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# THE TROUBLED CONTINENT

1870 – 1914

**In the early 20th century, Europe was dominated by ambitious imperial states. This produced an unstable international system and fueled an arms race. War broke out in Europe with the assassination of Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand in the summer of 1914.**



# THE TROUBLED CONTINENT



German chancellor Otto von Bismarck masterminded the creation of a united Germany in the 1860s and 1870s. He created the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary and kept friendly relations with Russia.



The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife by Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, led Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia.

German propaganda portrayed Germany in 1914 as a chivalrous and heroic defender of civilization against the barbarism of its enemies.



Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph, here holding court in Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, was head of a vast but restless empire with a large Slav population. Its annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 angered Serbia.



In the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, Serbia, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria fought against Ottoman Turkey and against one another. Serbia gained military strength and confidence in these conflicts.

ATLANTIC OCEAN



The arrival of the German gunboat *Panther* off Agadir in July 1911 was a challenge to French imperial ambitions in Morocco. The episode brought Europe to the brink of war.

**A** series of wars in the 1860s and 1870s established Germany as Europe's dominant military power. In the 1890s, France and Russia formed an alliance to counter the might of Germany and its close ally, Austria-Hungary. In the first decade of the 20th century, Britain, feeling threatened by the growth of the German navy, abandoned its traditional isolationism and formed an entente—a loose unofficial alliance—with France and Russia. In the years

leading up to World War I, peace was maintained by a balance of power between the two hostile alliance systems. The European states expanded their armed forces and equipped them with the latest technology. They developed plans for the rapid mobilization of mass conscript armies that threatened to turn any confrontation into full-scale war. Every country felt that the side that struck first would have a decisive advantage.

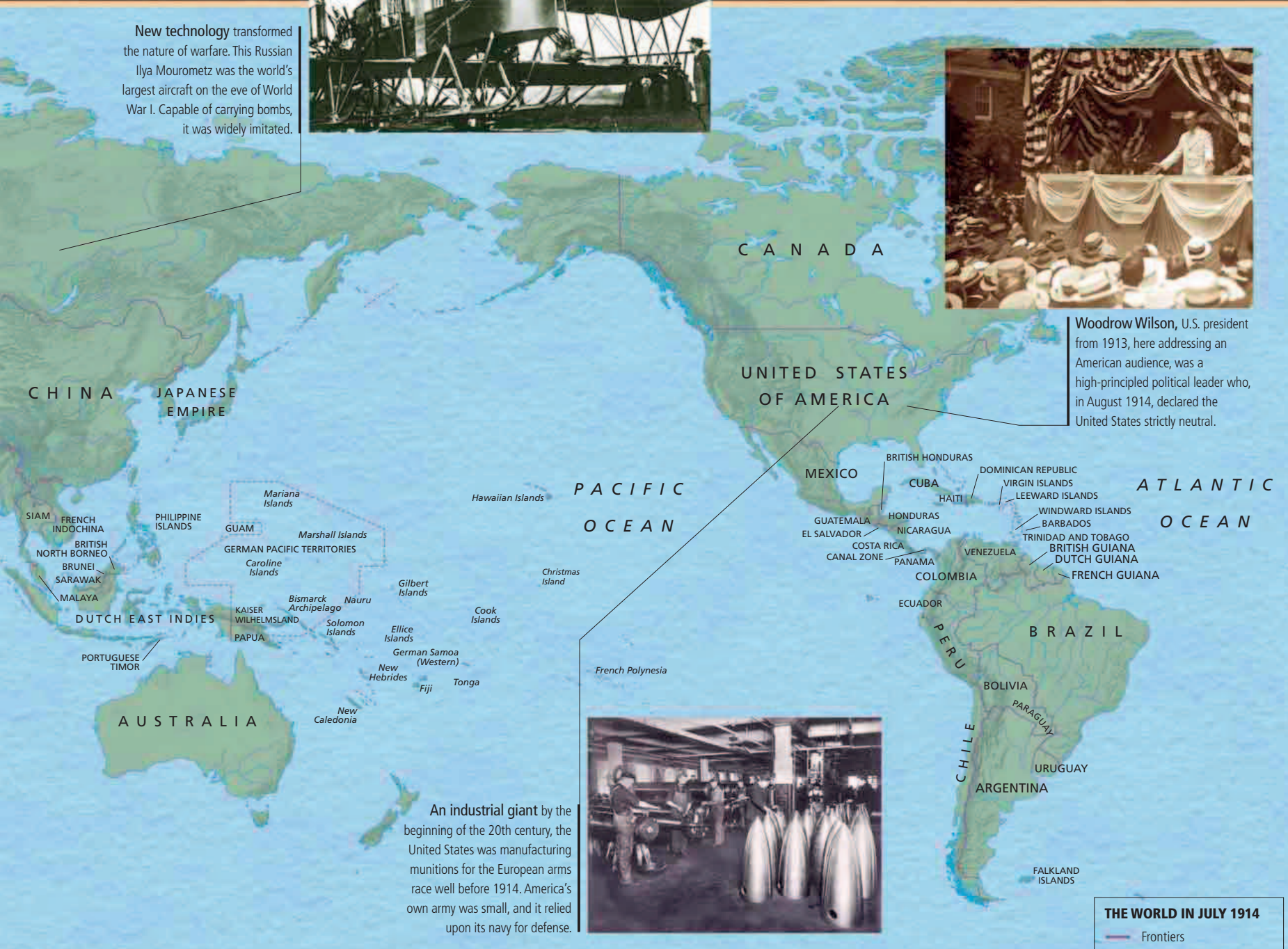


## 1870 – 1914

New technology transformed the nature of warfare. This Russian Ilya Mourometz was the world's largest aircraft on the eve of World War I. Capable of carrying bombs, it was widely imitated.



Woodrow Wilson, U.S. president from 1913, here addressing an American audience, was a high-principled political leader who, in August 1914, declared the United States strictly neutral.



An industrial giant by the beginning of the 20th century, the United States was manufacturing munitions for the European arms race well before 1914. America's own army was small, and it relied upon its navy for defense.



The behavior of Germany's leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II, was aggressive and erratic, particularly during the Moroccan Crisis of 1911. But the spark that ignited war came in the Balkans, where states such as Serbia had become independent of Ottoman Turkish rule in the 19th century. Russia had ambitions to spread its influence in the Balkans as the champion of the Slav peoples. This led to hostile relations with Austria-Hungary, which was at odds with restless Slav


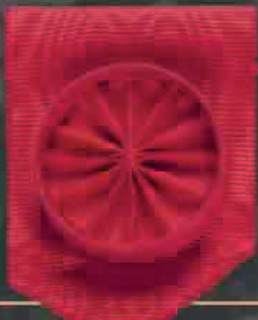




minorities, including Serbs, within its own borders. In June 1914, a Serb terrorist assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Austria-Hungary was determined to use this as a pretext for a war with Serbia.

When Russia mobilized in defense of Serbia, Germany declared war on Russia and France. The German invasion of neutral Belgium then ensured that a hesitant Britain would enter the conflict.



# TIMELINE 1870 – 1914






**Franco-Prussian War** ■ Rival military alliances ■ **Wilhelm II is Kaiser** ■  
**Boer War** ■ **Anglo-German naval race** ■ Moroccan Crises ■ **Wars in the**  
**Balkans** ■ Assassination in Sarajevo ■ **Declarations of war**

1870 – 1880	1881 – 1890	1891 – 1900	1901 – 1902	1903 – 1904	1905 – 1906
<p><b>JULY 1870</b> Outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.</p> <p><b>JANUARY 1871</b> France is defeated. The King of Prussia is declared Emperor of Germany.</p>	<p><b>1881</b> Russia joins Germany and Austria-Hungary in the League of the Three Emperors.</p> <p><b>1882</b> The Triple Alliance is formed between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.</p>	<p><b>1891</b> Architect of Germany's prewar planning Alfred von Schlieffen becomes German Chief of the General Staff.</p> <p><b>JANUARY 1894</b> Franco-Russian Alliance is concluded.</p> <p>» Alfred von Schlieffen</p>	<p><b>1901</b> Discussions about a possible alliance between Britain and Germany come to nothing.</p> <p><b>JANUARY 1901</b> Death of Queen Victoria.</p>		
	<p><b>1884</b> The Maxim gun, the first true machine gun, is invented. The Berlin Conference formalizes the division of Africa between European colonial powers.</p>		<p><b>MARCH 1901</b> In the Boer War, the British adopt the policy of moving Boer civilians into concentration camps.</p> <p><b>SEPTEMBER 1901</b> China signs a humiliating treaty with foreign powers after suppression of the Boxer Rebellion.</p>	<p><b>MARCH 1903</b> Germans make plans with Ottoman Turkey to build a railroad between Berlin and Baghdad.</p> <p><b>DECEMBER 1903</b> The Wright brothers make the first powered heavier-than-air flight.</p>	<p>» King Edward VII visits Paris for the Entente Cordiale</p> <p><b>1905</b> German army adopts the Schlieffen Plan for fighting a war on two fronts.</p>
	<p><b>JUNE 1888</b> Wilhelm II becomes emperor (Kaiser) of Germany.</p> <p><b>1889</b> Russia begins a rapprochement with France.</p>	<p><b>1898</b> Germany begins naval expansion, starting an Anglo-German naval race.</p> <p><b>OCTOBER 1899</b> The Boer War in South Africa reveals deficiencies in the British Army.</p>	<p><b>JANUARY 1902</b> Britain establishes a military alliance with Japan.</p>	<p><b>FEBRUARY 1904</b> Russo-Japanese War begins.</p> <p><b>APRIL 1904</b> Britain forms the Entente Cordiale with France.</p>	<p><b>MARCH 1905</b> Japanese army defeats the Russians at the Battle of Mukden. Germany provokes the First Moroccan Crisis to test the Anglo-French Entente, which holds firm.</p>
<p>» French Legion of Honor medal</p> <p><b>MARCH 1878</b> Defeated in war with Russia, Ottoman Turkey is forced to recognize the independence of Serbia and Romania.</p>	<p><b>1890</b> European armies begin to adopt bolt-action repeater rifles, increasing infantry rate of fire.</p> 	<p><b>1900</b> First effective submarines come into service. First flight of Zeppelin airship.</p>	<p><b>MAY 1902</b> Boer War ends in British victory.</p>		<p><b>MAY 1905</b> The Imperial Japanese Navy destroys a Russian fleet at the Battle of Tsushima.</p> <p><b>SEPTEMBER 1905</b> Russo-Japanese War ends in humiliating defeat for Russia.</p>
<p><b>1879</b> Germany and Austria-Hungary form the Dual Alliance.</p> <p>» Belgian machine gun</p>			<p><b>JUNE 1902</b> Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy is renewed.</p>		<p><b>FEBRUARY 1906</b> HMS Dreadnought is launched, rendering all earlier battleships obsolete.</p> <p>» Kaiser Wilhelm II</p>



“The accelerating **arms race is... a crushing burden** that weighs on all nations and, if prolonged, **will lead to the very cataclysm** it seeks to avert.”

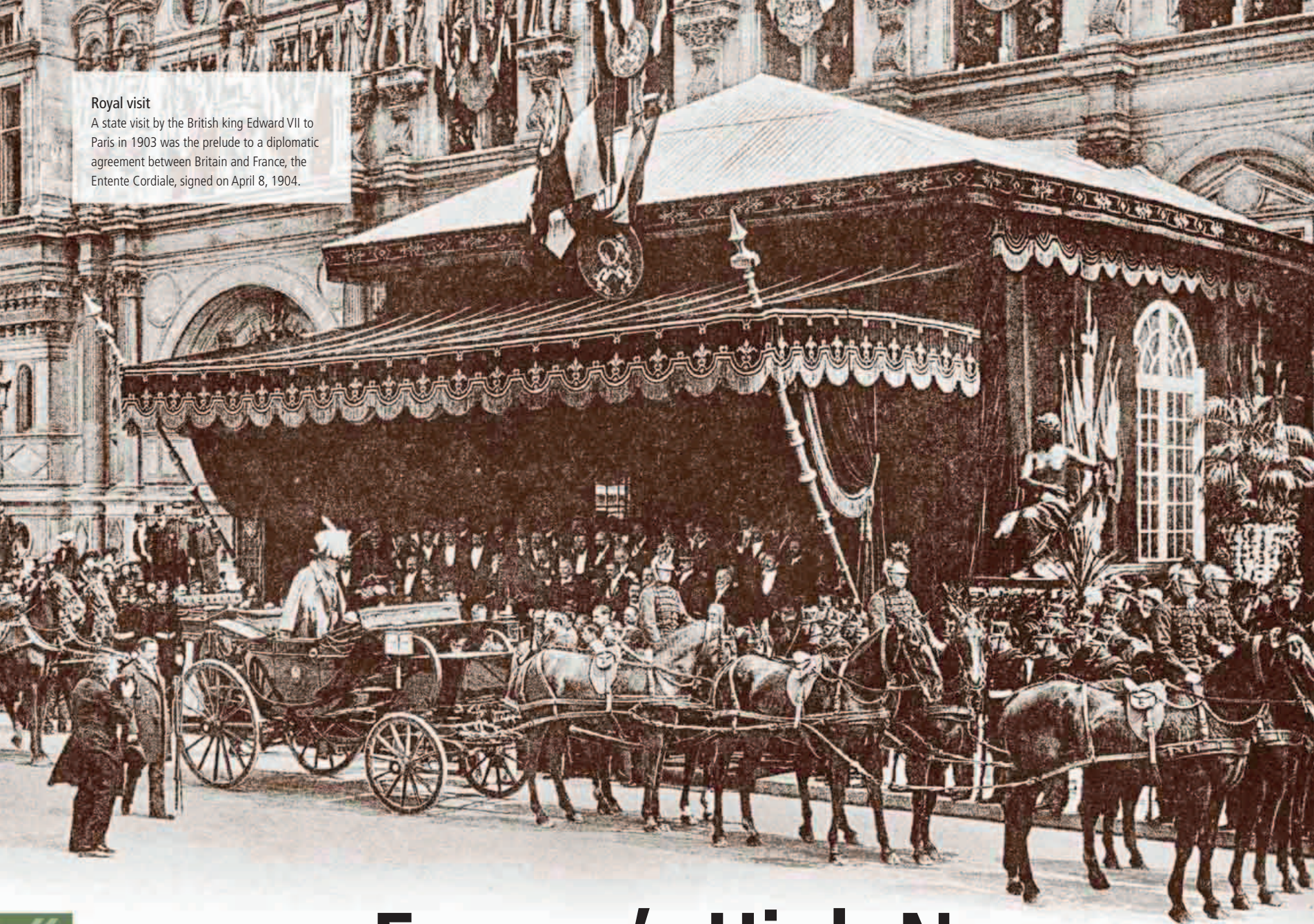
TSAR NICHOLAS II, ADDRESSING THE HAGUE CONFERENCE, 1899

1907 – 1908	1909 – 1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	»
 <p><b>MARCH 1909</b> Germany backs Austria-Hungary over the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, forcing Russia to withdraw its opposition by threatening war.</p> <p>« Political postcard of European balancing act</p>	<p><b>MARCH 1909</b> Germany backs Austria-Hungary over the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, forcing Russia to withdraw its opposition by threatening war.</p>	<p><b>JULY</b> General Joseph Joffre is appointed commander-in-chief of the French army.</p> <p><b>JULY 1</b> Arrival of German gunboat in Tangier provokes the Second Moroccan Crisis, taking Europe to the brink of war.</p>	<p><b>FEBRUARY 12</b> China becomes a republic as the last emperor abdicates.</p>	<p><b>MARCH 23–MAY 30</b> Bulgarians capture Adrianople, Turkey, in First Balkan War. Treaty of London redraws boundaries.</p> <p><b>JUNE 29</b> Second Balkan War begins. Bulgaria fights Serbia, Greece, and Romania.</p>		
<p><b>AUGUST 1907</b> Russia and Britain sign a convention settling outstanding disputes in Central Asia.</p> <p><b>1908</b> German army adopts the MG 08 machine gun.</p>	<p><b>APRIL 1909</b> Young Turks depose Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II and replace him with Mehmed V.</p>			<p><b>JUNE 28</b> Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo.</p> <p><b>JULY 6</b> Germany agrees to support Austro-Hungarian action against Serbia.</p>		
<p>» German Uhlan helmet</p> 	<p><b>NOVEMBER 1909</b> Britain creates an Imperial General Staff to coordinate military planning in Britain and its dominions.</p>	<p>» The German High Seas Fleet in the North Sea</p> <p><b>SEPTEMBER 29</b> Italy declares war on Turkey in pursuit of territorial claims in Libya.</p>	<p><b>MARCH 28</b> British House of Commons rejects votes for women, provoking suffragettes into adoption of militant tactics.</p>	<p><b>AUGUST 7</b> France enacts the Three-Year Law, extending conscription.</p> <p><b>AUGUST 10</b> Second Balkan War ends with defeat of Bulgaria.</p>	<p><b>JULY 23</b> Austria-Hungary issues the Serbians an ultimatum.</p> <p><b>JULY 28</b> Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.</p>	
<p><b>JULY 1908</b> Young Turk revolution begins drive to modernize Ottoman Turkey.</p>	<p><b>1910</b> Armies and navies of the major powers begin to acquire planes and train military pilots.</p> <p>» Suffragette banner</p>		<p><b>OCTOBER 8</b> First Balkan War begins, pitting Turkey against the Balkan League: Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Bulgaria.</p> <p><b>OCTOBER 18</b> Italo-Turkish War ends. Italy takes possession of Libya.</p>			
<p><b>OCTOBER 1908</b> Austria-Hungary announces the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.</p>	<p><b>MAY 1910</b> In Britain, George V becomes king on the death of Edward VII.</p>	<p><b>NOVEMBER 1</b> First combat use of aircraft by Italians in North Africa.</p> <p><b>NOVEMBER 4</b> Treaty of Fez resolves the Moroccan Crisis.</p>	<p><b>NOVEMBER</b> Britain and France agree to share naval responsibilities, the French concentrating on the Mediterranean.</p> <p><b>NOVEMBER 5</b> Woodrow Wilson is elected president of the United States.</p>		<p>» Announcement of war in Berlin</p> <p><b>JULY 30</b> Russia begins general mobilization.</p>	



### Royal visit

A state visit by the British king Edward VII to Paris in 1903 was the prelude to a diplomatic agreement between Britain and France, the Entente Cordiale, signed on April 8, 1904.



## BEFORE

A series of localized wars in the 1860s and 1870s redrew the borders of major European states.

### GERMAN UNIFICATION

In 1860, Germany was a collection of separate states. **Prussia** was acknowledged as its **leading power**, and in 1870–71, it defeated France in the **Franco-Prussian War**. This victory led directly to the founding of the German Empire under the king of Prussia, who later became the German Kaiser.

### AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

The Austrian Hapsburgs survived in power by forming **Austria-Hungary**, the Dual Monarchy, held together by allegiance to the emperor of Austria, who was also the king of Hungary.



GERMAN ARMY HELMET

# Europe's High Noon

**Convinced of the superiority of their civilization, Europeans had achieved a dominant position in the world, rooted in the spectacular growth of their industries and populations, and in the strength of their military forces.**

**A**t the dawn of the 20th century, Europe was at the height of its military and economic power. States such as Britain and France controlled huge empires, encompassing nearly all of Africa and large parts of Asia. European capital and commerce created enormous influence and wealth. Global transportation and communication networks tied the global economy to its European hub. The United States was the only major non-European economic power, although Japan had emerged as an industrializing military force in the 1890s. The leading European powers were Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Austria-

Hungary. Italy and Ottoman Turkey aspired to join them. Of these states, Germany was the most dynamic force.

Since the unification of Germany in 1871 the country had undergone rapid industrialization. The population had grown a massive 43 percent between 1880 and 1910. France, by contrast, had an almost static population growth and less developed industries, despite ruling an

extensive empire. Russia lagged even further behind industrially, but was by far the most populous European state. Britain had lost its industrial lead but still exercised unchallenged dominance over international finance, maritime trade, and its vast overseas empire.

**1.63 BILLION** The estimated global population in 1900. Around one-quarter of this number resided in Europe.



### Precarious balance

A 1910 postcard shows various heads of state embarked upon an uncertain journey, precariously mounted aboard a motor vehicle. In the early 20th century, the political balance was always threatening to tip over into war.





Oppressed nationalities' demands for self-rule were a threat to the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. Governments feared a breakdown of order and responded by asserting the military and diplomatic prestige of the state. They hoped this would serve as an antidote to internal forces of disintegration and subversion.

All the major powers spent large amounts on their armed forces. Mass education and a popular press united in spreading a message of patriotism that easily slipped into jingoism. As no formal institution existed for regulating international affairs, states sought security in alliances. Germany allied itself with Austria-Hungary and Italy, and France with Russia. Britain was

#### Imperial splendor

Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria receives guests at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. A member of the Hapsburg dynasty, he was Europe's longest-ruling monarch in 1914, having come to the throne in 1848.

traditionally isolationist, but its fear of Germany led to agreements with France, and later Russia. These divisive alliance systems existed among nations bound by cultural similarities, economic interdependence, and the ties that linked the various royal families. The inability of the countries to stop the slide to war was to be a catastrophe for Europe, from which it would never recover its global power.

**Tensions between the European powers mounted over disputes outside Europe and in the Balkans.**

#### THE MOROCCAN CRISES

Germany challenged French **imperial ambitions in Morocco**, leading to diplomatic crises in 1905 and 1911 **18–19 »**.

**CENTRAL POWERS** Name given to Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their allies in World War I.

**ENTENTE POWERS** Name given to Britain, France, and Russia, which are also referred to as the Allies.

#### OTTOMAN DECLINE

The long-term decline of the **Turkish Ottoman Empire** was a serious source of instability, triggering an **Italian invasion of Libya**, an Ottoman-ruled area of North Africa, in 1911, and two **Balkan Wars in 1912–13 18–19 »**. Ottoman weakness and Balkan conflicts were a temptation for both Russia and Austria-Hungary to intervene in an area on their southern borders where they had competing interests. This was where World War I would start, after the assassination of **Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand** in June 1914 **28–29 »**.

#### Political systems

Most European states were ruled by hereditary monarchs. In Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, these monarchs retained a large measure of political power, despite the existence of elected parliaments. Britain had retained its monarchy, but kings and queens scrupulously respected the authority of the Houses of Parliament. France, conversely, was a republic. Both Britain and France had restricted electoral franchises—women could not vote, and in Britain the poor were also excluded.

#### Threats and alliances

Although often seen in retrospect as a golden age of tranquil prosperity, the years before World War I were racked by political conflict. Mass socialist movements preached the overthrow of the capitalist system. Anarchists practiced “propaganda of the deed,” assassinating monarchs such as the Italian King Umberto I in July 1900, and bombing symbols of power. Suffragettes turned to violence in their quest for women's voting rights.

#### European alliances, 1878–1918

By 1900, shifting military alliances had resolved into a fixed confrontation between Russia and France on one side and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other.

#### KEY

- ◆ Austro-German alliance, 1878–1918
- ◆ Three Emperors' alliance, 1881–87
- ◆ Austro-Serbian alliance, 1881–95
- ◆ Triple alliance, 1882–1915
- ◆ Austro-German-Romanian alliance, 1883–1916
- ◆ Franco-Russian alliance, 1894–1917
- ◆ Russo-Bulgarian military convention, 1902–13
- ◆ Anglo-French Entente, 1904–1918
- ◆ Anglo-Russian Entente, 1907–1917

#### ALLIANCES DURING WORLD WAR I, 1914–18

- The Allies (and allied states)
- Central Powers (and allied states)
- Neutral states





# Crises and Conflicts

**In the years before the outbreak of World War I, the European powers engaged in brinkmanship and an accelerating arms race. A series of diplomatic crises and conflicts in the Balkans accustomed Europeans to the possibility of a major war.**

Germany was indisputably a major military and economic power by the end of the 19th century. However, it lacked two of the attributes then regarded as indicative of great power status: a substantial overseas empire and an oceangoing navy.

Under the unstable Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany set out to flex its muscles on the world stage. A plan to build a world-class fleet, proposed by Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, was adopted in 1897. To Britain, this appeared to be a hostile act. The German naval program

presented a direct challenge to the Royal Navy's dominance of its home waters, the cornerstone of Britain's national security. The British responded with a massive warship-building program of their own, setting a new standard for battleships with HMS *Dreadnought* in 1906. As the naval race gathered pace, the British buried old rivalries to form an entente with France in 1904 and with France's ally, Russia, in 1907.

## Moroccan crises

While making an enemy of Britain, Germany also manufactured a confrontation with France. In 1905, Kaiser Wilhelm made a provocative visit to Morocco, a nominally independent country that France was absorbing into its sphere of influence. He called for all the powers to be given equal access to Morocco, a claim rejected by a

subsequent international conference. The Germans took up the issue again in 1911, sending the gunboat SMS *Panther* to the Moroccan port of Agadir. This move provoked a diplomatic crisis, briefly raising fears of a general European war. By the end of 1911, a settlement had been negotiated, involving a small concession of territory to Germany from French Equatorial Africa. This saber-rattling, along with some anti-British remarks dropped by the Kaiser, drove Britain to strengthen its links with France.

When the crisis of 1911 blew over, the prospect of a general war appeared to recede. Yet at

a private meeting in December 1912, the Kaiser and his senior military commanders discussed launching a preventive war against France and Russia. They argued that with the strength of the Russian



## Crisis in Morocco

The dispatch of the German gunboat *Panther* to Agadir, caricatured in this contemporary German illustration, took Europe to the brink of war in 1911. Diplomacy solved the crisis but strengthened Anglo-French resolve.

army increasing, it was in Germany's best interest to make the conflict happen sooner rather than later.

## Slav nationalism

In southeastern Europe, tensions were rising. The Balkans were a traditional area of rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Russia. The Russians had adopted the role of protectors and leaders of the area's Slav states,

## BEFORE

**The accession of German Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1888 was followed by a fatal shift in great power relations.**

## LEAGUE OF THE THREE EMPERORS

In 1873, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck tried to stabilize Europe through an **alliance of three empires**: Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. In the 1880s, **rivalry between Russia and Austria-Hungary** undermined this system. Germany formed the **Dual Alliance** with Austria-Hungary, but maintained friendly relations with Russia. This policy was abandoned by Wilhelm II. By 1894, **Russia had allied itself with France** against Germany.



OTTO VON BISMARCK

## German fleet, pre-1914

Dreadnought battleships of the German High Seas Fleet steam into the North Sea before World War I. The navy was a source of pride to the German people, its expansion supported by a patriotic Navy League with more than a million members.





including Serbia and Bulgaria. Russia also had long-term ambitions to expand at the expense of the declining Ottoman Turkish Empire. For Austria-Hungary, Slavs were a domestic problem, a restive part of the empire's ethnic mix. By asserting itself against the Balkan Slavs, especially Serbia, which was not in the Hapsburg Empire, Austria-Hungary hoped to reinforce its authority over its own Slav minorities.

In 1908, the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, an area it already administered, provoked a hostile response from Russia, but its allies, Britain and France, refused to back military action. The annexation left the Russians humiliated and angered Serbia, which covertly backed a campaign of attacks on Austro-Hungarian officials by Bosnian Serbs.

### The Ottoman Empire

The weakness of Ottoman Turkey was another source of instability. In 1908, Turkish nationalists, known as the Young Turks, rebelled against the sultan, Abdul Hamid II, opening a



period of political upheaval. In 1912, the Balkan League—an alliance of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro—attacked and defeated Turkey in the First Balkan War. The victors then fell out over the spoils. Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece to start the Second Balkan War. When Romania also joined the

hostilities, Bulgaria was heavily defeated. The major winner of both wars was Serbia, which almost doubled its territory.

After the war, Bulgaria was left a discontented state, eager for revenge on the Serbs, while the strengthening of a hostile Serbia was a disaster for Austria-Hungary. The split between

### Balkan soldiers

The two Balkan Wars of 1912–13 were fought with great ferocity, resulting in more than half a million casualties. The instability of the region drew Russia and Austria-Hungary into a dangerous confrontation.

Serbia and Bulgaria was a major setback for Russia's Balkan policy. Unable to back both countries, Russia was left with Serbia as its sole ally in the Balkans.

Germany, meanwhile, sought to extend its influence southward, and planned to build a Berlin-to-Baghdad railway. This was interpreted by Britain as a threat to its interests in the Middle East. Enver Pasha, a Young Turk army officer who became Turkish leader in 1913, was pro-German. He invited a German military mission, headed by General Otto Liman von Sanders, to modernize the Turkish army.

None of these crises, fears, and conflicting ambitions made a general European war inevitable, but it had become distinctly imaginable and even tempting for some as a possible solution to intractable problems.

“If the German fleet becomes **superior** to ours, the German army can **conquer** this country.”

SIR EDWARD GREY, BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY, 1906

## AFTER

In the years leading up to World War I, a growing arms race was a clear sign of insecurity and potential conflict.

### THE ARMS RACE

In its **naval race with Britain**, Germany had built 17 dreadnoughts and five battle cruisers by August 1914. Due to Britain's massive financial investment, however, it retained its superiority over Germany, boasting 24 dreadnoughts and 10 battle cruisers.

**DREADNOUGHT** The name of a British battleship that entered service in 1906. It became a general term for all modern battleships of comparable armament and performance.

France extended conscription by the Three Year Law of 1913, attempting to match the size of the German army from a much smaller population base. **Russia increased military spending.**

### BALKAN TROUBLES

World War I was in part a third Balkan War, following on from the two wars of 1912–13. Triggered by the assassination of **Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand** by Bosnian Serbs at Sarajevo in June 1914 **28–29 >>**, World War I began when **Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia 30–31 >>**.



EMPEROR OF GERMANY Born 1859 Died 1941

# Kaiser Wilhelm II

**“England, France, and Russia have conspired... to wage a war of annihilation against us.”**

KAISER WILHELM II, MEMORANDUM WRITTEN JULY 30, 1914

To his enemies, Wilhelm II, King of Prussia and Kaiser (Emperor) of Germany was the embodiment of aggressive Prussian militarism. Yet in many ways, Wilhelm had struggled to adapt to the requirements of his social status and official role. A difficult birth had left him with a withered and paralyzed left arm. To this disability, about which he was self-conscious, was added a neurotic nature. He hero-worshipped his stern and warlike paternal ancestors, and molded himself in the image of the Prussian military tradition—strict, hard, pitiless, and

## Young leader

In the early part of his reign, Wilhelm was a fresh force in German life, promising to lead the country on a new course to global power and prosperity.

patriarchal. He was, however, neither physically nor emotionally fit for the role. A weak man trying to prove he was strong, he developed a habit of erratic posturing, alternately bullying and ingratiating. The other European powers viewed Germany as unreliable and dangerous.

## On the global stage

Coming to the throne at the age of 29, Wilhelm was determined to assert his personal rule. He quickly disposed of the experienced Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. *Weltpolitik*, the theory that Germany should take its place as a global superpower, was adopted as official German policy in 1897. This expansionist outlook was not his own invention. It reflected the ideas and aspirations of a host of German nationalists, who demanded that their country should have a colonial empire, an oceangoing navy, and possibly *Lebensraum* (living space) in eastern Europe.

For Wilhelm, diplomacy was partly a family affair. He was a grandson of Britain's Queen Victoria, on his mother's side, and cousin to Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. These blood connections were important to him, but did not necessarily imply friendship. His attitude toward Britain in particular was contradictory. He



**Churchill meets the Kaiser**

The Kaiser hosted Winston Churchill during military maneuvers in 1909. Churchill described him as a man who wanted to be like Napoleon “without having to fight his battles.”







### The Kaiser at war

Wilhelm was sidelined by military leaders, but could not be ignored completely. Here, he stands between generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff at German General Headquarters in 1917.

In the years leading up to World War I, the German high command under General Helmuth von Moltke and the chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, dictated policy. In the crisis of summer 1914, Wilhelm wavered between violent assertions of the need for war and feeble attempts to preserve peace.

### The war years

Although the spirit of national unity that gripped Germany in August 1914 carried the Kaiser to an unprecedented level of popularity, his marginalization continued. He intervened in the direction of the German war effort, but did not control it. He took a special interest in naval affairs, limiting the operations of the High Seas Fleet in order to avoid loss of his precious battleships. His attitudes showed his habitual instability, one moment advocating genocidal policies on the Eastern Front, the next considering a peace initiative based on an appeal to his royal relatives. From 1916, he lost control of senior appointments and

veered from clear admiration to a conviction that the British were intent on seeking his destruction. Such instability was typical of the Kaiser, as was his impulsiveness.

### Waning authority

Wilhelm liked dramatic diplomatic initiatives, such as his unexpected appearance in Tangier in 1905, provoking the First Moroccan Crisis. Yet the language of his speeches could be blustering in a way that damaged Germany's international image.

November 1908, General Dietrich, Count von Hülsen-Haeseler, the Chief of the German Imperial Military Cabinet, died while dancing in front of the Kaiser dressed in a ballerina's tutu. More damagingly, from 1907 the Kaiser's closest confidant, Prince Philip of Eulenburg, had to defend himself against press allegations of homosexual behavior.

Germany's military and bureaucratic establishment was beginning to tire of Wilhelm's ill-considered public statements and erratic attempts to



### Epaulettes

These shoulder boards formed part of the Kaiser's Hussar Life Guard uniform. Wilhelm loved military regalia and was deeply captivated by the grandeur of parades and ceremonies.

**“Germany is a young and growing empire... to which the legitimate ambition of patriotic Germans refuses to assign any bounds.”**

KAISER WILHELM II, INTERVIEW IN BRITAIN'S *DAILY TELEGRAPH*, OCTOBER 28, 1908

In 1900, he told German troops sent to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China that they should behave like “Huns,” a reference to the devastating attacks on European areas of the Roman Empire by the hordes of Attila the Hun in the fifth century.

Beginning in 1908, Wilhelm's personal position weakened and his influence on policy-making waned. His reputation was damaged by association with scandal. At a private party in

exercise personal diplomacy. The last straw was an interview the Kaiser accorded to a British journalist for the *Daily Telegraph* in October 1908, in which he described the British as “mad as March hares,” suggested German naval expansion was aimed at Japan, and claimed to have personally shown the British how to win the Boer War in South Africa. This outburst alienated public opinion inside Germany as well as abroad.

was forced to accept the ascendancy of General Erich Ludendorff, whom he loathed. Almost powerless, he was dubbed the “Shadow Kaiser.” His last exercise of authority was to sack Ludendorff as the war effort fell apart in October 1918. In November, facing defeat and revolution, the army insisted that he abdicate. Wilhelm was spirited away into exile in the Netherlands, an irrelevant figure as Germany entered a new era.

### TIMELINE

- **January 1859** Born in Berlin, the son of Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia and Princess Victoria of Great Britain.
- **February 1881** Marries Augusta Victoria, Princess of Schleswig-Holstein.
- **June 1888** Becomes Kaiser after the death of his father, Friedrich III.
- **March 1890** Forces the resignation of veteran Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.
- **January 1896** Sends a personal telegram to South Africa to congratulate Boer leader Paul Kruger for defeating the British-backed Jameson Raid. This causes offense to Britain.
- **1897** Backs Admiral von Tirpitz's plan to build a modern navy capable of challenging the British in the North Sea.
- **March 1905** Visits Tangier to assert German interests in Morocco, antagonizing France and causing a diplomatic crisis.
- **April 1907** Prince Philip of Eulenburg, Wilhelm's closest friend and personal adviser, is accused in the press of homosexual activities, initiating a major scandal.
- **October 1908** Gives an ill-considered interview to the British *Daily Telegraph* that includes wild statements on foreign affairs.
- **July 1914** Assures Austria-Hungary of German support for military action against Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.
- **August 1914** Delivers an eloquent address to the deputies of the German Reichstag, welcoming national unity.
- **August 1916** Sidelined as generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff take control of the German war effort.
- **January 1917** Approves the decision to resort to unrestricted U-boat warfare, which will bring the United States into the war.
- **November 1918** Having lost the support of his army commanders and the German people, Wilhelm abdicates and flees to exile in the neutral Netherlands.
- **June 1919** The Treaty of Versailles attempts to prosecute Wilhelm for “supreme offense against international morality.” The Dutch government refuses to extradite him.
- **November 1922** After the death of Victoria Augusta, Wilhelm marries his second wife, Princess Hermine Reuss of Greiz.
- **June 1941** Dies in his country house at Doorn in the Netherlands.



WILHELM AND HERMINE IN EXILE



# Planning for War

The armies of the major European powers had long prepared for the conflict that erupted in 1914. Their military plans were a crucial factor in fueling the buildup to war, although its actual course confounded all their expectations.

The war plans of all the Continental powers were built on the rapid mobilization of mass armies. European states maximized their manpower by conscripting a large proportion of their male population into short-term peacetime service. These trained men formed a reserve that could be easily deployed in the event of war.

This created armies of unprecedented size in Germany, France, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. Britain, which did not have conscription, had a relatively small number of regular troops and reserves, backed up by a part-time Territorial Army intended for home service only.

This risky plan, based on optimistic assumptions about everything from the marching speed of German troops to the slowness of Russian mobilization, was adopted in 1905.

Schlieffen's successor as Chief of the General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke (known as Moltke the Younger),

merely tinkered with details of the plan, such as avoiding the violation of Dutch neutrality and shifting some troops from the

enveloping maneuver to reinforce the border with France. The consequences of violating Belgian neutrality were not addressed.

At the time the Schlieffen Plan was adopted, French war planning was essentially defensive. Fearing German military strength, France had built a

line of fortresses on its eastern border. In 1911, however, General Joseph Joffre took over as French commander-in-chief, and French tactics changed.

## Offense versus defense

Influenced by military theorists such as General Ferdinand Foch, who argued that in modern warfare the offense would always triumph over the defense, Joffre adopted Plan XVII, prescribing an immediate invasion of German-annexed Alsace and Lorraine if war broke out. By 1913, the French had also managed to extract from their Russian allies, whose rearmament they were financing, a promise to launch an offensive against Germany within 15 days of mobilization. The Russians continued to have separate plans for a possible war with Austria-Hungary alone. Austria-Hungary faced a problem of

**42** The number of days it would take for France to fall to Germany, according to the Schlieffen Plan.





## Plans for a war on two fronts

The assumption behind Germany's war planning was that it would have to fight France and Russia simultaneously, a Franco-Russian military alliance having been in place since the 1890s. The German army's Chief of the General Staff from 1891 to 1906, Alfred von Schlieffen, believed that a two-front war could be won only through bold aggression. He devised a plan to hurl most of the German army into an initial offensive against France. Approaching via Belgium, his troops would encircle the French, attacking from the rear and crushing them within six weeks of mobilization. The German troops would then move by train to the Eastern Front and defeat the Russians.

## The Schlieffen Plan

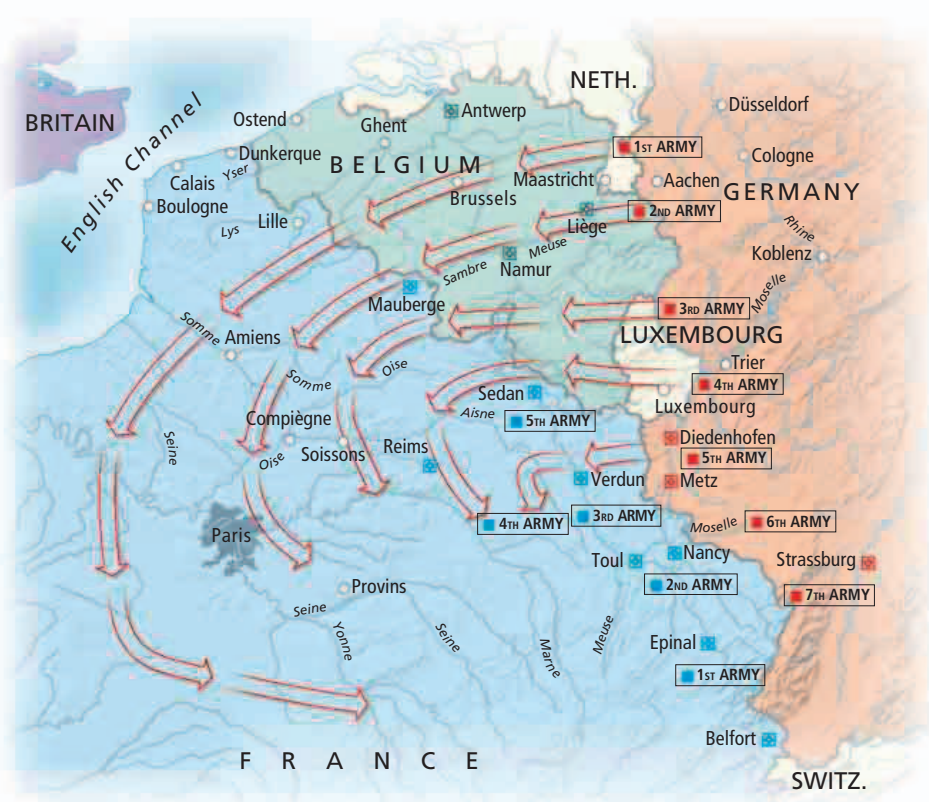
Germany's plan for defeating France involved an advance through neutral Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg to sweep behind the French armies, which were to be enveloped and swiftly destroyed.

**KEY**

-  Planned routes of German armies
-  German fortified town
-  Belgian fortified town
-  French fortified town

“Let the **last man on the right brush the Channel** with his sleeve.”

REMARK ATTRIBUTED TO COUNT ALFRED VON SCHLIEFFEN, 1905



## Part-time soldiers

A British soldier, British lion, and the figure of Britannia advertise a military exhibition held at the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre in London in 1901.

## BEFORE

Prussian victories in wars against Austria in 1866 and France in 1870–71 convinced all European powers of the need for meticulous war planning by a properly trained general staff.

## PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS

Staff officers trained at the Prussian War Academy had excelled in the organizational task of moving masses of men swiftly to the borders by rail and of supplying them once they arrived. After 1870, other European countries imitated the Prussian system—France, for example, creating its *École de Guerre* in 1880. New railroads were built to facilitate mobilization, and the drawing up of railroad timetables was recognized as a vital staff function.



BRITISH BOER WAR MEDAL

## BRITISH REFORMS

The British Army lagged behind Continental Europe, but serious failings revealed during

Britain's war against the Boers in South Africa in 1899–1902 led to major military reforms. Pushed through by War Minister Richard Haldane from 1905, these reforms created the post of Chief of the Imperial General Staff and instituted detailed planning for mobilization in case of war.





#### German troops on maneuvers

A crowd watches soldiers cross a pontoon bridge during Germany's 1912 military maneuvers. These annual occasions were a testing ground for new tactics and technology and a display of military strength.

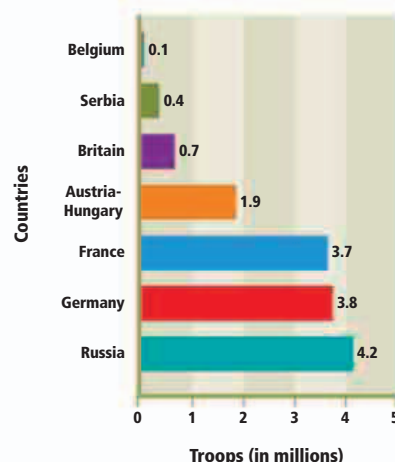
split objectives. The Austro-Hungarian chief of staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, favored an offensive war against Serbia, and was inclined to stand on the defensive against Russia. But Austria-Hungary's German allies needed Austro-Hungarian forces to attack the Russians in Poland, to relieve pressure on Germany's Eastern Front. Despite Austro-Hungarian plans for a "swing force" to be mobilized against Serbia or Russia as required, the issue was still unresolved in 1914.

#### British commitments

Britain's front line of defense was its Royal Navy, which had long enabled British governments to adopt a detached pose in relation to European affairs. But its entente with France

in 1904, designed to deter German aggression, led to the development of war plans that would commit the British to a European war.

From 1911, informal talks between British and French army commanders resulted in an understanding that, if France were attacked by Germany, Britain would send an expeditionary



force across the English Channel to take up position on the left of the French line, facing the border with Belgium. The British were careful to avoid any formal promise to carry out this commitment to their French allies.

The pre-1914 war plans were worked out in great detail by staff officers, with timetables that had to be adhered to if the military machine was to function smoothly. Collectively, they created a situation in which the mobilization of armies could only with great difficulty be prevented from leading to large-scale battles. The planners had written the script for a Europe-wide war that could be precipitated at any moment by a single incident.

#### Army sizes at the outbreak of war

Russia's army was substantially larger than those of other European nations, but it was poorly equipped and badly organized. Britain had a relatively small army, and depended on the Royal Navy for defense.

## AFTER

**The mobilization of European armies in 1914 mostly proceeded with an efficiency that was a credit to the professionalism of army staff officers. Once the fighting had started, however, little went as planned.**

#### THWARTED EXPECTATIONS

None of the plans of the initial protagonists worked out as they had expected. Attacking on their eastern frontier, the French army quickly discovered their troops' **vulnerability to defensive firepower**. At the same time, instead of achieving the rapid defeat of France they had envisioned, German forces were driven back at the **Battle of the Marne** in September 1914 **54–55 >>**. On Germany's eastern front, **advancing Russian armies** suffered heavy defeats. There was to be no quick victory for anyone.



# Evolving Military Technology

“Everybody will be **entrenched...** The **spade** will be **indispensable.**”

JAN BLOCH, POLISH FINANCIER AND INDUSTRIALIST, IN *THE FUTURE OF WAR*, 1897

The European armies and navies of 1914 were the beneficiaries of a century of progress in industry, science, and technology. Change was often not specifically driven by military requirements. Railroads transformed the speed at which armies could be deployed to frontiers. New means of communication, from the electric telegraph to the telephone and radio, were adapted to military uses. Progress

in precision engineering made it much easier to mass-produce weapons with complex mechanisms. Chemists experimented with new explosives that would provide a more powerful replacement for gunpowder.

## Arming the infantry

In 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, armies fought with smoothbore flintlock muskets, loaded by ramming

a ball and powder down the barrel, and cannon firing solid shot. Navies went to sea in wooden sailing ships. The pace of change was slow at first, but by the 1870s a firepower revolution was under way.

In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, both sides armed their infantry (foot soldiers) with breech-loading single-shot rifles. By the 1880s, these already effective infantry

weapons were being replaced by bolt-action rifles with ammunition fed from a magazine. A well-trained soldier using the Lee-Enfield, the British Army's standard rifle from 1895, could fire more than 20 rounds a minute. This rate of fire was far exceeded by machine guns. The Maxim gun, the first true machine gun, brought into active service in the 1890s, fired 600 rounds a minute. The German army took to machine guns enthusiastically, while other countries struggled to find a good tactical use for the weapon.

## Rapid-fire artillery

Artillery guns (long-range weaponry used for bombardment) also adopted rifled barrels and breech-loading. The range of guns greatly increased, and gunners began practicing the bombardment of targets beyond their field of view.

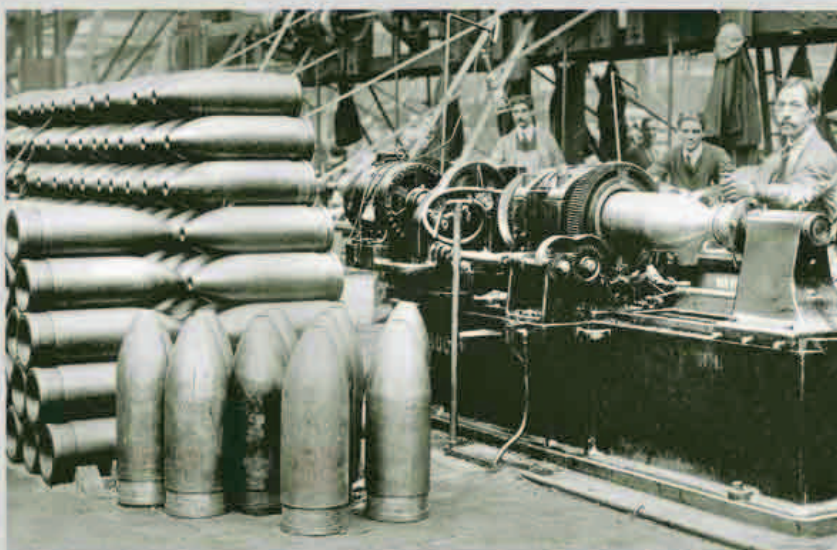
The invention in the 1870s of a hydraulic mechanism that returned the gun's barrel to its original position after recoil cleared the way for rapid-fire artillery. Most important of all, scientifically designed shells packed with nitrate-based high explosives ensured that artillery fire

## Potential bomber

Just before the outbreak of World War I, Russian aviation pioneer Igor Sikorski (right) built the first multiengine aircraft. These flying machines could carry a substantial load and were turned into bombers during the war.







“Aviation is fine as a **sport**.  
But as an **instrument of war**, it is **worthless**.”

FERDINAND FOCH, FRENCH GENERAL, 1911

was more destructive. Rifled guns and high-explosive shells were also used at sea, mounted in rotating turrets aboard steam-driven steel warships.

### New technology

By the early 20th century, armies and navies were eager to explore other new inventions that might give them an advantage over the enemy. Wireless telegraphy (radio), first demonstrated experimentally in the 1890s, was in use by navies by 1904. However, early

radio equipment proved cumbersome on land, and armies preferred to use field telephones.

Inventors Wilbur and Orville Wright developed a heavier-than-air flying machine between 1903 and 1905. European armies showed interest but adoption of the invention was delayed by the brothers' refusal to demonstrate their aircraft in public.

Meanwhile, airships were developed by, among others, German Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin. From 1909, the year in which French pilot Louis Blériot flew a monoplane across the Channel, an air craze gripped Europe. Air enthusiasts and fantasy fiction writers envisaged future aerial wars with mass bombing of cities. More

**12,000** The number of machine guns in service with the German army in August 1914. In contrast, the British and French armies had only a few hundred machine guns each.

soberly, armies and navies explored the potential of airplanes and airships for reconnaissance, integrating both into maneuvers from 1911.

By that date, motor transportation was having a major impact on civilian life, but armies remained overwhelmingly reliant upon horse-drawn vehicles. Armored cars began to come into service, and were used by Italy in its war with Turkey in 1911.

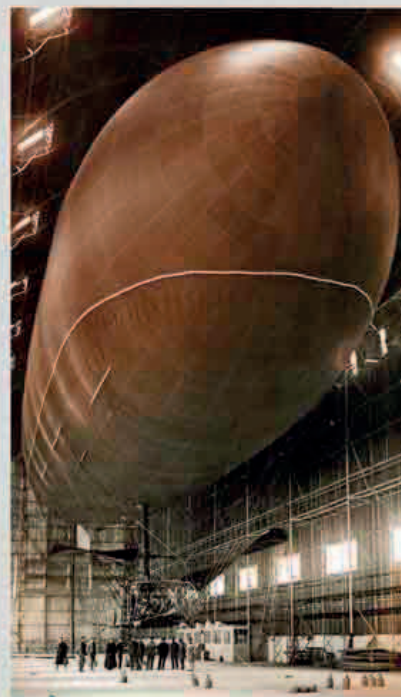
### High-explosive shells

Mass-produced in factories and fired from breech-loading rifled guns, these shells marked a revolutionary advance in destructive power over the gunpowder and smoothbore cannons of the mid-19th century.

The rapid developments in military technology from the 1870s occurred during a long period of peace between the great powers. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, the first conflict to use modern armaments, provided a preview of what was to come in World War I. At sea, torpedoes and mines proved capable of sinking the largest warships. On land, troops were entrenched behind barbed wire. Invented to control cattle in the American West, barbed wire inflicted massive casualties on infantry attempting frontal assaults.

### The old ways die hard

In Europe, naval commanders continued to focus on bigger and better battleships, while army commanders preached the triumph of offensive spirit over defensive firepower. Openness to technological innovation coexisted with an attachment to venerated traditions, such as the cavalry charge with saber and lance, and the infantry assault with fixed bayonets. World War I would be characterized by the contrast between the efficient exploitation of weaponry supplied by science and industry and the persistence of many attitudes to war belonging to an earlier era.



Clément-Bayard II airship

Built in 1910 for the French army, this airship never entered service. It was the first airship to fly over the English Channel, and its wireless transmitter achieved the first air-ground radio communication.

### TIMELINE

- **1840s** Prussia is the first European state to equip its infantry with a breech-loading rifle, the Dreyse needle gun.
  - **1859** In France, the army makes the first mass movement of troops by railroad, transporting an army to fight the Austrians in northern Italy.
- 
- BELGIAN MACHINE GUN, 1869**
- **1860s** The first hand-cranked rapid-fire weapons are introduced, including the Belgian Montigny Mitrailleuse and the American Gatling gun.
  - **1866** British engineer Robert Whitehead invents the first self-propelled naval torpedo.
  - **1870–71** In the Franco-Prussian War, Krupp's rifled artillery guns prove their effectiveness.
  - **1880s** High explosives such as picric acid (lyddite) and TNT come into widespread use as fillings for artillery and naval shells, greatly increasing their destructive effect.
  - **1884** The first recoil-operated machine gun is invented by Sir Hiram Maxim. The Maxim gun, as it is known, is used by the British Army in colonial wars in the 1890s. Its derivatives include the German MG 08 (1908) and the British Vickers gun (1912) used in World War I.
  - **1886** Replacing gunpowder with a smokeless propellant makes rifle fire more effective.
  - **1890s** European armies are equipped with the bolt-action repeater rifles they will use in World War I, such as the German Mauser Gewehr 98, French Lebel, and Russian Mosin-Nagant.
  - **1897** The U.S. Navy adopts the first successful powered submarine.
  - **1898** France introduces the 75 mm field gun that can fire up to 30 rounds a minute to a range of 5 miles (8.5 km).
  - **1904–05** In the Russo-Japanese War, the combination of trenches and barbed wire, artillery firing high-explosive shells beyond line of sight, and the use of field telephones and radio anticipate the warfare of World War I.
  - **1906** The British battleship HMS *Dreadnought* enters service, making all previous leading warships obsolescent.
  - **1911** The military use of aircraft begins as Italy drops grenades on Ottoman Turks in Libya.





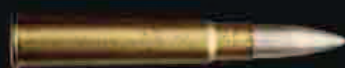
[1] MAUSER GEWEHR 98 (GERMAN)



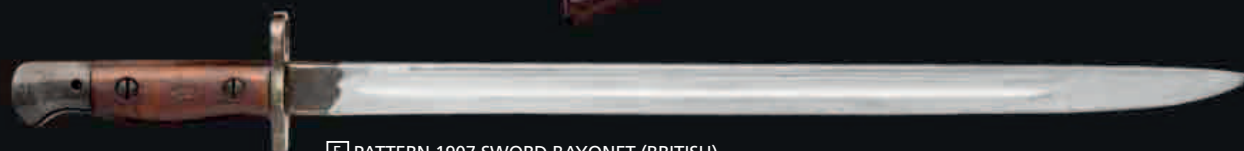
[2] 7.92MM X57 MAUSER CARTRIDGE (GERMAN)



[7] KNIFE BAYONET (GERMAN)



[8] .303 MKVII CARTRIDGE (BRITISH)



[5] PATTERN 1907 SWORD BAYONET (BRITISH)



[9] SHORT MAGAZINE LEE-ENFIELD (BRITISH)

# Rifles

**The infantry was armed with bolt-action rapid-fire rifles, with ammunition fed from a box magazine. These were reliable, efficient weapons, and armies saw no need for substantial innovations during the war.**

[1] Mauser Gewehr 98 (German) entered service in 1898. This model has been fitted with a telescopic sight for use by a sniper. [2] 7.92mm X57 Mauser cartridge (German) was adopted in 1905. Its use with the Gewehr 98 rifle led to the name "Mauser" being added. [3] Ross .303IN MK III (Canadian) Produced until 1916, the Ross was favored by many snipers due to its long-range accuracy. However, it often jammed in the muddy conditions of the trenches. [4] M91 Moschetto de Cavalleria (Italian) This was a shorter variant of the Carcano M91 rifle, the standard Italian infantry weapon. [5] Pattern 1907 sword bayonet (British) Designed for the Lee-Enfield rifle, this was based on the Japanese Arisaka bayonet, but its long blade was unwieldy in the trenches. [6] Steyr-Mannlicher M1895 (Austro-Hungarian) was used by Austro-Hungarian troops, who called it the "Ruck-Zuck" (very quick) due to its high firing rate. [7] Knife bayonet (German) Short and double-edged, this attached to the Gewehr 98 rifle and doubled as a trench knife. [8] .303 MKVII cartridge (British) This version of the Lee-Enfield cartridge had a heavy lead base, which

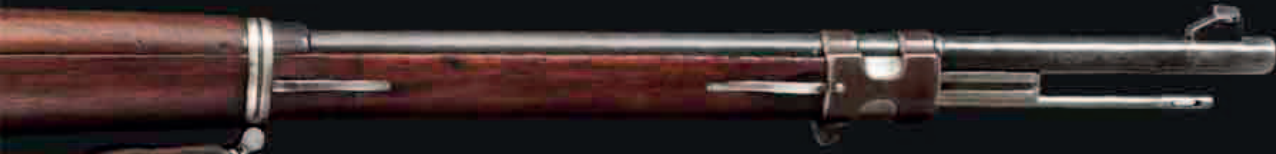
caused the cartridge to twist and deform, inflicting more severe wounds on the enemy. [9] Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (British) was the standard British infantry weapon. The rifle shown is the Mark III Star, introduced in late 1915. [10] Berthier MLE 1916 (French) A modified version of the earlier MLE 1907/15, this increased the magazine size from three rounds to five. [11] Hales No. 3 rifle grenade (British) Rifle grenades, which clipped to the muzzle, provided greater range for explosives. [12] Cartridge belt (American) Standard issue for infantrymen, these belts enabled them to carry extra ammunition. [13] Mosin Nagant M1891 (Russian) was the main weapon of the Russian infantry. Due to shortages, Russia issued contracts to American firms for over three million of these rifles. [14] M1903 Springfield (American) After encountering Mauser rifles in the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States negotiated a license to manufacture a Mauser-style rifle of its own. [15] Cartridge belt (Turkish) This belt with its cartridge pouches was made in Germany, as was most of the equipment used by the Turkish troops.



[11] HALES NO. 3 RIFLE GRENADE (BRITISH)







[3] ROSS .303IN MK III (CANADIAN)



[4] M91 MOSCHETTO  
DE CAVALLERIA (ITALIAN)



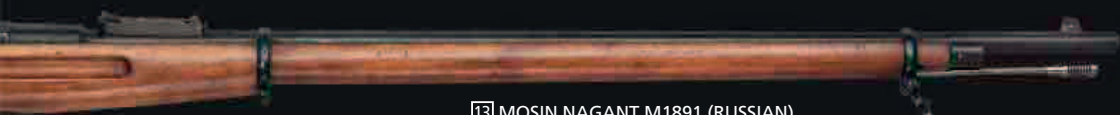
[6] STEYR-MANNLICHER  
M1895 (AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN)



[10] BERTHIER MLE 1916 (FRENCH)



[13] MOSIN NAGANT M1891 (RUSSIAN)



[14] M1903 SPRINGFIELD (AMERICAN)



[12] CARTRIDGE BELT (AMERICAN)



[15] CARTRIDGE  
BELT (TURKISH)



## BEFORE

**Austria-Hungary was a multiethnic state in crisis. Its stability was under threat from growing discontent among its Slav subject peoples.**

#### AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN WEAKNESS

The country's ruler, **Emperor Franz Joseph**, had come to the throne in 1849. His regime was splendid in its public ceremonies but shaky in its political foundations. In 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed **Bosnia-Herzegovina** << 18–19, a

province with a mixed Serb, Croat, and Bosnian Muslim population. This annexation **angered Serbia**, an aggressive Balkan state with ambitions to unite the region's Slav population under its rule. The

Austro-Hungarian government felt the **rising power of Serbia** was a threat to its authority over its restive Slav subjects in the Balkans.



EMPEROR FRANZ JOSEPH

# Assassination at Sarajevo

**On June 28, 1914, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophie, were shot to death by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo. This act triggered a chain of events that would lead to the outbreak of war.**

**A**rchduke Franz Ferdinand's visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was a blunt assertion of imperial authority in a recently annexed province. Even its timing was provocative—June 28 was a day sacred to Serb nationalists as the anniversary of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, in which a defeat by the Turks had cost Serbia its independence.

Bosnian Serb separatists, who were armed, trained, and organized by shadowy nationalist groups and military intelligence officers in Serbia, had been carrying out attacks against

the Austro-Hungarian authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Austrian government had received specific warning of a planned assassination attempt against the archduke, but the

**The Hapsburgs of Austria-Hungary were one of Europe's oldest royal families. They took their name from a castle in Switzerland.**

visit went ahead regardless. To cancel it, or even to mount a heavy-handed security operation, would have been an admission that the Hapsburgs did

not fully control one of the provinces of their empire. The archduke's planned route and schedule were publicized in advance of the visit.

#### Imperial visitor

Franz Ferdinand arrived in Sarajevo by train at 9:50am. He was delighted to be accompanied by his wife, who was usually excluded from all public ceremonies under the terms of their marriage. The archduke first inspected troops drawn up on the Filipovic parade ground and then set off for the town hall in a procession of cars.



#### Assassin apprehended

Gavrilo Princip is arrested after shooting Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife on June 28, 1914. Princip declared himself inspired by a mission to free Slavs from Austrian rule "by means of terror."





Waiting among the crowds along the route were seven young conspirators bent on assassination. Six of them were Bosnian Serbs and one a Bosnian Muslim, apparently chosen deliberately to give the operation multicultural credentials. Between them they had six bombs and four Serbian army pistols.

### The assassination

As the motorcade drove along the quay by the Miljacka river, one of the conspirators, Nedjelko Cabrinovic, threw a bomb that bounced off the back of the archduke's car and exploded. This injured a number of bystanders, including a police officer. The would-be assassin then swallowed a cyanide pill and jumped into the shallow river, where he was arrested, the cyanide dose proving nonlethal. Angry and shocked by the incident, Franz Ferdinand continued making his way to the town hall. The conspirators dispersed into the crowds, their assassination bid having seemingly ended in failure.

Nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip went into a delicatessen to buy a sandwich. Coming out of the shop, he found the archduke's car stopped directly in front of him. Franz Ferdinand had decided to visit the injured police officer in the hospital, but his driver had taken a wrong turn and was trying to reverse. Seizing his opportunity, Princip pulled out his pistol and fired twice, hitting the archduke in the neck and his wife in

### Assassin's gun

The assassination was carried out with a Belgian-manufactured Fabrique Nationale Model 1910 semiautomatic pistol, supplied by the Serbian army.

the abdomen. The couple died within minutes, while still in the car. Princip tried to kill himself but was overpowered by onlookers and arrested.

### Austria-Hungary reacts

The news of the couple's death was a shock to the Hapsburg court. There was no state funeral. Franz Ferdinand and Sophie were interred side by side in a private crypt at Artstetten Castle in the Danube valley. Emperor Franz Joseph was privately relieved that he would never be succeeded by a nephew he neither liked nor trusted. "A higher power," the emperor said, "has restored that order which I could unfortunately not maintain." But the public affront to the Austro-Hungarian state was gross. Although there was no clear evidence that the Serbian government had been directly involved, the operation had definitely

been planned and organized in Serbia. This was enough. A band of assassins, with Serbian backing, had killed the heir to the throne. Austria-Hungary's honor, prestige, and credibility required that Serbia be made to pay.

### The road to war

Austro-Hungarian ruling circles were split between hawks and doves. Chief of the General Staff Count Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf had long sought a war with Serbia. He saw the assassinations as an ideal pretext for military

action. Other important figures, including Count István Tisza, prime minister of Hungary, were more cautious, preferring a diplomatic solution. In the first week of July,

**47 PERCENT** of the population of Austria-Hungary were Slavs. They included Poles, Czechs, Croats, Slovaks, Slovenes, and Serbs. Only **24 percent** of the population were ethnic Germans.

Austria-Hungary sought the opinion of its ally Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II had been outraged by the assassinations. His advisers, including Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, agreed that Austria-Hungary should be encouraged to take decisive, but unspecified, action against Serbia. Whatever the Austro-Hungarian government chose to do, it could be assured of Germany's support.

This loose guarantee of German backing—often referred to as the "blank check"—put the hawks firmly in control in Vienna. Austria-Hungary then drew up a series of demands deliberately designed to prove unacceptable. Their rejection by Serbia would provide a pretext for an attack by the Austro-Hungarian army.

No one was planning for a full-scale war. The idea was for a swift punitive invasion followed by a harsh peace settlement to humiliate and permanently weaken Serbia. However, nothing could happen quickly. Much of the army was on leave, helping to bring in the harvest. After some hesitation, the date for delivery of an ultimatum was set for July 23.

### Private burial

Franz Ferdinand knew his Czech wife would be denied burial in the Hapsburg imperial crypt below the Capuchin Church in Vienna. He therefore specified in his will that they be buried at Artstetten Castle, Austria.

### ARCHDUKE (1863–1914)

### FRANZ FERDINAND

Franz Ferdinand was the nephew of Emperor Franz Joseph. He became heir apparent to the Hapsburg throne in 1889. His relations with Franz Joseph were soured by his insistence on marrying an impoverished Czech aristocrat, Sophie Chotek, in 1900. He was forced to agree to humiliating terms in order to marry her. She was denied royal status, and any offspring would be barred from inheriting the throne. Franz Ferdinand's political position varied over time, but he was viewed by the Austro-Hungarian establishment as dangerously liberal on the key issue of Slav nationalism.



### AFTER

**The interrogation and trial of the conspirators failed to dispel the mystery surrounding the event.**

### TRIALS AND EXECUTIONS

Twenty-five **Bosnian conspirators** implicated in the archduke's assassination were **tried in Austria-Hungary** in October 1914. Sixteen were found guilty and three hanged. Gavrilo Princip was spared execution because he had been under 20 years old when the crime was committed. He died of tuberculosis in prison in April 1918.

The **planning of the operation** was traced to the head of **Serbian military intelligence**, Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic. Using the code name Apis, he also led a Serbian secret society known as the **Black Hand**. In 1917, the Serbian government had Dimitrijevic and three other Black Hand members executed after a rigged trial.

### THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

Austria-Hungary **declared war on Serbia** on July 28, 1914 **30–31 >>**. Within a week, a wider European war had broken out. World War I led directly to the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the fall of the Hapsburg dynasty.

**"Sophie, Sophie, don't die!  
Stay alive for our children!"**

LAST WORDS OF ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND, JUNE 28, 1914





# The Slide to War

**In late July 1914, an Austro-Hungarian confrontation with Serbia plunged Europe into crisis. Such situations had been resolved before by diplomacy, but this time the major powers slid with startling rapidity from peace to a long-anticipated war.**

**O**n July 23, at 6pm, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador delivered an ultimatum to the Serbian government, starting the world on the road to war. The ultimatum demanded that the Serbs suppress anti-Austrian terrorist organizations, stop anti-Austrian propaganda, and

allow Austro-Hungarian officials to take part in the investigation of those who were responsible for the Sarajevo assassinations. The Serbians were given 48 hours to accept the demands of the ultimatum or face war. Serbia accepted most of them but, assured of support from Russia, rejected outright the idea of Austrian officials operating in its territory.

A diplomatic solution was still possible. On July 26, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey proposed a conference of the major powers. Kaiser Wilhelm, returning from his holiday cruise in the North Sea, enthused over the humiliation of Serbia and suggested that war was no longer necessary.

## The Russian reaction

The dominant elements within the Austro-Hungarian military and political establishment did not want a diplomatic triumph. They wanted a military victory to dismember Serbia and bolster Hasburg authority. Thus, on July 28, Austria-Hungary formally declared war on Serbia.

To stand by while Serbia was defeated by Austria-Hungary would have been a severe humiliation for Russia. It would have signaled the end of its long-nourished ambition to expand its influence in the Balkans and toward Constantinople (modern Istanbul). So, on July 28, Russia declared the mobilization of its armed forces in those regions facing Austria-Hungary, but not along its border with Germany. Suddenly the great European powers



## Life as usual

The gravity of the diplomatic crisis in July 1914 was masked by summer holidays. Relaxation in the sun distracted ordinary German citizens and cloaked the machinations of military and political leaders.

occasions that, for Germany, it was better if the war came sooner rather than later. On July 29, he urged mobilization to support Austria-Hungary. German war plans dictated that this had to be directed against both Russia and France and involve the invasion of neutral Belgium.

Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg, debate raged about the practicality of partial mobilization. The Russian foreign minister Sergei Sazonov, fearful of German intentions, forced through a shift to general mobilization on the evening of July 30. This played into the hands of the German hawks, who could now present themselves as responding to Russian aggression.

## BEFORE

**The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 << 28–29 was followed by an interlude in which, in public at least, little happened.**

## PLANNING FOR WAR

Dominant figures in Austria-Hungary, notably Chief of Staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, were determined to use the assassination as a pretext for **war against Serbia**. They had received clearance from Germany to take whatever action they wanted. It took time for Austria-Hungary to organize its blow against Serbia, so through the first three weeks of July the crisis appeared to subside.

## BUSINESS AS USUAL

Maintaining a facade of normality, Kaiser Wilhelm left for a summer cruise. Meanwhile, French president Raymond Poincaré made a prearranged visit to Russia to confirm the long-established **Franco-Russian alliance**. The issue of Serbia was mentioned, but without the urgency of a matter that might **threaten war**.



TSARIST STATE EMBLEM

## Naval review

In July 1914, Britain's Royal Navy conducted a test mobilization, followed by a review at Spithead. Submarines were among the ships on show.

## German mobilization

At this point in the crisis, a general war was still far from inevitable. Yet leading figures in the German political and military ruling circle, including the Chief of the General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, and Prussian War Minister Erich von Falkenhayn, decided the moment for the long-predicted war with France and Russia had come. Moltke had argued on previous

**“The lights are going out all over Europe; we shall **not** see them **lit** again in our lifetime.”**

ATTRIBUTED TO SIR EDWARD GREY, BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY, AUGUST 3, 1914







On July 31, German chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg asked Moltke, “Is the fatherland in danger?” Moltke answered in the affirmative. On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia. The Kaiser made a last-ditch bid for peace by sending a telegram to his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II, but the two heads of state were not in control. When the Kaiser ordered Moltke to

limit the war to Russia, he was told that mobilization for a war on two fronts could not be changed. A German declaration of war on France followed on August 3.

### Enter the British

For the Germans, a crucial but unknown factor in the crisis was the reaction of Britain. The British Liberal

government was horrified by the prospect of war. An inner circle of ministers had gone much further than was publicly known in committing British military support to France in case of war. As fighting broke out on the continent, they could not carry the rest of the government with them. More clear-cut than Britain’s ententes with France and Russia, however, was

Through 1914, there were more declarations of war as the conflict took on a global scale. Other countries asserted neutrality.

### THE WIDENING WAR

Britain and France also brought their empires into the war 118–19 >>. In Britain’s case, this included the British dominions of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa—although in South Africa entry into the war was contested by anti-British Boers. Japan, an ally of Britain since 1902, declared war on Germany on August 23, 1914 84–85 >>. The Ottoman Empire entered the war as an ally of Germany at the end of October 74–75 >>.

### NEUTRALITY

Italy opted to stay neutral. It had been a member of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary since 1882, but with the Italian people in equal measure hostile to Austria-Hungary and hostile to going to war, in August 1914 neutrality seemed the best policy. The United States also declared neutrality 130–31 >>.

### PUBLIC UNITY

Combatant countries experienced a wave of social solidarity and patriotic fervor at the outbreak of war 32–33 >>.



FRENCH MEDAL OF HONOR

### Rallying the nation

Germania, the personification of the German nation, stands ready for war in Friedrich August von Kaulbach’s 1914 painting of the same name. The German government presented itself as the armed defender of civilization against tsarist Russia in the East.

its commitment to Belgium. Britain was a guarantor of Belgian neutrality under the terms of the 1839 Treaty of London. In order to implement the Schlieffen Plan, the German army had to cross Belgium. On August 2, Germany demanded right of passage for its troops.

The Belgians opted to fight. When German troops entered Belgium on August 3, Britain responded with an ultimatum demanding their withdrawal. A British declaration of war on Germany followed on August 4. Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, appalled at this turn of events, told the departing British ambassador, Edward Goschen, that Britain had gone to war “just for a scrap of paper.”



# Pulling Together

**The outbreak of war in August 1914 produced a remarkable show of solidarity in deeply divided societies. As the mobilization of mass citizen armies proceeded smoothly, revolutionary aspirations and antiwar sentiments drowned in a flood of patriotism.**

**B**efore 1914, war was a divisive issue in Europe. Nationalists and imperialists praised war as a healthy struggle for survival. Liberals and socialists denounced it as an offense against civilized values or an evil product of capitalism and autocracy. Although newspapers were often aggressively jingoistic, most ordinary people were not, as their voting patterns showed.

A general election in France in spring 1914 brought a landslide victory for radicals and socialists opposed to the country's virulently anti-German president, Raymond Poincaré.

In Germany, the Social Democrats, outspoken critics of Prussian militarism, were the largest party in the Reichstag. European socialists took the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" seriously. The Second International, to which the socialist

parties of all the major European countries belonged, believed it could make war impossible through coordinated working-class resistance.

On July 31, 1914, France's most prominent antiwar socialist, Jean Jaurès, was killed by a nationalist

extremist in a Parisian café. This act of violence might have been expected on a wider scale—a struggle between those in favor of the war and those against it. Instead, the outbreak of war was followed by an extraordinary social and political solidarity.

## Growing patriotism

In every country, the vast majority of people were convinced that their nation's cause was just, a necessary act of defense or the fulfillment of an obligation. Accepting the need to defend their country against tsarist Russia, the most reactionary regime in Europe, the German Social Democrats voted in support of the war. Surprised and elated, Kaiser Wilhelm stated that he "no longer saw parties, but only Germans." In Austria-Hungary, to general astonishment, even the empire's Slav minorities showed initial enthusiasm for the war.

In France, squabbling politicians buried their differences in response

### Called to war

German reservists, some in uniform and others still in civilian dress, are mobilized at the start of World War I. Part-time, nonprofessional troops, reservists were soon to be thrown into battle.

## BEFORE

**If the slide to war took Europe by surprise in summer 1914, it was partly because other crises and scandals were holding governments' attention.**

### INTERNAL UNREST

**Russia faced widespread strikes** that threatened to develop into revolutionary upheaval. In France, the public was preoccupied with the sensational trial of Henriette Caillaux, wife of a former prime minister. She had shot a French newspaper editor for publishing her love letters. The British were wrestling with a grave crisis over **Irish Home Rule 106–07 »**, which threatened civil war between Irish Protestants and Catholics, and an arson campaign by **suffragettes** seeking voting rights for women.



SUFFRAGETTE BANNER







to President Poincaré's appeal for a *Union sacrée* (Sacred Union) in defense of the fatherland. French socialists redirected their hostility against German militarism. In Russia, widely believed to be on the brink of a revolution in the summer of 1914, a vast crowd assembled with banners and icons in St. Petersburg to pledge their support to Tsar Nicholas II.

Britain was similarly swept by a wave of patriotism. This was stimulated by fear of an increasingly powerful Germany and widespread sympathy for the plight of Belgium. Suffragettes negotiated a halt to their violent campaign for women's voting rights, with the government freeing suffragette prisoners in return for the movement's support in the war.

**“A fateful hour has fallen upon Germany... The sword is being forced into our hands.”**

KAISER WILHELM II, IN A SPEECH IN BERLIN, JULY 31, 1914

British trade unions also rallied behind the call for war, canceling a planned series of strikes.

### Irish support

Most remarkably, a perilous situation in Ireland was transformed. The war broke out as Britain was about to grant the Irish a measure of self-government, known as Home Rule. This was opposed by the Protestants in Ulster, who had formed an armed militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), to resist such moves. Pro-Home Rule Catholics had responded by arming a militia of their own, the Irish Volunteers.

The outbreak of the European war prevented a civil war in Ireland. UVF leaders offered the services of their militia to the British Army, which readily accepted them. Irish nationalist leader John Redmond also supported Britain in the war, calculating that this would ensure implementation of Home

### Reviewing the Ulstermen

The Ulster Volunteers are reviewed by their founder, Edward Carson. On the outbreak of war, this Protestant militia, set up to fight Irish Home Rule, formed the basis of the British 36th (Ulster) Division.

Rule when it ended. Somewhat reluctantly accepted by the British Army, Redmond's Irish Volunteers formed the basis of the 16th (Irish) Division. Some Volunteers refused to follow Redmond and continued their campaign against British rule.

### Conscript armies

Mobilization of Europe's conscript armies—a complex operation on a vast scale—mostly proceeded smoothly. Millions of men and horses were assembled, equipped, and sent by train to the front. Before the war, French military authorities had estimated that up to 13 percent of those called up might not appear; in fact, only 1.5 percent failed to present themselves as instructed. There were antidraft riots in some Russian towns and country districts, but they were the exception. Nonetheless, the popular image of smiling soldiers leaving for the front

cheered by crowds is deceptive. There were tears, anxiety, and resigned acceptance, as well as enthusiasm.

The large number of those not liable for military service who volunteered to fight in August 1914 is evidence of the war fever gripping European nations. Britain was the only combatant country that did not conscript. Responding to an appeal for volunteers launched by the newly appointed Minister for War, Lord Kitchener, over 750,000 men had enlisted by the end of September. World War I was, at least initially, a people's war.

**Unity in support of the war was never complete and did not last. Social conflicts soon resurfaced and opposition mounted.**

### DISSENTING VOICES

Socialists who opposed the war from the start included Kier Hardie in Britain, Karl Liebknecht in Germany, and Russian Bolshevik leader **Vladimir Ilyich Lenin**. In 1915, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg formed the revolutionary **Spartacus League** to oppose the war.



HONORING THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE, BERLIN

### SUFFRAGETTE (1858–1928)

#### EMMELINE PANKHURST

Born in Manchester, Emmeline Pankhurst was the founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) suffragist movement. From 1903, she adopted militant tactics, including attacks on property and hunger strikes, in pursuit of women's right to vote. On the outbreak of war in 1914, she dedicated her organization to support of the war effort. She called on women to “fight for their country as they fought for the vote.” Pankhurst felt her stance was vindicated by the British parliament's partial extension of voting rights to women in 1918.



**715,000** The number of horses mobilized by Germany in 1914.





# The Declaration of War

**The outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 was greeted with a range of emotions from the people of Europe. Most imagined it would be a brief conflict, with short, murderous battles and a clear result. Thousands of young men immediately rushed to take part in the glory, while mobilization papers soon took others—fathers, brothers, and sons—away from their worried families.**

“Up and down the wide road... crowds paced incessantly by day and night, singing the German war songs: ‘Was blasen die Trompeten?’, which is the finest, ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,’ which comes next, and ‘Die Wacht am Rhein,’ which was most popular. As I walked to and fro among the patriot crowds, I came to know many of the circling and returning faces by sight... Sometimes a company of infantry, sometimes a squadron of horses went down the road westward, wearing the new grey uniforms in place of the familiar Prussian blue... Sometimes the Kaiser in full uniform swept along in his fine motor, cheered he was certainly... [But] the most mighty storm of cheering was reserved for the crown prince, known to be at variance with his father in longing to test his imagined genius in the field.”

MR. H.W. NEVINSON, A CORRESPONDENT FOR THE *LONDON DAILY NEWS*, IN BERLIN DURING THE FIRST DAYS OF AUGUST 1914

“‘The tocsin!’ cried someone in the field. ‘There’s a fire in the fields!’ Then we saw men running... Soon the field was swept with a wave of agitation. My husband and I stared without understanding before we heard, right in our faces, the news that a neighbor, in his turn, was yelling, ‘War! It’s war!’

Then, we dropped our tools... and joined the crowd, running as fast as our legs could carry us, to the farmhouse. The men usually so calm... were seized with frenzy. Horses entered at quick trot, whipped by their drivers, while the oxen, goaded until they bled, hurried in reluctantly. In this coming and going of wagons and animals, I could hear disjointed phrases: ‘General mobilization...’, ‘What a misfortune, what an awful misfortune!’, ‘I’ll have to leave right away!’, ‘It was all bound to come to this.’”

MÉMÉ SANTERRE, A WEAVER FROM A FRENCH VILLAGE NEAR THE BELGIAN BORDER

## War is declared

News of the much-anticipated announcement of war in August 1914 drew huge crowds onto the streets of Berlin. It was greeted with a mixture of solemnity and excitement, for a swift victory was expected.

