

The causes of the First World War: was war inevitable in 1914?

Story

Create a title for each paragraph.



The article below examines the long term causes of the First World War.

Summarise each paragraph in one or two bullet points.



In the nineteenth century (1800s), the relationship between countries had been dominated by two things – **nationalism** (the belief that your country is better than others) and **imperialism** (the belief that countries had the right to conquer other lands and build up an empire). The British, with the world's largest navy, had an empire which covered a fifth of the world. The French, too, had a huge empire. The French also wanted revenge on the new country of Germany (created in 1871), who had defeated them in war and taken French land.

Even so, these countries believed that they ought to work together to keep the peace, and the presence of huge areas of the globe which they could easily conquer (especially in Africa), gave them a different focus for their ambitions.

The arrival of Germany upset the balance of power between countries. The new Germany was very rich and had a very strong army and it frightened the other nations. One way fearful countries responded was by forming **alliances (friendships)**, seeking safety by making defensive agreements with other countries. The idea behind these **alliances** was that no one would dare to attack you because they knew it would involve war, not just with you, but with all your allies as well.

In the years up to 1914, tensions increased. Germany was jealous of Britain's navy and empire. In the years after 1898 Germany built up a powerful navy to challenge Britain. In 1905, and again in 1911, France and Germany clashed in Morocco (in north Africa). New countries in Eastern Europe – such as Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania – had become independence following the fall of the Turkish Empire. Austria-Hungary, which itself ruled many Eastern European peoples, was terrified by the development and wary of these new nations, especially Serbia. Austro-Hungarian generals regularly asked to go to war.

Looking back, what seems odd is not that war broke out in 1914, but that it had not broken out sooner. The years 1870–1914 saw Europe stacking up resentments and tensions, like a fireworks manufacturer stuffing a rocket with gunpowder.

Source

This cartoon – ‘A Chain of Friendship’ - appeared in the American newspaper the Brooklyn Eagle in July 1914. The caption read: “If Austria attacks Serbia, Russia will fall upon Austria, Germany upon Russia, and France and England upon Germany”.



“I no longer have any doubt that Britain, Russia and France have agreed among themselves to wage war to destroy us. The encirclement of Germany has already been achieved.” Kaiser Wilhelm speaking in 1914 before the outbreak of war.

Scholarship

What really marked out the decade before 1914 was a failure of [leadership] and hope. By 1912, most European governments had come to believe that a general European war was inevitable [couldn't be stopped] and that the problems which plagued them at home and abroad could no longer be settled by negotiation and diplomacy [talking]...In these circumstances, war seemed to offer an attractive way out ... The balance sheet in 1918 proved how wrong they had been.

Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the First World War* (1989)

Task 1: Read through the **Story** of the causes of WW1. For each paragraph, you need to create a ‘title’ on one side, and a short summary (two bullet points maximum) on the other.

Task 2: Look at **sources** A and B. In your book, write a short description of the message of each source. Then answer the question “What do these sources tell you about how likely people thought war was?”

Task 3: Read through Henig’s **scholarship** about the causes of the war. Highlight what you think are the three most important sentences. In your book, answer the question “To what extent does this historian think war was inevitable in 1914?”