

PrepUS History
Unit 7 – Changing America
World War I: The Seeds of War

The First World War broke out in late summer 1914, but tension had been building in Europe since 1900. So why did the war start?

The MAIN Causes

Militarism **Militarism** - building up armed forces, getting ready for war.

Alliances **Alliances** - agreements to defend and help another country.

Imperialism **Imperialism** - trying to build up an Empire.

Nationalism **Nationalism** - having pride in your country, willing to defend it.

Germany wished to build up her colonial empire. This is known as _____.

Germany also built up her armed forces - known as _____.

Britain had the most powerful navy and was worried about other countries building up their armed forces. We could call this a concern about _____.

Countries in Europe were very proud of themselves and would defend their country to the very end. This is known as _____.

The Causes of World War One

June 28 in Sarajevo

We'll start with the facts and work back: it may make it all the easier to understand how World War I actually happened. The events of July and early August 1914 are a classic case of "one thing led to another" - otherwise known as the treaty alliance system.

The spark was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. Archduke Ferdinand was chosen as a target because Serbians feared that after his ascension to the throne, he would continue and even heighten the persecution of Serbs living within the Austro-Hungarian empire. Serbia had gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. At that time, Serbia laid claim to several regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina which were inhabited primarily by Serbs. However, in 1908, Austria-Hungary officially annexed all of occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, adding additional fuel to the fires of Serbian nationalism.

The Serbian terrorist organization the Black Hand had trained a small group of teenage operatives to infiltrate Bosnia and carry out the assassination of the Archduke. It is unclear how active the Serbian government was in the plot, but it was uncovered years later that the leader of the Black Hand, Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic, was also the head of Serbian military intelligence.

As Francis Ferdinand and his party proceeded through Sarajevo, the first of the Black Hand operatives tossed a bomb at the Archduke's automobile. The chauffeur saw the explosive and accelerated to avoid the impact. Sophie ducked, and Francis Ferdinand deflected the bomb with his arm, causing it to bounce off the back of the car and explode behind them, demolishing the next car and seriously injuring several aides. To avoid capture and interrogation, the unsuccessful assassin, nineteen-year-old Nedjelko Cabrinovic, jumped into the river. However, he was hauled out of the river and detained.

As the Archduke's entourage resumed its tour of Sarajevo, the Archduke's chauffeur took a wrong turn and drove within ten feet of another Black Hand agent, Gavrilo Princip. Princip stepped up to the car and fired two pistol shots. One bullet hit Sophie, killing her instantly. The other hit Francis Ferdinand, who died within minutes. Like Carbinovic, Princip attempted suicide, but was captured before succeeding.

Ferdinand's death at the hands of the Black Hand set in train a mindlessly mechanical series of events that culminated in the world's first global war.

Austria-Hungary's Reaction

Austria-Hungary's reaction to the death of their heir (who was in any case not greatly beloved by the Emperor, Franz Josef, or his government) was three weeks in coming. Arguing that the Serbian government was implicated in the machinations of the Black Hand, the Austro-Hungarians opted to take the opportunity to stamp its authority upon the Serbians, crushing the nationalist movement there and cementing Austria-Hungary's influence in the Balkans.

It did so by issuing an ultimatum to Serbia: bring the assassins to justice! They effectively nullified Serbia's sovereignty. Austria-Hungary's expectation was that Serbia would reject the remarkably severe terms of the ultimatum, thereby giving her a pretext for launching a limited war against Serbia.

However, Serbia had Slavic ties with Russia, so although Austria-Hungary didn't really expect Russia to be drawn into the dispute to any great extent other than through diplomatic protest, the Austro-Hungarian government sought assurances from her ally, Germany, that they would come to their aid should the unthinkable happen and Russia declared war on Austria-Hungary. Germany readily agreed and even encouraged Austria-Hungary's warlike stance.

One Thing Led to Another

These were the remarkable sequence of events that led inexorably to the 'Great War' - a name that had been touted even before the coming of the conflict.

Austria-Hungary, unsatisfied with Serbia's response to her ultimatum, declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914.

Russia, bound by treaty to Serbia, announced mobilization of its vast army in Serbia's defense, a slow process that would take around six weeks to complete.

Germany, allied to Austria-Hungary by treaty, viewed the Russian mobilization as an act of war against Austria-Hungary, and after little warning declared war on Russia on 1 August.

France, bound by treaty to Russia, responded by announcing war against Germany and, by extension, on Austria-Hungary on 3 August. Germany promptly responded by invading neutral

Belgium so as to reach Paris by the shortest possible route.

Britain, allied to France by a more loosely worded treaty which placed a “moral obligation” upon them to defend France, declared war against Germany on 4 August. Britain’s reason for entering the conflict lay in another direction: they were obligated to defend neutral Belgium by the terms of a 75-year old treaty.

With Germany’s invasion of Belgium on 4 August, and the Belgian King’s appeal to Britain for assistance, Britain committed itself to Belgium’s defense later that day. Like France, Britain was by extension also at war with Austria-Hungary.

With Britain’s entry into the war, British colonies and dominions abroad, including Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, offered military and financial assistance.

Japan, honoring a military agreement with Britain, declared war on Germany on 23 August 1914. Two days later Austria-Hungary responded by declaring war on Japan.

Italy, although allied to both Germany and Austria-Hungary, was able to avoid entering the fray by citing a clause enabling it to evade its obligations to both. Italy was committed to defend Germany and Austria-Hungary only in the event of a ‘defensive’ war; arguing that their actions were ‘offensive’ she declared instead a policy of neutrality. The following year, in May 1915, she finally joined the conflict by siding with the Allies against her two former allies.

The Tangle of Alliances

Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the Triple Alliance in 1882 and signed an agreement to support each other militarily in the event of war. Germany and Austria-Hungary shared strong ethnic ties. Italy and Austria-Hungary, however, had land disputes and were rivals for control of the Adriatic Sea. Nevertheless, the Triple Alliance was renewed from time to time until 1913. Secretly, Italy had signed a similar treaty with France.

In 1907 Great Britain, France, and Russia formed an alliance called the Triple Entente. The Triple Entente counterbalanced the power of the Triple Alliance in Europe. The two associations of nations came into armed conflict in 1914. Italy initially declared neutrality, thereby ending the Triple Alliance. Then, in 1915, Italy entered the conflict on the side of the Entente, which would be known during World War I as the Allied Powers, or Allies.

All these alliances brought the most of the world’s major nations into the war at one point or another. What was intended as a strictly limited war - a brief war - between accuser and accused, Austria-Hungary and Serbia, rapidly escalated into something that was beyond the expectations of even the most warlike politicians.

Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria

Allied Powers: Great Britain, France, Russia, Serbia, Belgium, Japan, Montenegro*

** Italy joined the Allied Powers in late 1915*

Cut and tape or write the events in the boxes in their correct chronological order.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

28 June 1914

Serb student, Gavrilo
Princip shoots
Austrian Archduke
Franz Ferdinand &
his wife.

war on France.

Due to her Alliance,
Russia mobilizes to
support Serbia.

5th August 1914

Austro-Hungary
declared war on
Russia.

1st August 1914

Due to the alliances,
Germany declares
war on Russia.

By 12 August 1914

France and Britain
declare war on
Austro-Hungary.

4th August 1914

Germany invaded
Belgium. Britain
declares war on
Germany.

28 July 1914

Unhappy at Serbia's
response, Austro-
Hungary declares war
on Serbia.

3rd August 1914

Germany declared

29th July 1914