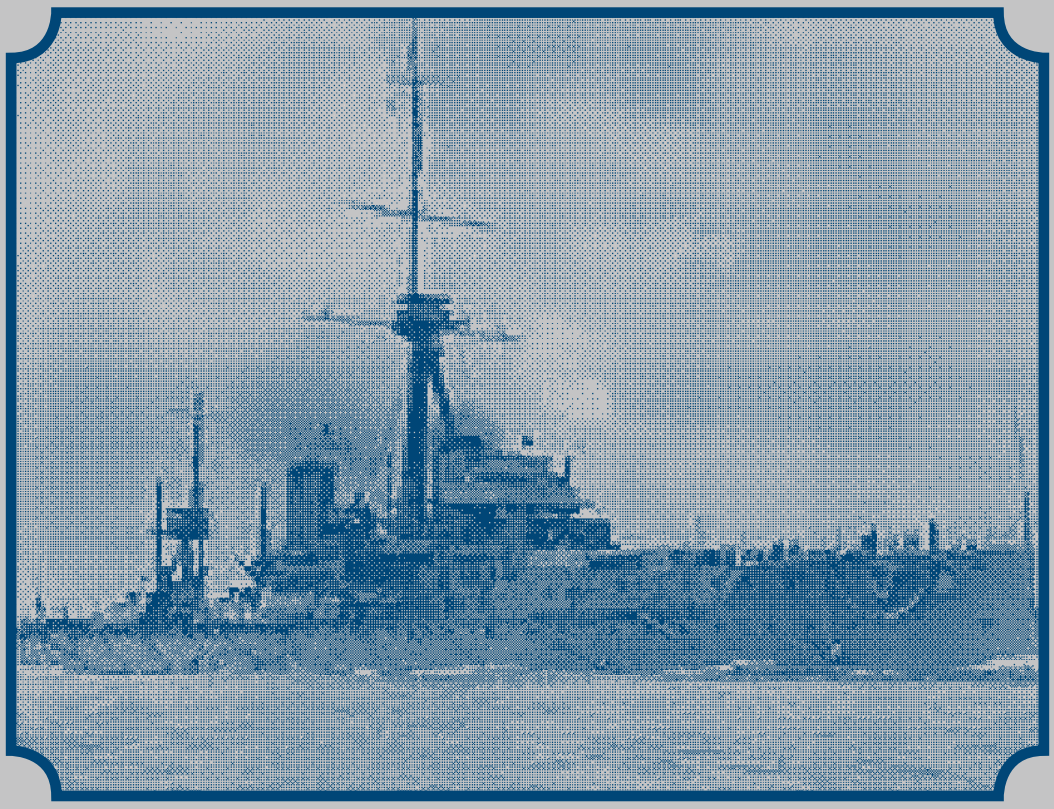
The Origins of the Great War



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The Great War

The First World War, initially known as the Great War, or as Churchill called it, the beginning of the Second 30 Years War, is slipping from living memory and soon the last survivors will be gone. This war, more than any other, is held in popular opinion to be the epitome of futility. In Australia, in particular, far removed from the battle lines, the war is thought to have seen Australian lives wasted in a senseless war on behalf of the British Empire. Essentially peace loving peoples are thought to have been goaded into war by cynical politicians with the aid of the most crude propaganda. Both the extreme left and extreme right wings of politics view the First World War as either being due to, or greatly influenced by, an international financial conspiracy.

This paper, which looks at the origins of the First World War, will outline a dissenting opinion. The major force driving international tensions, which led to war, was the pursuit of national prestige, or at least efforts to avoid, or take revenge for, national humiliation. Rather than being reluctantly dragged into war by their political leaders, the politicians of all the combatants were able to count on the enthusiastic support of their people.

The war was the climax of decades of international tensions. These tensions, felt very keenly by the peoples involved, were not due to efforts to gain power for its own sake, or to pursue financial gain, but were the result of nations seeking to increase or defend national prestige, then and still the most powerful of motivators for war. Seen thus, there are many lessons for the world today. Colonel Gaddafi of Libya, speaking at the Arab League Summit in March 2005, held continuing humiliation of the Arabs by the West as being one of the major reasons for the bringing to being of "a thousand Osama bin Ladens".

In the early part of the 20th century, Britain, in particular, was keen to avoid war and maintain the status quo, since the war came on a century of British dominance of the international stage. Gifted British politicians desperately tried to avoid war, but when the time came, even

pacifist leaders spoke for the people when war was preferred to national humiliation. Rather than seeing financial advantage, as the financial conspiracy theory holds, stock markets saw the war as a disaster.

Australians closely identified as a members of the British Empire in the early 20th century. Newspapers congratulated persons by calling them "a credit to their race", meaning the British Race. Australians were at least as supportive of the war as were the inhabitants of the British Isles and Australian troops remained among the best in the service of the Empire throughout the war. The naming of the Australian contingent as the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) emphasised the dual loyalty to Australia and Empire. By comparison, the force Britain sent to fight in Europe was known simply as the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

Map of pre-war Europe 1914 http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/map01eu.htm

The Major European Powers 1914

Reading historical documents, especially those written at the time, can be likened to reading a Russian novel. Countries may be known by several different names and sometimes to avoid repetition, the same country is referred to in different ways in the same paragraph. A modern example would be to refer to the United States as "The Americans" or Washington. The list below gives a brief description of the "Dramatis Personae" with their various appellations.

Austro-Hungarian Empire, often referred to as Austria, Vienna or "The Dual Monarchy"
The successor to the Holy Roman Empire from which it derived the heraldic device of the double-headed eagle. The monarch was both Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary and his Empire encompassed a large part of Europe which now consists of Austria, Hungary, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and parts of the Balkan nations, Poland and The Ukraine. It had acted as the European bulwark against the Islamic Ottoman Empire, but with the decline in the latter's strength was at risk of disintegration.

Britain, Great Britain, United Kingdom, often referred to as England
Enjoyed the greatest prestige of any European country with her large Empire and powerful navy. The birth place of the industrial revolution, she had dominated the 19th century, but was slipping back with the industrialisation of other countries.

France, sometimes referred to as the Third Republic
An unstable democracy – there had been 15 changes of government in the 10 years prior to World War I. France had gone through several, often violent, alternations between Republic and Empire in the previous century. France still held itself to be the center of European civilisation, but was being overshadowed by the newly united Germany. The French smarted over the loss of two provinces to Germany following their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

Germany, known as Prussia (the major German state) prior to unification in 1871
Newly united when the King of Prussia was crowned as Emperor of Germany in 1871, following victory in the Franco-Prussian war. A dynamic country with the best education system in Europe, the Germans were becoming leaders in the new fields of chemistry, metallurgy, the electrical industry and the development of the internal combustion engine. They felt, however, denied their rightful place in the European community.

Ottoman Empire, sometimes referred to as Turks or The (Sublime) Porte
Once a powerful Islamic Empire and a shining example of good governance and religious tolerance, the rise of Christian Europe with the Enlightenment and industrial revolution had seen the Ottoman Empire decline to being "The Sick Man" of the European Powers.

Russia
The most powerful nation in Europe in the early 19th century following the defeat of Napoleon, Russia had fallen far behind as the major European countries industrialised. A conservative, Christian Orthodox, autocratic society, Russia saw itself as the "Third Rome" following the fall of Rome and then Constantinople. Repression was justified since the path of Christian Orthodoxy was held to be the only means of salvation, not only for the Russians, but for all humanity.

The Origins of the Great War

National Prestige

Karl Marx forcefully proposed that economic advantage is the major driving force in human society. He was mistaken; the greatest force in individuals, tribes or nations is the desire to achieve a high self-esteem. The roots of this primal urge are very deep in primate society and relate to the greater reproductive success of high status males. Certainly, humiliation is one of the most bitter human experiences.

So it was with Germany in the late 19th and early 20th century. Newly united under the dynamic leadership of Chancellor Bismarck, Germany had achieved great economic success and had become a world leader in the fields of engineering, chemistry and the electrical industry. Her education system was the best in the world. Despite this, she felt slighted by the French and patronised by the British. In the words of Kaiser Wilhelm II she wanted a "place in the sun".

The 19th century had been a British century dominated by the rule of Queen Victoria. Even counties outside her Empire referred to the "Victorian Era". Since the Napoleonic Wars, British naval might had been such that no nation dared confront her. She maintained naval stations around the world and all world sea borne trade was conducted on her sufferance. Britain saw herself as the international policeman and her far-flung empire as a force for good in the world, ordained by God. "At Heaven's Command", British battle cruisers enforced the freedom of the seas, suppressed the slave trade and maintained the "Pax Britannica". Moves by other nations to increase their sea power were seen as a direct challenge, not only to her own position, and a threat to world peace, but virtually as an assault on the divine order of things.

Germany didn't see it like this. She saw no reason why she couldn't also have a great navy to defend her overseas trade. Germany also wished to acquire and protect colonies as a move to increase her prestige and provide a destination for German migration. In the 19th century many Germans had sought a new life overseas, but had almost always moved to the English speaking United States, Canada and Australia and were lost to the German world.

Germany United

In the early 19th century, Prussia, though the largest of the Northern German states with the capital in Berlin, had been considered the weakest of the European Powers. Under the brilliant leadership of the Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck, Prussia engaged in carefully calculated

wars against Denmark and Austro-Hungary to make Prussia the dominant German speaking state. France feared for its place as the most powerful European state, and, in 1870, was easily provoked into declaring war on Prussia over a dispute on rival candidates for the Spanish throne. In this, the Franco-Prussian War, a better led and equipped Prussian army ignominiously defeated the French forces. The French Emperor was deposed and the Third Republic proclaimed, but the Prussian advance could not be halted. Paris was besieged and France finally capitulated in January 1871. In the tradition of the French Revolution, the citizens of Paris arose and formed the Paris Commune, an icon of the left wing of politics to this day. It was brutally crushed by the French army. The triumph reached its peak, in the French Palace of Versailles, with the proclamation of the Prussian King, Wilhelm I, as Emperor of a united Germany.

The prestige of the Prussian military was greatly enhanced and the military ethos remained dominant in Germany until the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945. In 1905, the German Chancellor said that the high point of his career came when leading his old cavalry regiment, at the gallop, past Kaiser Wilhelm II at a military review. It is impossible to imagine a British, let alone an Australian Prime Minister being of the same opinion.

It was not just in Germany, however, that the Prussian triumph was admired. For some years, London Bobbies and the officer cadets of the US military academy, West Point both wore spiked helmets in imitation of the Prussian infantry. Britain established a staff college to train army officers for higher command after the example of the Prussians. A move lampooned by William S. Gilbert in "The Major General's Song: *I am the very model of the modern Major General,"* in the light opera "The Pirates of Penzance".

The success of the military campaigns to gain German dominance in Europe also strengthened the current of Romanticism in German society. The Romantic Movement in Europe was, to some extent, a reaction to the intellectualism and materialism of the Enlightenment which was thought to be contrary to the true nature of humanity. It valued the irrational over

the intellectual, poetry over prose, praised heroism; both in the individual and the tribe, and felt great things could only be achieved by following a forceful leader rather than through the ineffectual debates of democracy. Romanticism was to effect a complete, though temporary, triumph of emotion over reason with the German Fascist movement of the 1930's and 40's.

Up to this point, Prussian policy, under the skilled von Bismarck, had consolidated the German position in Europe without leaving long-lasting enmities. The Franco-Prussian War, however, brought a measure of instability. France suffered not only the humiliation of the defeat and the loss of its primary position in European politics, but the added injury of losing the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany and having to pay a huge indemnity of 5 billion francs to cover the costs of the war waged by Prussia. France longed for revenge and the chance to recover the lost territory.

In an effort to contain French determination for revenge, and to settle rival claims over spheres of influence in the Balkans, Bismarck engineered the "Three Emperors League" between Germany, Russia and Austro-Hungary in 1873, two years after the Franco-Prussian war. This was followed by the short-lived secret "Reinsurance Treaty" between Germany and Russia, which lapsed with the dismissal of Bismarck by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1890. Russia, very nervous about the increasing power of the united Germany, was now free to pursue an alliance with France. The French were eager to respond, since France needed an ally as her falling birth rate meant that she was becoming ever weaker than Germany as time went on. The alliance left Germany with potential enemies on two fronts; the French to the southwest and the Russians to the east.

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany

Unstable and emotional, the Kaiser was a figure of some ridicule even in his own empire. He did, however, embody many of the aspirations of the German people and his ambivalent relationship with the British was

typical of German feelings. He was half English himself; his mother was the Princess Royal, being the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, and he spoke excellent English with only a slight accent. He frequently brought his yacht to English race meetings and was himself an admiral in the Royal Navy. He very much enjoyed this rank and constantly bombarded the Admiralty with advice on organisation and administration of the navy, requiring much tactful handling by the British. The Kaiser's idea of a holiday was to rent a mansion in the English countryside and live the life of an English gentleman.

Then, in 1895, there occurred a little known incident that was to have enormous ramifications for future relations between Germany and Britain. The Kaiser, as usual, came to the annual Royal Yacht Club Regatta at Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, in style, living on board his own Royal Yacht, but this time accompanied by two new battleships he wished to show off to the British. The British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, was invited to come aboard the Royal Yacht and no doubt be impressed by the show of German naval strength. Salisbury arrived late, having left the Kaiser and his entourage waiting for several hours. The Kaiser brooded over this perceived slight for months and it was in this atmosphere he sent the famous "Kruger Telegram".

In late 1895, a Dr Jameson had led an ill-fated raid on the Boer Transvaal from the British Cape Colony in South Africa. Kaiser Wilhelm's telegram of congratulation to the Boer President Kruger for repulsing the raid caused a wave of anti-German feeling in the British public. The Kaiser decided as well that he would not attend the annual British regatta at Cowes any longer and instead established his own annual regatta at Kiel in Germany.

These ups and downs aside, Kaiser Wilhelm remained determined to make Germany a figure of international respect and further Germany's overseas interests, by creating a navy to rival the Royal Navy, knowing that this would be seen by Britain as a direct challenge. Kaiser Wilhelm's plans to challenge Britain in the past had not been well received by the more far-sighted Bismarck who had wanted Germany to be dominant in Europe and

extend her influence by her excellence in industry and trade. In this she was very successful. Her superb universities cooperated with industry more than was the case in Britain where commercial dealings were considered tainted and not the proper field of enquiry for intellectuals. Germany became the leading figure in the fields of chemistry, electrical innovations and the use of the internal combustion engine. So impressive was the German technical dominance, maintained during the First World War, that after the war the British and other nations decided to imitate the German model and introduce the post-graduate Doctorate of Philosophy. To this day, the PhD is awarded by virtually every university in the world, except for the University of Oxford, which declined to introduce this 'German degree' and instead awards a D Phil.

The continuing disagreements between the Kaiser and Bismarck came to a head when the Kaiser dismissed Bismarck as Chancellor in 1890, setting Germany on a new path of international adventure. The Kaiser was not alone in his plans. The chief architect of the push for a great German navy was Admiral Alfred Tirpitz, also an anglophile, who spoke excellent English and sent his two daughters to be educated at the Cheltenham Ladies College in England. As a junior officer in the German Navy he had greatly admired the Royal Navy but bristled at the patronising attitude shown by the British to the German sailors. Now, as Secretary of State for the Navy, he introduced the first of the Navy Laws in 1898, the start of a program directing German naval construction for the next 20 years.

German military efforts were, as a result, split in two different directions. The army strategy was to manage the threat of a war on two fronts with France and Russia as the postulated enemies. The navy, on the other hand was planned to confront the British. This dichotomy of policy was partly due competition between the Kaiser's various ministers. Germany did not have the Westminster cabinet system in which differences of opinion between ministers are worked out 'in camera' before a united policy is made public. The lack of a unified strategy was to prove fatal to Germany, since when the war did break out, she tried to contain the hostilities to the continent of Europe without realising that her naval buildup made it

virtually certain that the British would intervene on the side of France and Russia.

Freed from the restraining influence of Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm was determined to use his authority to advance the cause of German international influence. His tendency to give speeches "off the cuff", however, was to be a constant headache for the German Foreign Ministry. One such embarrassment occurred during the Boxer rebellion in China. Throughout the 19th century the Chinese seethed at the constant humiliation of having the European Powers forcing unequal treaty rights on the ancient Chinese Empire. Rebellion was finally sparked, in 1900, by the Germans seizing much of Shantung Province on the Yellow Sea to provide a naval station in the East. The German Minister to China was assassinated and the Kaiser ordered thirty thousand troops to be sent to China to assist in quelling the rebellion without consulting his Chancellor or Foreign Office. Farewelling the first contingent he made what was described as the "worst speech of his life". Urging them to emulate the Huns of King Attila he shouted, "may the name of Germans resound through Chinese history a thousand years from now". This speech was to provide much ammunition to Allied propagandists who gleefully labeled the Germans as "Huns" in both World Wars.

Shifts in the Balance of Power

Prussia, and then unified Germany, had attained military dominance in Europe without the use of a navy at all. During the Franco-Prussian War, the small navy had remained anchored in harbor. In 1898, Germany moved to extend her influence beyond continental Europe when the first of the Navy Laws was proclaimed, requiring the building of 17 battleships and 37 cruisers to be ready by 1904.

In October 1899, the Second South African or "Boer" War broke out between the British and the independently minded Boers, settlers of Dutch descent. Germany maintained the colony of German Southwest Africa (now Namibia) just to the north and the Boers appealed to the Germans for

help. Without a fleet capable of challenging the Royal Navy, the Germans were unable to respond. The great sympathy felt in Germany for the Boers, whom they regarded as close relatives, and the frustration caused by this impotence, made it much easier for Admiral Tirpitz to steer The Second Fleet Act of 1900 through the German Reichstag. This far more ambitious program provided for 38 battleships and 45 cruisers to be ready by 1917, and was a serious challenge to the Royal Navy.

Britain's traditional policy had been to support the second strongest nation in Europe to maintain the balance of power and prevent a Europe united under a dominant power confronting her across the Channel – a policy her critics say she maintains to this day. When France had been the strongest power, Britain had been quite friendly to Germany and was sympathetic to the Prussian side in the Franco-Prussian War. With the defeat of France and the unification of Germany, the balance of power had changed. Britain, however, continued to regard France as the potential enemy. Popular novels of the time had Britain invaded by the French army aided by a legion of French soldiers who were already in England disguised as waiters in French restaurants.

British colonial interests also clashed with those of the French in North Africa. British colonies were aligned on a North-South axis, starting with South Africa through Rhodesia, Kenya, Sudan and Egypt, whereas the French colonies were East-West with Algeria and Tunisia. The tensions came to a head in September 1898, when General Kitchener, fresh from victory over insurgents at Khartoum, forced the French out of Fashoda, a small outpost on the upper Nile. Despite outrage among the French people at this affront, the French government was very keen for British assistance to balance the growing power of united Germany. On the British side, attention was now being drawn to the extensive German Naval program and it was in the interests of both countries to put aside differences. The colonial points of friction were smoothed over with formal demarcation of spheres of influence drawn up in North Africa between the British and French Empires. The way was clear for a formal Anglo-French Entente, signed in 1904.

There remained the problem of Russia, an ally of France since 1894, following the collapse of the "Reinsurance Treaty" between Germany and Russia in 1890. Britain had long seen Russia as a potential enemy. In fact, one of the reasons for the Federation of the Australian states was for a united defense against possible Russian incursion from their new bases in Vladivostok and Port Arthur. Russia was unpopular with British liberals because of her repressive internal policies and with the conservatives because of her expansionist imperial ambitions that clashed with those of Britain in Iran and Afghanistan where "The Great Game" was played between the two.

Uneasy over the rise of German sea power but still wary at the time of Russian Imperial ambitions, Britain had signed an alliance with Japan in 1902. The alliance allowed Britain to bring home much of her Far East Fleet and to leave the protection of British interests in the Pacific to the Japanese. Australia, incidentally, viewed the Anglo-Japanese alliance with alarm and was less than impressed with the idea of Japanese cruisers patrolling Australian shores. (Some of the motivation for the very vigorous Australian support for the British in the First World War was to decrease and supplant British reliance on the Japanese.)

The disastrous defeat of Russia by the emergent Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 had made it easier for the British to accept Russia as much less of a threat and more as a potential friend. From the Australian view, on the other hand, the success of the Japanese was the cause for great concern. Australia saw herself as a small European nation on the other side of the world threatened by "The Yellow Peril". Australia moved to strengthen Imperial ties but also sought reinsurance from the United States. Despite British objections, the US "Great White Fleet" was ostentatiously invited to visit Sydney during its around the world cruise in 1908.

Dreadnought

As well as moving from "splendid isolation" to an understanding with France, Britain undertook a major naval program herself to counter the

German build up. The commander of the Royal Navy, the First Sea Lord, was the eccentric genius Sir John "Jacky" Fisher. Under his direction, the British built a radical new warship, HMS *Dreadnought* – laid down and launched in a single year, in a masterful display of industrial power. A very fast steam turbine driven battleship armed with 10 twelve-inch guns in 5 turrets, the minute she hit the water all other warships in the world were obsolete. A naval arms race ensued, with nations only counting the number of "dreadnoughts" in their fleet, other ships being thought now as more an encumbrance than an asset. The name stuck and the 45000 ton US battleship *Missouri*, when decommissioned in 1992 was said to be the "last and greatest of the dreadnoughts".

The Morocco Crisis

The Anglo-French Entente was only an understanding and not an alliance and did not commit Britain to the aid of France if that country were to be at war with Germany. Nevertheless, Germany was determined to detach Britain from France. The defeat of Russia by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 meant that Russia was not in a position to assist France and the time seemed ripe for a move.

Morocco, just across the strait from the large British naval base at Gibraltar was the last independent state in North Africa, mainly because the British resisted any move by a European power that would threaten British control of the strait and access to the Mediterranean. The Sultanate of Morocco, however, was in turmoil. There was an ongoing rebellion from a disaffected chieftain and the economy was a shambles. Under the doctrine of "The Open Door", these circumstances were usually seen as an invitation to a European power to intervene and, in their view, straighten things out. Three European countries had an interest in Morocco: France, which was thought to have the major claim, since Morocco shared a border with French Algeria, Spain which was also involved, with an adjacent colony of Spanish Morocco, and Britain.

Though Germany had had no previous interest in Morocco, the Kaiser himself paid a visit to the country in a deliberate challenge to France. To try to resolve what was becoming a potentially dangerous situation, a conference of interested European states was called in the Spanish city of Algeciras, just across the bay from Gibraltar. The British dominated the conference, backed by an awesome display of naval might assembled at Gibraltar, in clear view of the delegates. The result was a defeat for Germany and the drawing closer of Britain and France as well as an increased determination by the Germans to match British naval dominance. Russia, impressed by the display of British power, sought British help against an ever more powerful Germany on her western border. The British were keen to finish "The Great Game" and end the continuing friction between the British and Russian empires. An Anglo-Russian Entente was signed in 1907.

Kaiser Wilhelm continued to cause problems for the German Foreign Service. In October 1908, he gave an interview to the British "Daily Telegraph" in which he told of his friendship for Britain despite the fact that the "prevailing sentiment among… my own people is not friendly to Britain" and said that his was the only voice to speak for Britain amongst the almost universal pro-Boer sentiment of Europe. The German Navy was not being built to challenge Britain but might be needed against, for example, the Japanese. In this interview he managed to alienate almost every section in his own society, not to mention those of Japan, Europe and Britain. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey wrote an article in reply, which began "The German Emperor is ageing me…" The interview had been sent for clearance to the German Chancellor Bulow, but Bulow probably didn't read it and only weakly defended his master in the Reichstag. Bulow was forced to resign and was replaced as Chancellor by Theodor von Bethmann Hollweg.

The Bosnian Crisis of 1908

The crumbling old Ottoman Empire was known as "The Sick Man of Europe" and was not strong enough to hold onto its provinces in Europe.

This was a continuing source of tension, as the other European powers sought to increase their influence over the emerging client states, or at least prevent potential enemies from increasing theirs. Bosnia-Herzegovina, one such state, though still nominally a province of the Ottoman Empire, had been administered by Austro-Hungary, following agreement of the other European powers at the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

Then, in 1908, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire was overthrown by a group of revolutionaries known as "The Young Turks", desperate to modernise the Empire and prevent further decay. Austro-Hungary thought they might initiate their program by reestablishing control over their European provinces and to preempt this, Austria annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbs, who had already managed to free themselves from the Ottomans, saw a fellow Slav state, rather than obtaining freedom, swallowed by a European Empire. They appealed to Russia, traditional defender of the Slavs (a policy continued to this day). Russia mobilised some of her army and moved the troops closer to the Balkan borders. Austria, in turn, sought help from her ally, Germany, which responded by sending a very curt note to the Russians threatening war. The Russians, weakened by their recent defeat at the hands of the Japanese, backed down, and Bosnia-Herzegovina remained an unwilling part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The whole of Russia was enormously humiliated and worked tirelessly to strengthen military ties to France and Britain in order to make sure that such loss of face did not happen again. When the war finally did break out, the Russian foreign minister at the time of the Bosnian crisis, Alexander Isvolsky, said gleefully "This is my war, my war".

The Anglo-German Naval Arms Race

Following the launch of HMS *Dreadnought*, the Germans initiated a program to build dreadnoughts of their own. The large Royal Navy may have been an affront to German self-esteem but it did not threaten German territorial integrity. For Germany, a navy was seen as a "luxury" in the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the British Liberal government, David Lloyd George. On the other hand, Britain was an island and, to the

British point of view, a powerful navy was essential to defend Britain itself.

The new Liberal government in Britain had hoped to decrease arms spending in favor of domestic programs. The German naval buildup forced a change of plan. The Admiralty wanted six new dreadnoughts, whereas the Treasury offered four, so in the words of Winston Churchill, soon to be First Lord of the Admiralty (Minister for the Navy), "we finally compromised on eight": four immediately and four more if the Germans kept building. They did.

In an effort to halt the race, the British proposed a "naval holiday" whereby both sides would suspend their building programs for a year. To the British this seemed sensible, but to the Germans it seemed to be an effort to consign them to perpetual naval inferiority and it was rejected. To add to British paranoia about the defense of their island, the Germans, from 1900, started building huge rigid airships, named Zeppelins after the designer Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin. Popular novels now had London bombed by Zeppelins and invaded by German troops, again assisted by disguised waiters already in place. There were many reports of ghostly shapes in the British night sky. The almost hysterical atmosphere in Britain was not helped by a popular German postcard showing a Zeppelin bombing a Royal Navy cruiser.

In 1909, the Frenchman, Louis Bleriot, flew a small monoplane across the English Channel. Britain was no longer an island. Aircraft were landing in the United Kingdom "like migrating birds" was one overwrought reaction.

The Second Morocco Crisis 1911

The Conference of Algeciras, although it had endorsed the independence of Morocco, had given the French the leading role as political advisers. Despite this, the Sultanate remained a constant source of instability. A revolution in 1911 overthrew the Sultan and caused much damage to European business. The Germans demanded recompense. The French, now overconfident following Algeciras, brushed them off. The Germans responded by

sending a gunboat "*Panther*" to Morocco to press the point, expecting to only have to deal with the French. The British, however, now became involved. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, called in the German ambassador and demanded to know German intentions. Grey was probably the best Foreign Minister to serve Great Britain in the modern era and commanded great respect in Europe. A member of the minor British aristocracy, widowed without children, he had no political ambitions and only served at all out of a sense of duty. The Germans declined to give an answer to Grey's request. Britain was not used to being treated with disdain and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, a sometime radical trade unionist, Germanophile and pacifist gave a speech in which he strongly implied that Britain would go to war rather than be humiliated before "The Cabinet of Nations." This speech, delivered by someone seen as a German sympathiser, served as something of a cold shower and Germany relented. This point must be emphasised, a life long pacifist preferred war to national humiliation. Relations between Germany and Britain actually became somewhat warmer over the next few years.

There remained the intractable problem of the continued German naval buildup. Britain sent several high level, though unofficial, missions to Germany, including one by Richard Haldane, the British War Minister, a German speaking graduate of the University of Gottingen, to see if some compromise could be reached. Germany did offer to halt the building program in return for a British promise of neutrality in the event of a war between Germany and France. The British were unable to agree, being unwilling to abandon their Entente partner and aware that there would be public outrage and that the government would fall if Britain were to cede naval supremacy to Germany. Again, the politicians were being driven to confrontation by their people and not vice-versa. Both Britain and Germany continued building the vastly expensive warships.

Continuing Problems in the Balkans

With the declining power of the Ottoman Empire, the states in the Balkans still under Turkish control continued to agitate for independence. The

aim of the other major European powers was to keep the peace but also to prevent their client Balkan states from suffering from the territorial ambitions of the others. Serbia, a nation of Orthodox Christians, which had won independence from the Ottoman Empire earlier in the 19th century, was a major source of agitation to force the Turks out of their remaining European provinces. She also strove to prevent any newly emerging countries falling into the hands of the major power to the North: the Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austro-Hungary's reason for existing at all was to provide a united bulwark against the Muslim Ottoman Empire, but with the decline of the Turks, it was becoming more and more irrelevant. The rising tide of nationalism, which was creating instability in the Balkans, was also creating an increasing desire for peoples in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as the Czechs, to achieve independence as well. In the capital of Austro-Hungary, Vienna, there was a feeling that the old Empire was doomed and that a great part of the blame was the continuing agitation of Serbian nationalists. One point of friction was known as "The Pig War". Some 80% of Serbian exports consisted of live pigs, with the majority going north to Austria. The Serbs were able to undersell the Austrian peasants who were going broke. Austria countered by clamping a tariff on the pig trade, but continuing friction with Serbia meant that the Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, Marshall Conrad von Hotzendorf, advised his Emperor, Franz-Joseph, to declare war on Serbia some 25 times in the early part of the 20th century.

The Balkan Wars

In the Balkan states, throughout 1910 and 1911, there was continuing talk of war to force the Turks of the old Ottoman Empire out of their remaining European provinces. Britain and Germany now cooperated in an attempt to keep the peace. They leant on their allies, Russia and Austro-Hungary respectively, to act with their client states in the Balkans to achieve some solution to the continuing "Balkan Problem". Both Russia and Austro-Hungary responded and publicly declared that they would not support any military action by the Balkan states to force the Turks out and would not recognise any territory gained by these states if they did go to war. It should

be noted that Britain, Germany, Russia and Austro-Hungary, just a few years before the outbreak of the First World War, were acting collectively to prevent any military adventures which could lead to just such a war.

Meanwhile, Italy, newly unified, felt that national prestige required that she have an empire in Africa as did the British, French and, to a lesser extent, the Germans. In 1882, she had entered into an initially secret alliance with Germany and Austro-Hungary, known as the Triple Alliance. The arrangement was that, in exchange for Italian support against France, Germany would support Italian designs in Africa. In 1911, Italy saw her chance against the weak Ottoman Empire and seized Tripoli and several Mediterranean islands. This war, which incidentally saw the first ever use, by Italy, of aircraft in a military role, resulted in the defeat of the Ottomans with a further blow to their prestige.

In 1912, with the Ottomans weakened by the war with Italy, the members of the "Balkan League"; Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Greece, despite the efforts of the major European Powers to keep the peace, declared war on the Ottoman Empire. This, the First Balkan War, saw rapid successes by forces of the Balkan League. The Bulgarians captured Adrianople (now Edirne), the second city of the Ottoman Empire, while the Serbs took Skopje, the onetime capital of the medieval Serbian Empire and the Greeks seized Salonika in Thrace.

A conference of the major European Powers, Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Russia and Italy was called and met in London, under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Grey. Under the resulting Treaty of London, signed in 1913, the Ottomans lost most of their European territory. Bulgaria, however, was unhappy with the arrangements and felt she had been deprived of her fair share of the spoils. In the Second Balkan War her forces attacked those of erstwhile allies Serbia and Greece. The Bulgarian campaign was unsuccessful and, while her Balkan League enemies were fighting amongst themselves, the Ottomans recaptured Adrianople. Romania also took the opportunity to attack the Bulgarians from the rear. A further peace treaty was signed, but again the Bulgarians felt poorly

done by and the Serbs, aggrieved at being forced by Vienna to give up some of the captured territory, viewed the Austro-Hungarian Empire with even greater hostility.

The Balkan Wars, rather than, as might be expected, bringing tension between rival European Powers to a peak and being a prelude to the First World War, actually resulted in an improvement in international understanding. The Major Powers cooperated in their determination to prevent these small wars from escalating into large ones.

There were, on the other hand, military lessons to be learned from these conflicts. All the major European powers had military observers in the Balkans during both wars and noted how the Bulgarians, in particular, had managed to overwhelm the Turk fortress at Adrianople with bayonet charges, even though it was well defended and equipped with the latest German Krupp artillery. The French, in particular, took this on board and Generals Foch and Joffre developed Plan 17, an offensive plan to drive straight into Germany in the event of war. The previous 16 plans had been mainly defensive. Officers favoring a defensive strategy were purged from the French General Staff. Plan 17 was to have enormous consequences, not only for French fortunes in the coming war, but also for the future of France as a world power.

The naval race between Britain and Germany continued, but now both sides had more or less accepted that the British would maintain superiority in numbers of dreadnoughts with the superiority further reinforced by the Queen Elizabeth class "super dreadnoughts" coming off the slips. Germany simply could not afford to keep pace with Britain by building great numbers of these expensive ships and at the same time maintain a very large army. Britain, protected by the English Channel and the Royal Navy, needed to maintain only a very small standing army. In June 1914, a large British Battle Squadron visited the German Naval Base at Kiel to participate in the Kiel Regatta, established in imitation of the British Regatta at Cowes. The week was very successful with sporting competitions and parties on each other's ships and as the British fleet finally left the harbor, the

flagship signaled “Friends in past and friends forever”. The news had just come through that the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne had been assassinated in Sarajevo: war was only weeks away.

The Road to Armageddon

Though none of the major powers was seeking war, all sides were increasing military readiness. France was deeply resentful over the loss of her two provinces, Alsace and Lorraine, to the Germans following the Franco-Prussian War, but was terrified of the power of the now united Germany on her borders. She hoped, however, that if war were forced on her, with the support of her two Entente partners, Britain and Russia, she would be able to extract revenge. France was a major source of capital for other states in Europe and used this to her advantage. For example, she insisted that a condition of a loan to Russia to finance railway extensions be that the railways were extended west towards the German border. These lines were economically unviable but would be useful to move Russian troops to support France in the event of war.

Germany, though easily the single most powerful nation on the Continent of Europe, faced the nightmare of encirclement with the increasing closeness of the Entente of Britain, France and Russia. If war threatened, she felt she would have to strike first or be overwhelmed by force of numbers if the huge Russian army were given time to organise. Faced with this potential confederation of nations against her in a future war, Germany clung to her only ally of consequence, the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire, however, was an uncertain quantity. The rise of Nationalism in the 19th century saw the Austro-Hungarian Empire facing disintegration as the various ethnic communities within her borders sought independence. A “fin-de-siecle” weariness enveloped the old Empire. Many Austrians, however, thought that she might still stand a chance if she could only strike down what was seen as the perpetual source of agitation: Serbia. Germany had given what was to be called a “blank cheque” of promised support in any dispute with Serbia. The account had already been

drawn down. In 1908, German threats had prevented Russia coming to the support of her Slav ally, Serbia, in a confrontation with Austria. In 1913 the promise of German support was reinforced in a conversation between Kaiser Wilhelm and the Austrian Foreign Minister Count Berchtold. "The Slavs were born to serve and not to rule" said the Kaiser and ostentatiously put his hand to his sword while assuring the Count of German military assistance to bring the Serbs to heel if Emperor Franz-Joseph of Austria so requested. Russia, the leading Slav nation, had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese in the war of 1904: the first time Asians had defeated a European nation since the days of Timur (Tamberlane) of the late 14th century. She had also been forced to back down before the German threats in 1908. Nothing is so unbecoming of authoritarian regimes, which justify repression in the name of security, as military defeat. A full-scale revolution had been set off in Russia in1905. (Defeat in the Falklands also saw the downfall of the Argentinean dictatorship in 1982). Russia would have to accept a German challenge the next time.

In a conversation with the new German Ambassador to Britain, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, held just before the London Conference of 1912, Sir Edward Grey predicted the course of events if Austria and Serbia were to go to war. The European Powers would be dragged in. Only Britain, guarded by the Royal Navy, was not immediately threatened. She had no alliances with any of the other Powers and the relationship with France and Russia was only an "Entente Cordiale". She would, however, be in a seriously compromised situation if a European war resulted in a victorious Germany, now with all the resources of defeated Europe at her back, were to face Britain across the moat of the English Channel. Sir Edward strongly implied to the German ambassador that Britain would intervene on the side of her European associates to prevent this happening. He allowed the British and French general staffs to hold joint planning meetings and by agreement the French Navy withdrew from the English Channel to concentrate in the Mediterranean to balance the increasing strength of the Austro-Hungarian navy, trusting the Royal Navy to keep the Channel clear of ships hostile to France.

The Assassination in Sarajevo

By 1914, Emperor Franz-Joseph of Austria-Hungary had been on the throne for 64 years. A diligent though austere man – he slept on an iron camp stretcher in the palace and was given to summoning advisers at all hours of the night – he had endured much personal tragedy. His wife, the beautiful Empress Elizabeth, had been assassinated, his brother, the Emperor of Mexico executed, and his only son, the unstable Crown Prince Rudolf had killed himself and his young mistress in a murder-suicide pact. The old Emperor was determined not to give way to any Serbian demands. His nephew Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, took a more conciliatory line but was excluded from decision-making. Franz Ferdinand had further weakened his position in the Austrian establishment by marrying a mere Countess, and a Slav at that, the Bohemian Sophie Chotek.

Serb insurgents were concerned that when Franz Ferdinand succeeded to the throne, his progressive views and his Slavic wife might make membership of the Austro-Hungarian Empire more palatable to the Slavs, who made up three fifths of its population, and thereby strengthen it.

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand paid a visit to the capital of the recently annexed province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The streets were lined with enthusiastic well wishers, but this was just the sort of challenge from the relatively popular heir-apparent that the insurgents were determined to meet. A bomb was thrown at the Archduke's car, but missed. The Archduke went on to attend a reception but to improve security the return route was changed. The chauffeur, however, got lost and as he slowed to turn around, a young Bosnian student, Gavrilo Princip, stepped up and shot the Archduke and his wife dead.

Everyone blamed Serbia. Even Russia, traditional defender of the Slavs, but which had seen several assassinations attempts made on its own rulers, held the Serbs accountable. Serbia initially denied responsibility, but further investigation was to reveal that the Slav insurgent group "The Black Hand

Society", thought to be the perpetrator, was financed by the Serbian Secret Service and the pistol used was actually from the Serbian State armory. Austro-Hungary especially thought Serbia was behind the assassination. The old Emperor sent a hand written note to the Kaiser stating that "the assassination was a direct consequence of agitation by Russian and Serbian Pan-Slavists whose sole aim is to weaken the Triple Alliance and shatter my Empire." The Kaiser replied, after some consideration, but without consulting his government, that if Austria felt it had to take military action against Serbia and Russia intervened, then the Emperor could be assured of the support of its "old faithful ally" Germany. When the Kaiser later reported his actions to his government and representatives of the military, they gave their full support. The "Blank Cheque" had been reissued.

Though the letter to the Kaiser listed the "Triple Alliance"– Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy – even ahead of his own empire as the target of the Pan-Slavists, Italy was considered unreliable, with its parallel treaty with France, and was not consulted. The Kaiser discussed possible actions of Russia and France with his advisors, but the possibility of Britain's involvement was not even mentioned. The Kaiser then left for his annual holiday, cruising around Norway.

Austro-Hungary Resolves to go to War

Austro-Hungary was determined that this time the Serbians would not go unpunished, though the Emperor insisted that mobilisation not take place until an ultimatum had been rejected. Both Britain and Russia leant on Serbia to make conciliatory gestures, but Austria now squandered the support it had from virtually the entire international community. The ultimatum sent was intentionally so aggressive that it could hardly be accepted by any self-respecting nation. Austria demanded that all anti-Imperial newspapers be closed down, that all members of the government and military holding such views be dismissed and that these actions be monitored by Austrian officials, and even demanded the right to sit on tribunals investigating the assassination. Faced with war and pressured by the other European Powers, Serbia agreed to most of the demands and

suggested that the most extreme measures, which would have made Serbia virtually an Austrian dependency, be referred to an international tribunal: in diplomatic terms, a groveling apology. Sir Edward Grey requested a Six Power Peace conference, along the lines of the very successful London Conference of 1912, to hear the differences. France and Russia immediately agreed, but Germany briskly declined. Germany and Austro-Hungary were bent on war to settle the Serbian problem once and for all, but the civilian and military administration of Germany was now ahead of their Monarch. When news of the Serbian acceptance of Austrian demands reached the Kaiser on his yacht in Norway, he was greatly relieved and jubilant that his forceful attitude seemed to have gained Austrian victory. "Every reason for war drops away" he wrote. Despite this reaction of the "Supreme War Lord", as the Kaiser liked to call himself, the German government telegraphed support for Austrian military action. Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia and the following morning, 29th July 1914, Austrian artillery opened fire on Belgrade, the Serbian Capital.

Though the shooting had started, a war involving all of Europe was not yet certain. The Austrians hoped this would be a war localised to themselves and Serbia which would stop the endless Serb agitation among the Slav majority in the Empire and restore the old Empire's prestige. The Germans saw this as a great chance to enhance their standing amongst the European Powers. If they could back Austria in its struggle with Serbia, and prevent the Russians from involvement by threat of war, they would finish Russia as a Great Power and ensure the survival of their only real European Ally – the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The German government, on the other hand, was desperate not to be seen as the aggressors in the eyes of the world, and also concerned that unless the coming war was seen as defensive by its own population, the large socialist element in the working class might not fight. Germany was, after all, the place where Karl Marx had predicted the Communist Revolution would start.

German plans of a fairly bloodless triumph were thwarted when, on July 31st, Russia mobilised. But, at least, Germany could now possibly be seen, by the other powers and by its own people, as being forced to take defensive

measures before the huge Russian "steamroller" (as the Russian army was often referred to) rolled over the German borders. The Germans sent a curt ultimatum to the Russians demanding demobilisation. As predicted by Sir Edward Grey, however, Russia could not stand the humiliation of another back down as had happened in similar circumstances in1908, and this time the Russians didn't even bother to reply. On August 1st Germany declared war on Russia.

Britain at the Crossroads

For much of this time Britain was preoccupied with its own problems. Almost a month after the assassination in Sarajevo, *The Times* of London on July 22nd ran a headline "Peace as a Miracle"– which actually referred, not to the threat to the European peace, but to the probability of civil war in Ireland. The Liberal Government planned to pass a Home Rule bill giving dominion status, such as that enjoyed by Australia and Canada, to the whole of Ireland. The Ulstermen in the north armed themselves and prepared to fight rather than be included. On July 21st the King called a conference to settle the differences but it was unable to reach any sort of agreement. The front page of *The Times* which was mainly devoted to the Irish crisis ran a much smaller column under the headline "The Austro-Servian Conflict" and the British Cabinet didn't even discuss the European crisis until three days after this on July 24th . Initially, the British were not unduly alarmed; similar crises over the last decade had been settled by, negotiation. It was not until the Germans declined to attend a Six Power Conference suggested by Sir Edward Grey that it became clearer that the Central Powers were intent on settling the Serbian problem once and for all. Sir Edward Grey then suggested that if Germany did not want to follow the British lead, then Britain would follow any German plan for peace and use its influence to gain the acceptance of the plan by France and Russia as well. Again this offer was declined. But even when Germany declared war on Russia, an Entente Partner of Britain, many still hoped that a negotiated peace could be reached or, if not, that war would be confined to the Continent and that Britain might not be involved.

With a European war threatening, the Governor of the Bank of England, Lord Cunliffe, called on the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, to demand that a way be found to avert a war that would have devastating effects on the international financial market which had London as its center. *The Economist*, bastion of British finance, on 1st August strongly called for Britain to stay out of the coming war. The call was echoed by captains of the British steel, coal and manufacturing industries. Rather than being a grubby war for the benefit of financial and industrial interests, these very interests saw the looming war as a disaster.

Hopes that the war might be limited were dashed by the German war plan laid down by the former Chief of the German General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, which was aimed at the combination of France and Russia. The "Schlieffen Plan" laid down a swift campaign to defeat France before the Russian "steamroller", could be organised and crush German defenses in the East. The German forces were then to be rapidly transported by rail to the Eastern Front to meet the Russian threat. The German army commanders were less concerned about who started the war than who was going to finish it. "Success alone justifies war" stated the Chief of the German General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke. There was no time to lose and in Germany the understanding was that "mobilisation means war". The plan depended on very tightly scheduled train timetables to transport the men and horses to the Belgian border where their heavy equipment was already in depot. And there was the problem – The Schlieffen Plan required the German army to sweep through Belgium and bypass the French fortresses on the Franco-German border. Though Britain didn't have formal treaties with France and Russia, merely declarations of a common "Entente", she did have treaty obligations to defend the neutrality of Belgium. As well as that, Britain, in the past centuries, had gone to war many times to keep the channel ports of Belgium out of hostile hands. The French, meanwhile kept the pressure on Britain, with the French ambassador desperately pleading for a statement from Britain that she would come to the aid of France if France were to be attacked, in the hope that this might deter the German assault. The Germans responded by offering to confine the war to Russia if France would promise neutrality and

give up her fortresses on the border as surety. When the French, needless to say, declined this suggestion, Germany offered to only defeat, and not "crush" France if Britain would stay out. Sir Edward Grey replied that this proposal, if accepted, would lead to "a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover". Britain was prepared to go to war rather than lose its international standing.

Sir Edward and the British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith did want to declare in favour of France, but were unable to guarantee that the Liberal cabinet, bitterly divided over the issue, would ratify the declaration. The dilemma was solved for the British when the Germans demanded free passage through Belgium to outflank France. King Albert of the Belgians called on British support to resist. Overnight the mood in Britain changed. An anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square evaporated. Sir Edward Grey made a brilliant speech in the House of Commons stating Britain's plan to come to the aid of Belgium (and France). The leader of the Irish Nationalists in Parliament, John Redmond, followed with a speech in which he declared, to thunderous applause, that Britain could withdraw all her troops from Ireland and that a united North and South could be relied upon to defend Ireland. Only Ramsay MacDonald, future Labor Prime Minister of Britain, spoke against using national honour as a pretext for entering hostilities.

On August 4th German troops swept over the Belgian border and Britain and her Empire went to war. It is often stated that the politicians blindly led their people into a war which they thought would settled quickly and the troops would be "home by Christmas". Though some may have hoped that the war would be decided quickly or that there would be a negotiated peace worked out before long, many leaders thought otherwise. The Commander of the British Staff College, Sir Launcelot Kiggell, felt the war would be prolonged, bitterly fought and mutually disastrous. The day before Britain declared war, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, stood in his office in Whitehall and as he watched the lamps being lit in Hyde park, said to a friend "the lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime".

Australia stands by Britain

The Australian government had been kept informed by a continuous stream of telegrams from London. Australians at the time identified themselves as British. The Labor Leader of the Opposition and soon to be Australian Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, declared that 'Australians will stand beside our own to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling'. As well, just to the north, was the German colony of New Guinea. Few thought that if Britain were to be defeated and her navy swept from the seas that Australia would be left in peace. Australia was acting with Britain, not only to defend the honour of the Empire, but also in her own self interest.

Popular Support for the War

The advent of war was greeted with a great wave of popular patriotic enthusiasm in all the major combatant countries. In Britain and Australia recruiting centers turned away many of the initial volunteers. The labor and socialist leaders, who, until just before the outbreak of war had been strident in their opposition, now gave the war their full support. The British poet Rupert Brooke (soon to die at Gallipoli) wrote:

"Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping".

This all occurred long before the publication of British atrocity propaganda regarding German actions against the civilian population in Belgium. The British based their stories on the report in May 1915 of a committee led by the influential lawyer Lord Bryce which gave credence to supposed eye witness accounts obtained from Belgian refugees of Germans nailing nuns to church doors etc. They need not have published these wild allegations, even the German Chief of Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, admitted German actions were "extraordinarily harsh". The propaganda campaign was to rebound badly in the Second World War when the Nazis were able to dismiss rumours of the Holocaust as just being "British atrocity propaganda".

The population of the warring nations, however, did not need exaggerated stories of enemy brutalities to support their nation's war efforts. All felt that they were acting to support their countries in a time of great trial. This support continued by and large throughout the war, at least on the victorious side. Nations that lost popular support for the war, initially Russia, then Austro-Hungary and finally Germany, were defeated.

Summary

The major underlying cause for the Great War of 1914 to 1918 was the defense of national prestige. The British, with their empire and powerful navy, enjoyed the highest prestige of any nation in the early part of the 20th century. The Royal Navy, which was needed to defend Britain, also gave her command of the seas. Britain wished to avoid a war which could threaten her dominant position and from the British point of view the Germans were the aggressors. The Germans, however, felt that they were being denied the status in international affairs that should have attended their military and economic success and in particular wanted a powerful navy so as not to virtually need permission from the British to undertake international trade and maintain access to overseas colonies. In her eyes the British, with the French and Russians, were acting to keep Germany in an inferior position. The strong support by the populations of the belligerent nations for the national aims espoused by their leaders allowed the war to be fought for so long with such great sacrifice of blood and treasure.

The Great War saw the defeat of the Central Powers and the breakup of three empires. The empires of Germany and Austro-Hungary were dismembered, as was the large Ottoman Empire. The Turks had entered the war on the defeated side. Russia had been defeated by Germany in 1917 and initially lost a great deal of territory but her empire was largely regained by the Communist government after the war. Great endeavors were made at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 to redistribute territory on an equitable basis but time was short and knowledge limited. The result has been continuing wars in the Middle East and the Balkans as efforts are

made to change national boundaries set by the victors.

We also hear echoes of 1914 in the world situation today. Again there is a great power with undisputed control of the seas and now the skies. Public statements of Al-Qaeda brim with resentment at the all-embracing influence of the Western Powers led by the United States.

"You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices because of your international influence and military threats. This theft is indeed the biggest theft ever witnessed by mankind in the history of the world.

Your forces occupy our countries; you spread your military bases throughout them; you corrupt our lands, and you besiege our sanctities, to protect the security of the Jews and to ensure the continuity of your pillage of our treasures".

Osama bin Laden "Letter to America" 2002

This time there is a religious dimension to the conflict but humiliation caused by the dominance of the West remains the wellspring of the bitterness.

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