even Britain. The ... public ... were by and large impressed by the scale of Germany's economic progress and proud of the international position and military power of the new German state. Noisy debates about 'world empires' and rapid armament, as well as 'war scares' and international crises appeared to have created anxieties amongst many Wilhelmine observers. Few on the left and in the center were so moved by such fears to contemplate war as a remedy. On the contrary, most seemed to assume – in conjunction with the Reich's industrialists and financiers – that a military conflict would bring instability and potential disaster.

The arms race and the alliance system both contributed towards the outbreak of war. The arms race fuelled political tension and insecurity, as we can see with the Anglo-German naval race, for example. In Germany the generals, faced by the growing strength of the Russian and French armies, positively welcomed the chance to go war in 1914 before the strength of their potential enemies became overwhelming.

The alliance system with its **secret diplomacy** and treaties was much criticised after 1919. The fact that the web of treaties which covered Europe in 1914 contained, or – equally as important – was thought to contain, secret clauses, contributed to the atmosphere of suspicion between the Triple Alliance and the Triple *Entente*. The alliance system also divided Europe up into potential friends and enemies and influenced military and strategic planning. The danger of this was that the admirals and generals had to take planning decisions which in a time of acute crisis could deprive their governments of both time and the freedom of action. The existence of the Schlieffen Plan (see page 40), for instance, made it much more difficult for Bethmann Hollweg to avoid war in July 1914. On the other hand, two American historians, Marc Trachtenberg and Denis Showalter, point out that the option of attacking Russia first was kept open until 1913, and so presumably could still have been put into operation only a year later, and just might have bought valuable time as far as France was concerned.

Germany's role

From the 1920s to the 1960s it was generally agreed that all the Great Powers were responsible for the war, but then this consensus was challenged by a new generation of German historians led by Fritz Fischer, who argued in two key books that the German leadership by 1912 was more than ready to risk war both to make Germany into a world power and to consolidate its position at home.

EXTRACT 2

From Fritz Fischer, *Germany's War Aims*, Chatto & Windus, 1967, p. 88.

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

KEY TERM

Autocratic Absolute government by one person.

KEY TERM

Secret diplomacy

Diplomatic contacts, meetings and decisions which are not made public.

Fischer focused the spotlight back on Germany's role in the causes of the war and triggered a bitter debate within Germany. His critics, such as the historians Gerhardt Ritter and Golo Mann, accused him of resurrecting the war guilt accusations of 1919. While his arguments have been modified, few historians would go back to the pre-1960 consensus among the majority of German historians and argue that Germany was a victim of aggression in 1914.

The responsibility of the other powers

Nevertheless, the Fischer controversy inspired historians to look more closely at the record of the other belligerent powers. Samuel Williamson, for instance, stresses the responsibility of Austria-Hungary.

EXTRACT 3

From Samuel Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 215.

In Vienna in July 1914 a set of leaders experienced in statecraft, power and crisis management consciously risked a general war to fight a local war. Battered during the Balkan wars by Serbian expansion, Russian activism and now by the loss of Franz Ferdinand, the Habsburg leaders desperately tried to shape their future, rather than let events destroy them. The fear of domestic disintegration made war an acceptable option.

Serbia's willingness to risk a war with Austria even if that should trigger a European war is explored by Mark Cornwall and Joachim Remark, and Edward McCullough argues strongly that Germany and Austria 'fought to maintain the *status quo*, while France and Russia fought to change it'. Britain too is heavily criticised by Niall Ferguson for the ambiguity of its foreign policy and secret military staff talks with the French about which parliament knew nothing.

EXTRACT 4

From Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, Penguin, 1999, p. 443.

Britain's decision to intervene was the result of secret planning by generals and diplomats, which dated back to late 1905. Formally Britain had no 'universal commitment' to France; this was repeatedly stated by Grey and other ministers in parliament and the press between 1907 and 1914 ... The key was the conviction of a minority of generals, diplomats and politicians that, in the event of continental war, Britain must send an army to France.

? How far do the views of the historians on the causes of the First World War quoted in Extracts 1, 2, 3 and 4 complement or contradict each other?

Why did war break out in 1914?

Why did war break out in 1914 when previous crises in the Balkans and Morocco had not led to conflict between the Dual Alliance and the Triple *Entente*?

Arguably, each crisis increased the likelihood of war. The two Moroccan crises did much to bring together Britain and France, while France's failure to back Russia in the Bosnian crisis of 1908, and Russia's subsequent humiliation at the hands of Austria and Germany, strengthened both Poincaré's resolve to support Russia next time and Russia's determination to stop the destruction of Serbia in July 1914.

The Great Powers did co-operate in containing the fallout from the two Balkan wars, but nevertheless the emergence of a greatly strengthened Serbia in 1913 with its claims on Bosnia and Herzegovina was a deadly threat to the Habsburg Empire, and the following year Austria went to war to crush it.

The constant international tension had created a mood throughout Europe that war was sooner or later inevitable, and that the main thing was to choose the right moment for the struggle to start. For differing reasons and at different stages that moment seemed to have been reached in July 1914. The Sarajevo assassinations brought together all the explosive tensions in Europe. Germany could not allow its only reliable ally to be humiliated by Serbia and Russia. Once Germany declared war on Russia, France could not stand back and see Russia defeated, while Britain, despite initial hesitations, could not afford to run the risk of a German victory. The decisions of the statesmen were backed for the most part by their people, who saw the war as a struggle and a matter of honour and principle to preserve their nation's independence, greatness and future development.

Chapter summary

In 1890, after Bismarck's resignation, Germany did not renew the Reinsurance Treaty but instead hoped to negotiate an alliance with Britain. Not only did this fail but it opened the door to the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance of 1894. For the next decade the focus of European rivalries shifted from Europe and the Balkans to Africa and China, where the Great Powers, joined by Japan, scrambled for territory and influence. The Germans believed that Britain, whose large and vulnerable empire was coming under increasing pressure, would in the

end seek to join the Triple Alliance, but the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the defeat of Russia in Manchuria and the *Entente* with France eased the pressure on Britain. The years 1904–14 saw growing Anglo-German tension largely as a result of naval rivalry and also the re-emergence of Austro-Russian rivalry in the Balkans, made more dangerous by Germany's support for Austria in the Bosnian crisis of 1908–9. By early 1914, with the collapse of the Turkish Empire within Europe, Serbia emerged as a major threat to Austria. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand gave Austria the chance to counter this threat but at the cost of causing a European war triggered by the alliance system.

Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- 1 What was the impact of the Franco-Russian Alliance on the European balance of power?
- 2 Why did imperial rivalries in Africa and China not lead to a major war?
- 3 How serious was the Fashoda crisis?
- 4 Why did the Jameson raid damage Anglo-German relations?
- 5 How great a role did economic rivalry play in the deterioration in Anglo-German relations?
- 6 What role did Anglo-German naval rivalry play in the causes of the First World War?
- 7 What did the Germans hope to achieve by triggering the first Moroccan crisis?
- 8 Why did Britain and Russia sign the colonial agreement of 1907?
- 9 What impact did the second Moroccan crisis have on the arms race?
- 10 To what extent did Poincaré strengthen the Triple Entente?
- 11 Why did the First Balkan War threaten the peace of Europe?
- 12 Why was Austria the 'clear loser' in the Second Balkan War?
- 13 Did Russian mobilisation make the First World War inevitable?
- 14 Why did Germany declare war on Russia on 1 August 1914?
- 15 Why did Britain not declare war on Germany until 4 August 1914?

Question practice

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 'Troubles in the Balkans were the most important factor in causing the outbreak of the First World War?' How far do you agree?
- 2 'It was Germany that caused the First World War.' Assess the validity of this view.
- 3 To what extent was the Triple Entente a cause of the First World War?
- 4 'The termination of the Reinsurance Treaty in 1890 by Germany was a major mistake that ultimately made the First World War more likely.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS

- 1 Read the interpretation and then answer the question that follows: 'The alliances and alignments guaranteed that the [Balkan] crisis [of 1914] would be Europe wide. In this situation the decisions of Austria-Hungary and Germany on the one hand, and of Russia on the other, involved fateful consequences.' (From D.E. Lee, *The Outbreak of the First World War*, D.C. Heath, 1975, p. x.) Evaluate the strengths of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations that you have studied.
- 2 Read the interpretation and then answer the question that follows: '[Germany's] leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of the general war in 1914.' (From Fritz Fischer, *Germany's War Aims*, W.W. Norton, 1967, p. 88.) Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations that you have studied.

SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

- 1 With reference to Sources 1 and 2, and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two sources is more valuable in explaining why the state of Austro-Russian relations was a threat to the peace of Europe?
- 2 With reference to Sources 2, 3 and 4, and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these sources to a historian studying the causes of the First World War.

SOURCE 1

From a dispatch to the Austrian foreign minister by the German chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 10 February 1913, quoted in M. Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War*, Berg, 2004, p. 204.

As far as I can judge the situation in Russia, on the basis of information which I have cause to believe is reliable, we can reckon with certainty that the forces which stand behind the Pan-Slavist agitation will win the upper hand if Austria should get involved in a conflict with Serbia. One must arrive at the conclusion, after objective enquiry that it is almost impossible for Russia without an enormous loss of prestige, given its traditional relations with the Balkan states to look on without acting during a military advance against Serbia by Austria-Hungary. The consequences of Russian involvement, however, are plain for all to see. It would turn into an armed conflict of the Triple Alliance – predictably not supported by Italy with great enthusiasm – against the powers of the Triple Entente in which Germany would have to bear the entire heavy burden of a French and English attack.

SOURCE 2

From a report to the British foreign secretary from Sir Fairfax Cartwright, British ambassador to Vienna, January 1913, quoted in Joachim Remak, 'Third Balkan War' in D.E. Lee, editor, *The Outbreak of the First World War*, D.C. Heath, 1975, p. 146.

[Serbia] will some day set Europe by the ears and bring a universal war on the Continent ... I cannot tell you how exasperated people are getting here at the continual worry which that little country causes to Austria under encouragement from Russia. It may be compared to a certain extent to the trouble we had to suffer through the hostile attitude formerly assumed against us by the Transvaal Republic under the guiding hand of Germany. It will be lucky if Europe succeeds in avoiding war as a result of the present crisis. The next time a [Serbian] crisis arises ... I feel sure that Austria-Hungary will refuse to admit of any Russian interference in the dispute and that she will proceed to settle her differences with her little neighbour by herself. ...

SOURCE 3

From the Franco-Russian Treaty 1892, quoted in Yale Law School, The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/frumil.asp

1. If France is attacked by Germany, or by Italy supported by Germany, Russia shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany. If Russia is attacked by Germany, or by Austria supported by Germany, France shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany.
2. In case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or of any one of the Powers belonging to it, should be mobilized, France and Russia, at the first news of this event and without previous agreement being necessary, shall mobilize immediately and simultaneously the whole of their forces, and shall transport them as far as possible to their frontiers.
3. The available forces to be employed against Germany shall be, on the part of France, 1,300,000 men, on the part of Russia, 700,000 or 800,000 men.

SOURCE 4

From David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Odhams, 1938, p. 1.

In the year 1904 on the day when the Anglo-French entente was announced, I arrived at Dalmeny [in Scotland] on a couple of days' visit to the late Lord Roseberry. His first greeting to me was: 'Well, I suppose you are just as pleased as the rest of them with this French agreement?' I assured him that I was delighted that our snarling and scratching relations with France had come to an end at last. He replied: 'You are all wrong. It means war with Germany in the end!'

... Had anyone then told me that before I ceased to hold office in the British Cabinet I should ... have witnessed a war between Britain and Germany ... I should have treated such a forecast as [a] ... wild prediction ...

The First World War 1914–18

Once war had broken out the key decisions about the future of Europe were made on the battlefield. It was not the diplomats, but the generals and admirals who now called the tune. To understand why the war lasted so long and ended in the defeat of the Central Powers, it is necessary to examine how events on the battlefields unfolded, as well as the aims and strategies of the belligerents. This chapter therefore examines the history of the war under the following headings:

- ★ The military and strategic background of the war 1914–15
- ★ 1916: The deadlock still unbroken
- ★ 1917: 'No peace without victory'
- ★ 1918: The final year of the war
- ★ The armistices of October and November 1918

Key dates

1914 Aug.	Germany invaded Belgium and France	1916 June	Battle of Jutland
	Battle of Tannenberg	July–Nov.	Battle of the Somme
Aug. 23	Japan declared war on Germany	1917 Jan.	Unrestricted submarine warfare began
Oct. 28	Turkey joined the Central Powers	Feb.	First Russian Revolution
1915 April 26	Treaty of London signed by Italy, France, Britain and Russia	April 6	USA declared war on Germany
May 23	Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary	Oct.	Second Russian or Bolshevik Revolution
1916 Feb.–Nov.	Battle of Verdun	1918 March 3	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
		March–April	German offensive on the Western Front
		Nov. 11	German armistice