

significant boom, increasing from 41 million to 65.3 million people in a mere forty (40) years (Pope and Wheal, 2003).

Within Germany, there were growing tensions due to a burgeoning industrial working class and a rapidly-emerging technocratic middle class. A proliferation of political parties all exerted pressure on the existing German state. However, the concerns over potential attacks from enemy states Russia and France (and possibly Britain, as well), coupled with an escalating arms race following the development of the dreadnought naval ship, pushed the German Kaiser to wage war. This move, as it would be seen later, galvanized the unity of the German people like never before (Pope and Wheal, 2003).

Created in the late nineteenth century by the union of the Kingdoms of Austria and Hungary, the *Austro-Hungarian Empire* was a dominating political and military force in Central Europe. Their economic impact on the region was enormous. Indeed, in terms of sheer geographical size, they were second only to Russia, covering some 675,000 square kilometres in area. The supreme political authority rested with the Hapsburg monarchy. During World War I, the monarch was Franz Josef I.

Following the outset of World War I, tensions between Austria and Hungary escalated due to poor harvests and the loss of grain-producing regions along the Eastern Front. Additionally, the expense of maintaining a three-front war was a daunting endeavor and political tensions within the Dual Monarchy began to mount ever more quickly. The end of the War saw the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the last of the Hapsburg monarchs, Karl I, conceded defeat in 1918, effectively ending the long line of rulers from his lineage.

The ancient and powerful *Ottoman Empire*, by this time in significant decline, was also key actor in World War I, occupying both British and Russian forces along the Eastern Front of the war. All contemporary references to “Turkey” or the “Turkish Empire” during World War I were, indeed, references to the Ottoman Empire, which had dominated Asia Minor and the surrounding regions since 1683 AD (the Ottoman Empire began its rise to power centuries earlier, however, in the year 1299) (Wikipedia, 2007).

This Empire was a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, governed by the Turkish government. For years it had been in a steady state of decline. However, their military involvement on the Middle Eastern Front

during World War I was due to their alliance with the Germans (the Ottoman-German Alliance) (Wikipedia, 2007). The Ottomans saw the war as an opportunity to regain much of the territories they had lost over the years, but most of what they were able to acquire (especially during the confusion of the Russian Revolution in 1917), was ceded at the conclusion of The Great War.

Bulgaria was also a member of the Central Powers. Although their involvement in the war had a significantly smaller impact than the three larger empires, their presence and effect in the Balkan region cannot be ignored. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, they fought alongside Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire (of which Bulgaria was a part until October 5, 1908). By aligning itself against the Allied Powers during World War I, however, it was positioning itself for a defeat that would cost it much of the territorial gains it had acquired in the Balkan Wars (Wikipedia, 2007).

The Entente Powers

The Entente Powers (also called the Triple Entente), were essentially France, Britain, and Russia (under the last waning years of tsarist control before the Communist Revolution on May 1, 1917). These countries had developed strategic alliances and created a unified front to the west and east of the Central Powers' territories. Later in the war, Italy and the United States of America joined the Entente as Associated Powers to lend additional manpower and materiel to the war effort. President Woodrow Wilson was explicit in his desire to not be considered one of the European Allies for various political reasons.

France was a key member of the Triple Entente. Following their losses in the Napoleonic Wars, which concluded in 1815, the French monarchy was re-established with new constitutional limitations (it had been done away with during the years of the French Revolution of 1789). A number of political changes followed, ultimately culminating in the Third Republic (following the defeat of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War). Their alliances with Russia and, subsequently, Britain, embroiled three of the largest empires on Earth in the conflict.

The *Russian Empire* under the Romanovs, had maintained long-standing alliances with the Serbs, who are ethnically related and share many of the same Orthodox religious traditions, and the French, whom they had

admired from afar for many, many years. Once Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Russia was duty-bound to oppose the action and to aid their Slavic brethren in the ensuing struggle. France, upon hearing the news that Germany and Austria-Hungary had gone to war against Russia, also entered the fray.

Great Britain (also known as the British Empire) was the third important allied nation in the Triple Entente. Having established itself as the undisputed naval power on earth, especially given the development of their superior dreadnought ships, their presence in the First World War (and that of their colonies, such as Australia and Canada), could not go unnoticed. Developments in British sea power and air power did much to spur on the early arms race prior to the declarations of war in 1914. Great Britain's alliance with Belgium and, to a lesser degree, France, gave the Britons the impetus needed to enter the war, providing their powerful military opposition to the Central Powers.

The Associated Powers

The Associated Powers of Italy and the United States of America joined with the Triple Entente after the outset of World War I, with Italy joining first and America joining much later on. Each of these nations at first adopted a policy of strict neutrality, but it soon became obvious that the war would spread quickly to other regions of the world due to the aggressive tactics of the German Empire.

Italy attempted to remain neutral despite its alliances with Austria-Hungary and Germany (through the Triple Alliance, established by Otto von Bismarck). However, they also had a secret pact with France which nullified these alliances. In May 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary and the next year,

By contrast, the *United States* waited much longer before having to abandon its policy of neutrality in the conflict. Due to the Kaiser's unfettered use of submarine warfare, many American merchant ships were being intercepted and/or destroyed. In 1917, very late in the war, the United States officially declared war against Germany.

Alliances, Treaties, and War

The complex reasons for the outbreak of the First World War are too detailed and intertwined to explain in detail here. However, suffice it to say that the various alliances forged over time between the nations involved in the conflict served as a primary mechanism to plunge Europe and, by extension, most of the rest of the world into war.

Following Prussia's (Germany's) wars with Austria in 1866 and France (1870-71), the nation was established as a new and potent force in the center of Europe. The Prussian leader, Otto von Bismarck, began a program of forging alliances with other nations in order to ensure the stability and longevity of the Prussian nation-state. This so-called "alliance system" created a tenuous and artificial balance of power in the region, and included agreements with Austria-Hungary (Dual Alliance, 1879), the Three Emperor's League (adding Russia in 1881), and the Triple Alliance including Italy (1882) (Hughes and Philpott, 2005).

Besides Germany's treaties with its strategic allies, there were other major alliances throughout Europe that contributed to the outbreak of World War I. They were as follows: the Empire of Russia and Serbia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, Belgium and Britain, France and Britain, France and Russia, and the British Colonies and Britain. The method and order in which these alliances came to bear on the major powers of the day are explained further in this section.

Serbia, it should be noted, was mostly subsumed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire and lay within its geographical boundaries. When the heir to the Empire was assassinated by Serbian nationalists (i.e., those who wished to have a free and independent Serbia) known as the Black Hand, Austria-Hungary responded with an ultimatum. The terms of this ultimatum were of such a nature that Serbia could not possibly agree. After sending their reply to Emperor Franz Josef I, Austria deliberated and then declared war on Serbia in June, 1914. It was this declaration of war that prompted a chain of events that would lead, catastrophically, to world war.

Russia, long-time allies and brothers of the Serbs, recoiled at Austria-Hungary's declaration of war and set about mobilizing their enormous armies to wage war against the forces of Emperor Franz Josef. Upon learning of Russia's intentions to go to war against their Germanic brothers and, having feared Russian military

action for some time against their nation, Kaiser Wilhelm II of the German Empire declared war on Russia, thereby honoring their treaty with Austria-Hungary.

France, bound by treaties they had signed with Russia, declared war on Germany (and thereby, Austria-Hungary). This measure prompted Germany to quickly sweep into and occupy Belgium, subduing it with little effort. By doing so, the Kaiser hoped to launch an attack to swiftly remove France as a potential threat against Germany to the west. Belgium pleaded for help to Britain, which had a long-standing treaty with Belgium of some seventy-five years. France also sent word to the United Kingdom for aid.

On August 3, 1914, Britain honored their treaties with Belgium and France and declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. The formation of the Western and Eastern Fronts followed quickly and the armies of the involved nations mobilized for war. Britain's Colonies, such as India, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, all pledged support and entered the war, as well, along with Japan, Brazil, and many other nations. By the spring of 1917, the United States officially declared war on Germany and send troops to Europe to fight.

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Setting the Stage: Important Events before the Great War

There are many contributing factors that ultimately lead to the First World War, some more significant than others. A good place to begin the sequence of events leading to war is with the assassination of Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand. What follows is a brief chronological timeline of the start of World War I (the information below is derived from data on firstworldwar.com, 2007).

- 1) The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia on June 28, 1914.
- 2) Austria-Hungary issues an ultimatum to Serbia. Serbia's reply is deemed unsatisfactory.
- 3) Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia on July 28, 1914.
- 4) Russia is bound by treaty to Serbia and vows to come to Serbia's defense.
- 5) Germany is bound by treaty to Austria-Hungary and declares war on Russia on August 1, 1914.
- 6) France is bound by treaty to Russia and declares war on Germany and, ultimately, Austria-Hungary.

- 7) Germany quickly invades Belgium.
- 8) Britain, bound by treaty now to France and, more importantly, to Belgium, declares war on Germany on August 3, 1914. By extension, they are also at war with Austria-Hungary.
- 9) Britain's colonies and other foreign territories become involved militarily or financially, including Canada, Australia, India, New Zealand, and South Africa.
- 10) The United States formally entered the war in early April of 1917, drawn into the conflict by Germany's submarine warfare policies (which affected American commercial shipping routes).
- 11) Japan declares war on Austria-Hungary on August 23, 1914, due to treaties they have with Great Britain. Austria-Hungary declares war on Japan on August 25 of the same year.
- 12) Italy is allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary, but insisted on being neutral. In 1915, Italy joined the war on the side of the Allies against Germany and Austria-Hungary.

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Lesson 2 Review Questions

Multiple Choice

1. Which Asian power declared war on Austria-Hungary in August of 1914?
 - a. China
 - b. Japan**
 - c. Montenegro
 - d. The Mongols
 - e. The Ottoman Empire
2. Which of the following nations was NOT involved in World War I?
 - a. Britain
 - b. Chile**
 - c. France
 - d. Germany