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# IMPERIALISM, WAR AND REVOLUTION

## The causes of World War I

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World War I (1914-1918), also called the First World War or the Great War, was caused by many related factors. In particular, mutual suspicions between the European powers, conflicting colonial interests, and political ambition all contributed to this terrible conflict.

### The Bismarckian Alliance System (1870-1890)

European politics was dominated by Germany under its chancellor, Otto von Bismarck and series of alliances with two main objectives: isolate France and maintain equilibrium in the Balkans. Germany's pacts were the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary (which later became the Triple Alliance when Italy joined) and the League of the Three Emperors with Austria-Hungary and Russia.

### The Armed Peace (1890-1914)

After the death of the German emperor Wilhelm I, his successor Wilhelm II favoured a more aggressive European policy, and Bismarck was replaced in 1890. European powers now divided into two military blocs: the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy faced the Triple Entente (1907) of France, Britain and Russia. Mutual fears led to an arms race. In this tense atmosphere, any confrontation could lead to large-scale conflict.

### Colonialism, a constant source of conflict

Germany and Italy wanted to build their own colonial empires, but the traditional colonial powers, Britain and France, wanted to limit their expansion.

Morocco, that became a Hispano-French protectorate at the Algeciras Conference (1907), and the Eastern Question were important sources of tension. The Ottoman Empire was falling apart, and Austria and Russia hoped to increase their influence in the region. Between 1908 and 1913, three crises culminated in two political changes: Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed by Austria-Hungary, and most of Bulgaria was divided up among neighbouring countries.

### The outbreak of war

Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife were assassinated on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914, when he was travelling in Sarajevo. In response Austria-Hungary, backed by Germany, issued an ultimatum to Serbia. Serbia rejected some parts of the ultimatum, and on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Russia, fearful of Austro-Hungarian control of the Balkans, mobilised its military to support Serbia.

Germany warned Russia to stop, but received no answer and declared war on Russia, and then on Russia's ally, France. On 4<sup>th</sup> August, Germany invaded Belgium in order to attack France where it was less well-defended. Britain had guaranteed to protect Belgium, and within hours declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. Italy did not support Austria-Hungary or Germany, which ended the Triple Alliance. World War I had begun.