

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND TENSIONS FROM 1870

1870-71 Franco-Prussian War. France decisively beaten. German Empire proclaimed in the Palace of Versailles. France signs Treaty of Frankfurt. Alsace-Lorraine ceded to Germany.

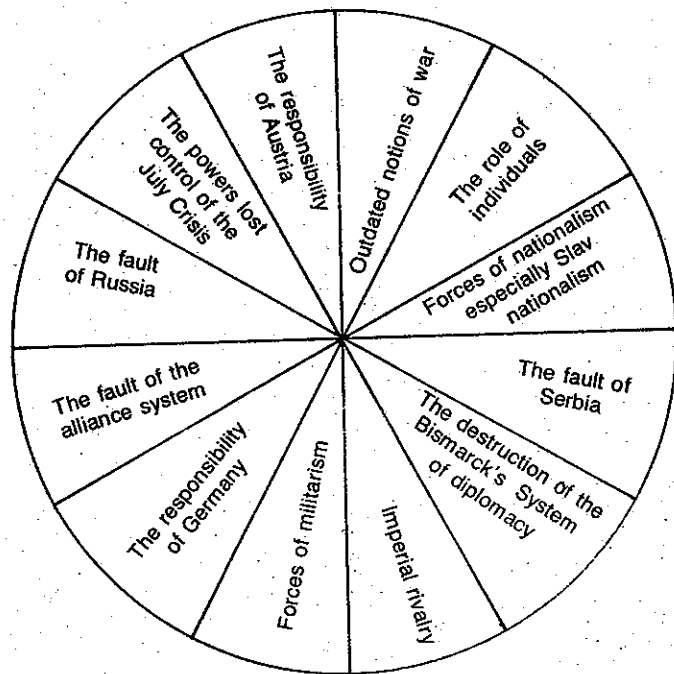


Fig. 1.1 Some interpretations for the origins of World War I

1873 Formation of Dreikaiserbund (Three Emperors' League) of Germany, Austria and Russia. Bismarck's aim to keep France isolated and preserve cordial Russo-Austrian relations.

1875 Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina rise up against Turkey. Revolt brutally suppressed. Serbia and Montenegro declare war on Turkey.

1877 Russia declares war on Turkey.

1878 Turkey defeated. Forced to sign Treaty of San Stefano. A 'big Bulgaria' created, certain to be a state under Russian control. The great powers are alarmed.

1878 Bismarck calls a European congress to Berlin. Tries to act as 'honest broker'. Russia's gains, particularly 'big Bulgaria', were reduced earning Bismarck Russia's lasting enmity. Austria to administer Bosnia-Herzegovina.

1879 Germany and Austria sign the Dual Alliance - each to support the other if attacked by Russia.

1881 Renewal of Dreikaiserbund. France seizes Tunis (North Africa).

1882 Italy joins Austria and Germany in a Triple Alliance clearly aimed at France. Britain occupies Egypt.

1887 Triple Alliance renewed. Germany and Russia

sign the Re-insurance Treaty ostensibly aimed against Austria. Austria, Britain and Italy sign a Mediterranean agreement aiming to maintain the Eastern Mediterranean status quo.

1890 New German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, dismisses Bismarck. The Re-insurance Treaty allowed to lapse.

1893 Russia and France sign an alliance - though defensive, it is aimed at Germany. France's isolation ends.

1898 France and Britain nearly go to war at Fashoda.

1899-1902 Boer War. Britain struggles to defeat the raggedy Boer forces and finds herself isolated. Germany backs the Boers.

1902 Britain and Japan sign alliance. Britain's 'splendid isolation' is over.

1904 Britain and France sign the Entente Cordiale with France. Outstanding colonial differences settled. Future military co-operation now a possibility.

1904-5 Russo-Japanese War sees Russia decisively beaten.

1905 Completion of the Schlieffen Plan.

1905 Tangier Incident. Kaiser arrives to support Moroccan independence. Effect to draw Britain and France closer.

1906 Algeiras Conference called to discuss Moroccan affairs. Leaves Germany humiliated.

1906 Launching of the first Dreadnought. Naval arms race begins in earnest.

1907 Britain and Russia sign an entente clearing up colonial differences. Europe now divided into two camps: the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. (See Figure 1.2.)

1908 Young Turk revolution. Austria annexes Bosnia-Herzegovina. Germany backs Austria preventing Russian support for the Bosnian Serbs.

1911 Agadir Incident. German cruiser, the Panther, arrives following French army occupation of Fez. Negotiations lead to Germany gaining Congo territory as compensation for French influence in

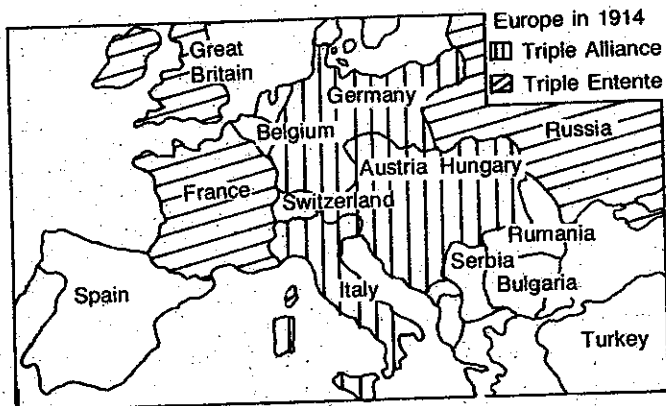


Fig. 1.2 Europe in 1914 showing the alliance system

Morocco. Real significance: drew Britain and France closer together. Increasing distrust of German intentions. Italy seizes Libya from Turkey.

1912 Anglo-French Naval Agreements.

1912 First Balkan War—Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria defeat Turkey. Clear victory for Balkan nationalism. Turkey almost pushed out of Europe.

1913 Second Balkan War—Bulgaria attacks Greece and Serbia but is soon forced to make peace. Turkey regains territory. Russia supports its Slav brother Serbia and Romania against Bulgaria. Balkans ready to explode. Serbia getting stronger. Austria even more fearful of rising Slav nationalism.

1914 Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo.

QUESTIONS

1. What did France lose in the 1871 Treaty of Frankfurt?
2. What were Bismarck's twin aims after 1871?
3. Who formed the Three Emperors' League?
4. Why was Russia angry with Bismarck in 1878?
5. Name the members of the Triple Alliance.
6. Which two great powers were most involved in Balkan affairs?
7. What was the Re-insurance Treaty?
8. What was the significance of the lapsing of the Re-insurance Treaty?
9. How did Britain end its isolation?
10. Name the members of the Triple Entente.
11. What was the effect of German action at Tangier and Agadir?
12. If the Balkans 'exploded' after the Second Balkan War, how do you think the following nations would line up: Austria, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria?

SUMMARY OF INTERPRETATIONS

Fall of Bismarckian diplomacy

According to this interpretation the fall of the Bismarckian system of diplomacy set against the background of the Balkans made war inevitable. The German victory of 1871 and the French loss of Alsace-Lorraine created within France the desire for an eventual war of revenge, in which France would need an ally. More importantly, the German victories of 1866 and 1871 excluded Austria from Italy and Germany—her only possible sphere of expansion was now the Balkans. The Balkans' nominal ruler Turkey, the 'sick man of Europe', was sinking amidst a sea of internal decay and insurgent Slav nationalism. Russia was eager to fill

any possible vacuum in the Balkans left by Turkey's departure in order to achieve the long-held desire for a warm-sea port. To this end Russia championed Slav nationalism on the grounds of religious and racial brotherhood. Periodically, Turkey tried to restore its crumbling position. There were therefore long-term conflicts between Russian, Turkish and Austrian imperialism. These centripetal forces clashed with the centrifugal force of Slav nationalism. Bismarck knew that the only way to keep the Balkans, and thus Europe, quiet was to keep Austria and Russia apart, to keep them isolated and to prevent Russian control of the area as any of these could lead to a general European war. Russian control of the Straits, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, would directly upset the balance of power—a development even Britain could not allow. To these ends Bismarck developed his 'system':

1. The Dreikaiserbund was an attempt to secure friendly relations between Russia and Austria.
2. The Congress of Berlin was aimed at limiting Russian influence.
3. The Dual Alliance urged Russian caution.
4. The Re-insurance Treaty was aimed at cautioning Austria and further had the effect of maintaining French isolation by persuading Russia that a move towards France was unnecessary.

Bismarck was dismissed in 1890. Wilhelm II allowed the Re-insurance Treaty to lapse and so Russia soon made a move towards France, culminating in the Franco-Russian alliance of 1893. Now even minor events in the Balkans had the potential to cause a European war as not only the Slavs, Austria and Russia would be involved but also Germany and France. Germany would thus face the Bismarckian nightmare of a two-front war. It was this fear which spawned the Schlieffen Plan which would lead to Britain entering the war (see below).

War was the result of insurgent nationalism

Austria-Hungary was a multinational empire whose existence depended on the suppression of Slav nationalism with millions of Slavs being forced to live under Austrian rule. Serbia was an expanding nation whose future depended on the success of nationalism. The Slavs dreamed of an end to Austria and the creation of a united Slav state. In 1908, Austria annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus attacking Slav nationalism. German backing of Austria prevented Russia intervening on the Slav side. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 saw Serbia triumphant and larger still. By 1914, Austria believed that if Serbia was not dealt with the Austro-Hungarian empire was doomed. The assassination at Sarajevo provided Austria with an opportunity to move against Serbia.

Imperialism

Before 1914 colonial clashes between the powers

were common and, on occasions, nearly led to war: Britain and Russia over Persia; Russia and Japan in the Far East; Britain and France over Egypt; Germany and Britain over southern Africa; France and Germany over Morocco. These clashes helped to poison international relations, encouraging nations to build up their armed forces and to seek allies. Thus an atmosphere of distrust, fear and suspicion was created that made war possible. However, there is another side to the argument. Colonial clashes often occurred between future allies, so were they so important? Tension in Europe only really began to increase when colonial expansion ended. It could be argued, therefore, that far from causing war, imperialism had acted as a safety valve which had eased European tension.

Militarism

The development of, and respect for, military values and the belief that national prestige is synonymous with military strength is known as militarism. It may also mean military control of government and pursuit of foreign policy by military means. One view of World War I is that the prevalence of these ideas meant that international crises were more likely to be dealt with militarily and that the influence of military-minded men made a resort to force likely. Evidence to support such a view includes: the arms build-up before 1914; the development of the Schlieffen Plan; and the excessive influence of the military in the governments of Germany, Russia and Austria.

Alliance system

The division of Europe into two camps, the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente, meant that the involvement of one power in a conflict would inevitably involve the other powers. Even if the alliances did not operate as originally planned, their existence nevertheless predetermined the general course that events would follow after an incident such as Sarajevo.

National responsibility

Many views have been argued blaming one or other power for the war. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles clearly blames Germany. Revisionist historians, such as Sidney Fay, have countered this by arguing that responsibility must be shared. Fischer, in 1961, argued that Germany wanted war and pushed Austria to that end. Taylor in *Struggle for Mastery in Europe* argues that Germany, being at the height of its power, welcomed war in August 1914, while Austria welcomed war because it was getting weaker.

Outdated notions of war

In 1914, most people still believed war to be glorious and noble; the horror of war was unknown. This ignorance, coupled with a willingness to go to war,

were the two major factors in bringing about war as James Joll argued in his *Origins of the First World War*. Paul Schroeder, writing in the *Journal of Modern History* (1972), supports this view and argues that the leaders of the time still saw war as a viable policy option.

The July Crisis: the powers lose control of events

A.J.P. Taylor, in *War by Timetable*, suggests that war came in 1914 partly because the European leaders had lost control of events. What follows is a chronology of the events of summer 1914 incorporating some of Taylor's ideas.

28 June Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Austrian heir, is assassinated by a Serbian, Gavrilo Princip. Europe is shocked, but war is not considered likely.

6 July Germany offers Austria a blank cheque regarding any action it might take against Serbia. Austria now knows it will not be alone if action against Serbia leads to Russian support for Serbia.

23 July Austria presents a 10-point ultimatum to Serbia.

25 July Serbia accepts the ultimatum except the point allowing Austrian officials to enter Serbia.

26 July Britain suggests an international conference to settle the Balkans issue. Germany and Austria decline.

28 July Austria declares war on Serbia.

Everything now depended on Russia: to do nothing and desert Serbia would be to abdicate as a great power; to mobilise against Austria alone would preclude any later mobilisation against Germany if this became necessary. This was because mobilisation involved moving millions of men on thousands of trains based on intricate railway timetables. Once one mobilisation plan was put into effect, no other options were open. Thus:

30 July Russia mobilises all along her border;

31 July Germany orders Russia to stop. Russia refuses.

1 August Germany declares war on Russia.

Attention now shifted to the West. German mobilisation plans were based on the premise of a two-front war. It was assumed that France would support Russia and so Germany now moved to implement the Schlieffen Plan. Belgium rejected a German ultimatum for free passage through that country and at this point events took on their own momentum. The Schlieffen Plan (see below) involved bottlenecks at Aachen and convergence on Liège. To slow down or stop would cause thousands of trains to back up. German mobilisation would be thrown into chaos. In other words, once Germany began to mobilise, there would be no going back.

3 August Germany declares war on France. Germany ignores British demands to leave Belgium.

4. *August* Britain declares war on Germany. The 1839 Treaty of London obliged Britain to support Belgium in the event of Belgium's neutrality being violated.

QUESTIONS

13. Why was Russia involved in the Balkans?
14. What was the basis of the Bismarckian system of diplomacy?
15. Why did the Bismarckian system collapse?
16. Why was the Franco-Russian alliance so important?
17. Why was Slav nationalism a life or death affair for Austria?
18. What effect did imperial clashes have?
19. Compare the views of Fay and Fischer regarding the responsibility for the war.
20. Why did people not shy away from war in 1914?
21. What was the blank cheque?
22. How might Russia be blamed for the war?
23. What was unique about German mobilisation?
24. Why did Britain go to war?

THE WAR ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Students should be aware that the syllabus specifically states that the nature of trench warfare should be studied by means of documents. Primary sources must be used. These might be diaries, letters, poems, songs, or extracts from books such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Erich Maria Remarque) or *Goodbye to all that* (Robert Graves).

THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

The signing of the Franco-Russian alliance brought home to Germany the possibility of a two-front war should hostilities begin. Germany's military planners believed that due to size, numbers and lack of technological expertise, it would take a long time for Russia's cumbersome armed forces to be fully mobilised. On the other hand it was believed that France could mobilise and reach the German frontier quickly. German planners, however, considered that the French army could be quickly overcome, hence the Schlieffen Plan. Knock out France in six weeks while holding off Russia, then turn Germany's full military might to the east.

The basis of the plan

Belgium and north-eastern France are flat; the French-German border is forested and slightly mountainous. The Schlieffen Plan took account of this difference. German armies would advance in a massive 'hammer-swing' through Belgium, hing-

ing at Metz in the east. Once through Belgium, the hammer would sweep south, move west of Paris and circle the city from the south. French armies would be trapped, the capital would fall, France's rich mining and industrial areas in the north east would come under German control, and France would be out of the war. (See Figure 1.3.)

Why did it fail?

The plan failed for a variety of reasons:

1. Moltke (Chief of the German General Staff) made some critical revisions to the original plan. Four corps were removed from the hammer, two to fight in Antwerp, two to fight in the east. The hammer was further weakened to strengthen the hinge. Thus, the thrust through Belgium was slowed down.
2. Allied mobilisation therefore had time to hold off the Germans. Belgian resistance backed by the British Expeditionary Force proved far stronger than Germany had expected.
3. Three German armies moved on Paris. Moltke concentrated his forces east of Paris, but as they moved south a gap appeared between the first and second army. The French, under Joffre and Gallieni, attacked the German flank. The Battle of the Marne ended the Schlieffen Plan and so the Germans retreated to the Aisne.

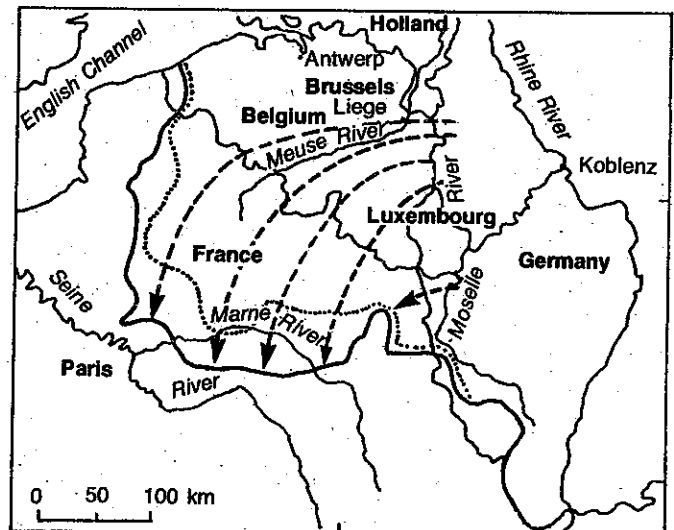


Fig. 1.3 The Schlieffen Plan, August 1914

AFTER THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

The failure of the Schlieffen Plan saw an end to mobile warfare in the west. Both sides 'dug in', constructing massive trench formations that with-