

Major Themes: MAIN Causes of World War I

Militarism



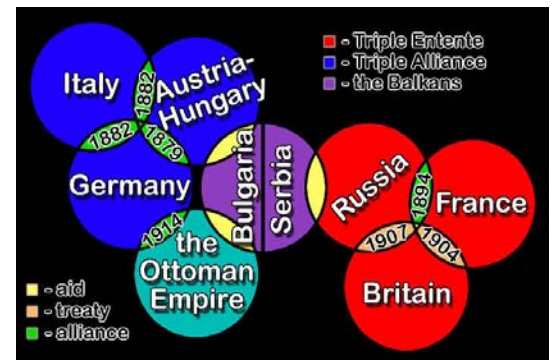
The late nineteenth century was an era of military competition, particularly between the major European powers. The policy of expanded military power was considered a measure of national and imperial strength. A powerful state needed a powerful military to protect its interests and support its policies. Strong armies and navies were needed to defend the homeland, protect imperial and trade interests abroad, and deter threats and rivals. Germany in particular looked to expand its navy. However, the 'naval race' was never a real contest – the British always maintained naval superiority. But the German obsession with building a navy that could compete with- even dominate- the British grew strong. Government rhetoric exaggerated military expansionism. Generals and admirals sometimes acted as de facto government ministers, advising political leaders, influencing domestic policy and demanding increases in defense and arms spending. While militarism alone did not start World War I, it did create an environment where war, rather than negotiation or diplomacy, was considered the best way of resolving international disputes.

Major Events:

- 1854- Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade* is published
- 1881- Development of the Machine Gun
- 1894- British Navy League forms, pressuring government for increase in ships & sailors
- 1906- Germany commissions construction of the U-Boat
- 1910- European nations- except Great Britain- enforce conscription into military

Alliances

An alliance is a formal political, military or economic agreement between two or more nations. Military alliances usually contain promises that in the event of war or aggression, one signatory nation will support the others. During the 19th and early 20th centuries European nations formed, annulled and restructured alliances on a regular basis. By 1914, Europe had come to be dominated by two large alliances; Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy banded together to form the Triple Alliance, while Russia, France, and Great Britain united in alliance as the Triple Entente. Although these alliances sought to preserve the existing balance of power, any dispute involving one country in an alliance would ultimately result in their allies joining in as well. Most alliances and ententes were formulated behind closed doors and revealed to the public after signing. Some nations even conducted negotiations without informing their other alliance partners, while others contained 'secret clauses' that were not publicly announced or placed on record. Several of these secret clauses only became known to the public after the end of World War I. The secretive nature of alliances only heightened suspicion and tensions between nations.



Major Events:

- 1871- The Unification of Germany is complete, forming the German Empire
- 1873- Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany, negotiates the signing of the Three Emperor's League
- 1882- The Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy is signed
- 1894- The Franco-Russian Alliance is signed, preventing Germany from absorbing France into its empire
- 1907- Great Britain, France, and Russia form an alliance known as the Triple Entente

Imperialism



Imperialism is a system where a powerful nation, often referred to as the “mother country”, establishes control by coercion through infiltration, annexation, political pressure, war and military conquest. Many European nations believed that a sign of great power was the possession of colonies, particularly in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. Colonies may have had military or geopolitical advantages but their main purpose was economic: they existed chiefly to profit and enrich the imperial power. Colonies were the source of precious metals or other resources, such as timber, rubber, rice, and tea that were considered essential to daily European life. The European

powers became accustomed to competing for colonies, and claims for territories contributed further to their rivalries. By 1900, one quarter of the world was controlled by the British. Another significant imperial power was France, whose holdings included Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), some Pacific islands and several colonies in west and north-west Africa. Two relative newcomers to empire-building were the newly unified nations of Germany and Italy. Otto von Bismarck, had showed little interest in gathering colonies – but Bismarck’s view was not shared by other Germans, specifically Kaiser Wilhelm II. Germany acquired Togoland, the Cameroons, South West Africa (now Namibia), and Tanganyika (now Tanzania) over the next few years. This “Scramble for Africa” and imperial fervor sparked many diplomatic incidents, especially between Germany and Great Britain.

Major Events:

1870- U.S. convinces China to sign Open Door Policy, establishing spheres of influence through trade

1874- King Henry II of Belgium establishes parts of the Congo as a Belgian colony

1880- The Scramble for Africa begins

1844- Berlin Conference divides African territories between 14 world powers

1899- Rudyard Kipling’s poem *The White Man’s Burden* is published

Nationalism

Nationalism, an extreme form of patriotism or loyalty to one’s country, places the interests of one’s own country above those of other countries. Most pre-war Europeans believed in the cultural, economic and military supremacy of their nation. Nationalism encouraged rivalries between France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. Pan-Slavism, a movement that recognized a common ethnic background among the Slav peoples of Eastern Europe and believed that they should have their own nation, was a powerful force in the region. Slavic nationalism was strongest in Serbia, where it had risen significantly in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries. The growth of Pan-Slavism led to the creation of new independent nations in the Balkans- Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Romania. The movement was particularly opposed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its control and influence over the region. Tensions grew among ethnic Hungarians who felt ostracized from the empire and ethnic Serbians who protested the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (nation-states with sizable Serbian populations). Serbian nationalism would eventually create the trigger cause of World War I: the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand.



Major Events:

1908- Bulgaria breaks away from the Ottoman Empire; establishes own kingdom

1908- Austria-Hungary annexes Bosnia & Herzegovina, angering native Pan-Slavic nationalists

1912- Albanian states of Ottoman Empire form new nation-state, the Republic of Albania

1913- The Balkan Wars result in the establishment of Serbia and its alliance with Russia.

1914- Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated on June 28 by a member of the Black Hand, a nationalist group