

# CHAPTER 1

# First World War 1914–18

**The First World War was a truly global conflict. It eventually involved 32 nations, with fighting taking place in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. It was also the first modern total war encompassing entire populations and resources in a way hitherto unknown. New military technologies pitted man against machine on an unprecedented scale. The experience of this war profoundly altered the political, social and economic situation in Europe.**

**The following key questions will be addressed in this chapter:**

- To what extent did the long-term causes of the war make conflict likely by 1914?
- How significant were the short-term causes to the outbreak of war in 1914?
- To what extent should Germany be blamed for causing the First World War?
- How far did the nature of fighting in the First World War represent a new type of conflict?
- How significant was the management of the war in determining its outcome?
- Did the impact of the First World War make future European conflict more or less likely?

# 1 The long-term causes of the First World War

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*Key question: To what extent did the long-term causes of the war make conflict likely by 1914?*

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In August 1914, war broke out between the major European powers. Austria-Hungary and Germany were on one side, against Britain, France and Russia on the other.

The onset of war was triggered by the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. The assassin was a Serb nationalist. Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia. This led to the following sequence of events which embroiled all the major European powers in war by the middle of August.

- 6 July: German offered full support to its ally Austria-Hungary in any action it may choose to take against Serbia.
- 23 July: Austria-Hungary issued an ultimatum to Serbia.
- 24 July: Serbia replied to the ultimatum, rejecting one of the key terms.
- 25 July: Austria-Hungary issued the partial mobilization of its army.
- 29 July: Russia issued the partial mobilization of its army. Germany ordered Russia to cease partial mobilization, regarding this as threatening German security.
- 30 July: Russia ordered the full mobilization of its army.
- 31 July: Germany ordered the full mobilization of its army.
- 1 August: France ordered the full mobilization of its army. Germany declared war on Russia.
- 3 August: Germany declared war on France. Germany invaded Belgium.
- 4 August: Britain declared war on Germany.
- 6 August: Serbia declared war on Germany. Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia.
- 12 August: Britain declared war on Austria-Hungary. France declared war on Austria-Hungary.

The enlargement of the conflict continued with the **Ottoman Empire**'s entry into the war in October 1914 on the side of Austria-Hungary and Germany, while Italy joined with Russia, Britain and France in May 1915. Many of the European powers had substantial empires that became involved in the conflict, rapidly giving the war a truly global dimension.

Although the assassination was the trigger, the First World War had its roots in long-term social, economic and political developments in Europe in the decades before 1914. This section will look at these long-term causes of the First World War.

## Economic changes in Europe, c.1870–1914

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### How far did economic developments increase the likelihood of war?

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One long-term cause of the First World War lay in the impact of economic developments that had taken place in Europe in the decades before 1914. The **industrial revolution** of the nineteenth century transformed the basis of economic power, giving enormous strength to countries that could increase their production of coal, iron and steel. In this, the former great powers of Austria-Hungary and Russia lagged behind, while Britain, at least initially, took the lead in industrial development. By 1900, however, British dominance was increasingly challenged as competition developed for economic superiority.

### Economic growth and competition

Almost all the major powers increased their production of steel and iron in the decades before the First World War. However, economic growth occurred at differing rates, leading to a significant shift in the relative economic strength of the major powers (see [Source A](#)), which fuelled economic competition and rivalry between them. Britain, for example, became increasingly concerned by the USA and Germany, the latter by 1910 leading the European powers in industrial output. Russia was also a cause for concern due to its growth rates in the production of pig iron and steel. Although by 1900, Russia's absolute output remained significantly behind the world leaders, it still contributed six per cent of the total world output of iron and



steel, ranking it fourth in the world, and given its vast size and largely untapped raw materials its potential for growth was considerable.

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#### SOURCE A

? What does Source A indicate about economic growth between 1880 and 1913?

#### Relative shares of world manufacturing output, 1880–1913 (percentages).

Country	1880	1900	1913
Britain	22.9	18.5	13.6
United States	14.6	23.6	32.0
Germany	8.5	13.2	14.8
France	7.8	6.8	6.1
Russia	7.6	8.8	8.2
Austria-Hungary	4.4	4.7	4.4
Italy	2.5	2.5	2.4

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Most European countries invested considerably in extensive railway networks. Russia made the most rapid progress between 1870 and 1910, both in growth rate and in absolute terms, so that by 1910 Russia possessed the largest overall railway network. However, the vast size of Russia meant that its rail network was far less efficient in terms of coverage than those of Britain and Germany. The growth rate of Germany's rail network was also notably impressive, increasing by 224 per cent between 1870 and 1910.

### Military strength

In the decades before 1914, economic rivalries contributed to profound insecurities as countries feared being overtaken by their competitors. Many countries entered the war believing that if war had to come, it was better to

fight sooner rather than later before their adversaries grew stronger.

Economic growth generated such concerns because of its implications for military strength. The increase in output of iron and steel, as well as the development of an effective manufacturing industry, was vital for the production of modern military technology. Similarly, the construction of extensive, efficient rail networks was imperative for the rapid transportation of troops and supplies. For example, the substantial growth of the Russian railway network had significant military consequences since it meant that the Russian army could be mobilized more rapidly, something which it was estimated would take over eight weeks in 1906, but only 30 days by 1912.

Nonetheless, economic growth and its potential implications for military strength were only a source of anxiety in a climate in which military spending was prioritized by European governments (see page 20); tensions and rivalries between nations were already in existence due to other factors such as imperialistic rivalries.

## Imperialism

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### How far did imperialism contribute to war in 1914?

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**Imperialist** policies were pursued vigorously by the major European powers at the beginning of the twentieth century. The possession of an empire conferred economic and potential military power as well as prestige. France, Britain and Germany focused on gaining overseas colonies, primarily, but not exclusively, in Asia and Africa, while Russia and Austria-Hungary had substantial interests in extending their empires into the **Balkans** (see [Source B](#)). Imperialism stimulated, and clashed with, the growth of **nationalism**, which arose in opposition to the existence of vast multi-ethnic empires.

### Imperial rivalries in the Balkans

The Balkan region was the focus of the imperial ambitions of Austria-Hungary, Russia, Serbia and the Ottoman Empire. The Balkan region had been dominated by the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century, but the demise of Ottoman strength led to the fragmentation of the region and the formation of smaller Balkan states like Serbia in 1817 and Bulgaria in 1878.

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The decline of Ottoman strength provided the opportunity for rival European powers to expand their control in the region, thereby intensifying rivalries.

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**SOURCE B**

? How useful is Source B in understanding the importance of the Balkans in 1913?

**The Balkans in 1913.**



***Austro-Hungarian interests in the Balkans***

The vast Austro-Hungarian Empire encompassed much of central and eastern Europe and began to extend its control into the Balkans in the early twentieth century; Bosnia-Herzegovina for example had been **annexed** in 1908.

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Austro-Hungarian ambitions to maintain and extend this control brought it into conflict with Russia and Serbia for influence over the region. Both Serbia and Russia promoted the growth of **pan-Slavism**. Austria-Hungary feared this would encourage revolt and threaten not only Austrian interests in the Balkans, but the very existence of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire which contained substantial numbers of **Slavic** peoples.

### ***Serbian interests in the Balkans***

Serbia promoted the nationalistic vision of a greater Serbia in which all Balkan Slavs would be united under Serbian rule. Serbian nationalism had increased in militancy following the rise of the pro-Russian and fiercely nationalistic ruling Karadjordjević dynasty through a military **coup** in 1903. In addition, the Kingdom of Serbia had recently enlarged its territory by 80 per cent as a result of victory in the **Balkan Wars** of 1912–13. Austria-Hungary understandably saw Serbia as a threat to the existence of its multi-ethnic empire and insisted on the creation of Albania, a state for ethnic Albanians, which would prevent Serbia from having access to the sea. Access to ports was essential for economic development as most trade occurred with merchant vessels, so the creation of Albania not only limited Serbia's gains, but hindered its economic development. Key individuals within the Austro-Hungarian government also promoted the view that the Serbian menace ought to be dealt with sooner rather than later, before Serbia grew more influential, accounting in part for Austria-Hungary's deliberately provocative ultimatum in response to the assassination in June 1914 (see page **28**) which did much to escalate the crisis to war.

### ***Russian interests in the Balkans***

Russian interests in the Balkans were partly motivated by ideological commitment. Russia, as the most powerful of the Slavic nations, had long promoted the image of itself as the defender of all Slavic peoples. This agenda was popular within Russia since it emphasized, and potentially increased, Russian power and prestige. However, ideological commitment to pan-Slavism was not the primary reason for Russian interests in the Balkans. There were more important strategic and political reasons. An extension of Russian influence in the Balkans would:

- provide important access for Russian merchant and warships through the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean

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- limit the territorial expansion of Russia's main rival, the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

### ***Austro-Hungarian and Russian rivalries in the Balkans***

Austro-Hungarian and Russian rivalries in the Balkans had almost triggered war on a number of occasions before 1914. In 1878, for example, Austria-Hungary mobilized its army in protest against a substantial extension of Russian influence in the region that had come about in the aftermath of a **Russo-Turkish War**. On this occasion, war was averted through diplomacy, although the final settlement left Russia dissatisfied and increased its animosity towards Austria-Hungary and Germany.

Tensions between Russia and Austria-Hungary over the Balkans flared again when Austria-Hungary formally annexed the region of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. Russia was militarily too weak to contemplate anything more than a diplomatic protest. However, the event increased Russian concerns about the extension of Austro-Hungarian influence in the Balkans and made it more determined to resist any further such occurrences in the future. This contributed to making any issue involving the Balkans, Austria-Hungary and Russia potentially particularly explosive.

## **Imperial rivalries between Britain, France and Germany**

The focus of the imperial ambitions of Britain, France and Germany was the acquisition of colonies outside Europe. The British Empire's imperial possessions constituted 20 per cent of the world's territory by 1900. France had substantial interests in Africa. Germany, a relatively new country having only come into existence in 1871, was keen to exert an influence on the world stage by acquiring its own empire.

### ***German imperial ambitions***

German imperial ambitions became increasingly evident during the rule of **Kaiser** Wilhelm II from 1888. The Kaiser was adamant that Germany should be recognized as a world power commensurate with its economic strength and he saw imperial policy as a way to achieve this. In 1896 he declared that 'nothing must henceforth be settled in the world without the intervention of Germany and the German Emperor'. This sentiment informed the new policy

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of *weltpolitik* in which Germany sought to extend its influence in the world largely through the acquisition of a large navy and colonies. This inevitably threatened French and British imperial interests, especially since the vast majority of key colonial ports were already in their possession. Although the German Foreign Minister, Bernhard von Bülow, issued the assurance to the other Great Powers in 1897 that 'we don't want to put anyone else in the shade, but we too demand our place in the sun', German interventions in global politics in the decades before 1914 all too often caused significant fractures in European power relations.

### ***The Moroccan Crises, 1905 and 1911***

The imperial rivalries of the major European powers led to diplomatic clashes over Morocco in 1905 and 1911. North Africa was considered primarily a French sphere of interest, which Britain supported as part of the Anglo-French *entente* in 1904. When France moved to establish more control over Morocco in 1905, Germany objected, claiming that it had to be consulted. When France ignored German demands, the German military threatened to attack France if its foreign minister was not replaced and if France refused to attend an international conference to resolve the matter. France complied and during the Algeiras Conference held in Spain in 1906, Britain firmly supported its *entente* partner, forcing Germany to agree to allow France to extend further control over Morocco under certain minor conditions.

In 1911, France sent troops into Morocco, causing Germany to proclaim the right to do the same in southern Morocco. Again Britain and France resisted German moves and demands, forcing Germany to accept 275,000 km<sup>2</sup> of French Congo instead. The German government felt that it had been defeated and humiliated.

### **How far did imperialism contribute to war in 1914?**

Imperialism contributed to the growing likelihood of war by generating rivalries between the European powers and by stimulating the growth of nationalism. However, it would take more than rival imperial interests to provoke war. After all, the Moroccan Crises had been resolved diplomatically, as had the Russian and Austro-Hungarian clashes over the Balkans. It was the growing military strength of the major powers (see page 20) which made crises generated by imperial rivalries more likely to trigger

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the outbreak of real hostilities.

## Alliance systems

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### Did the alliance systems make war more likely?

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One of the striking features of the **July Days** (see pages **11–12**) was the rapidity with which a conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia enlarged to a European war. The existence of rival alliance systems which tied the main countries of Europe together is often cited as an explanation for this escalation. France, Britain and Russia were allied in the **Triple Entente**, while Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy were joined together in the **Triple Alliance**.

### Why were the alliances formed?

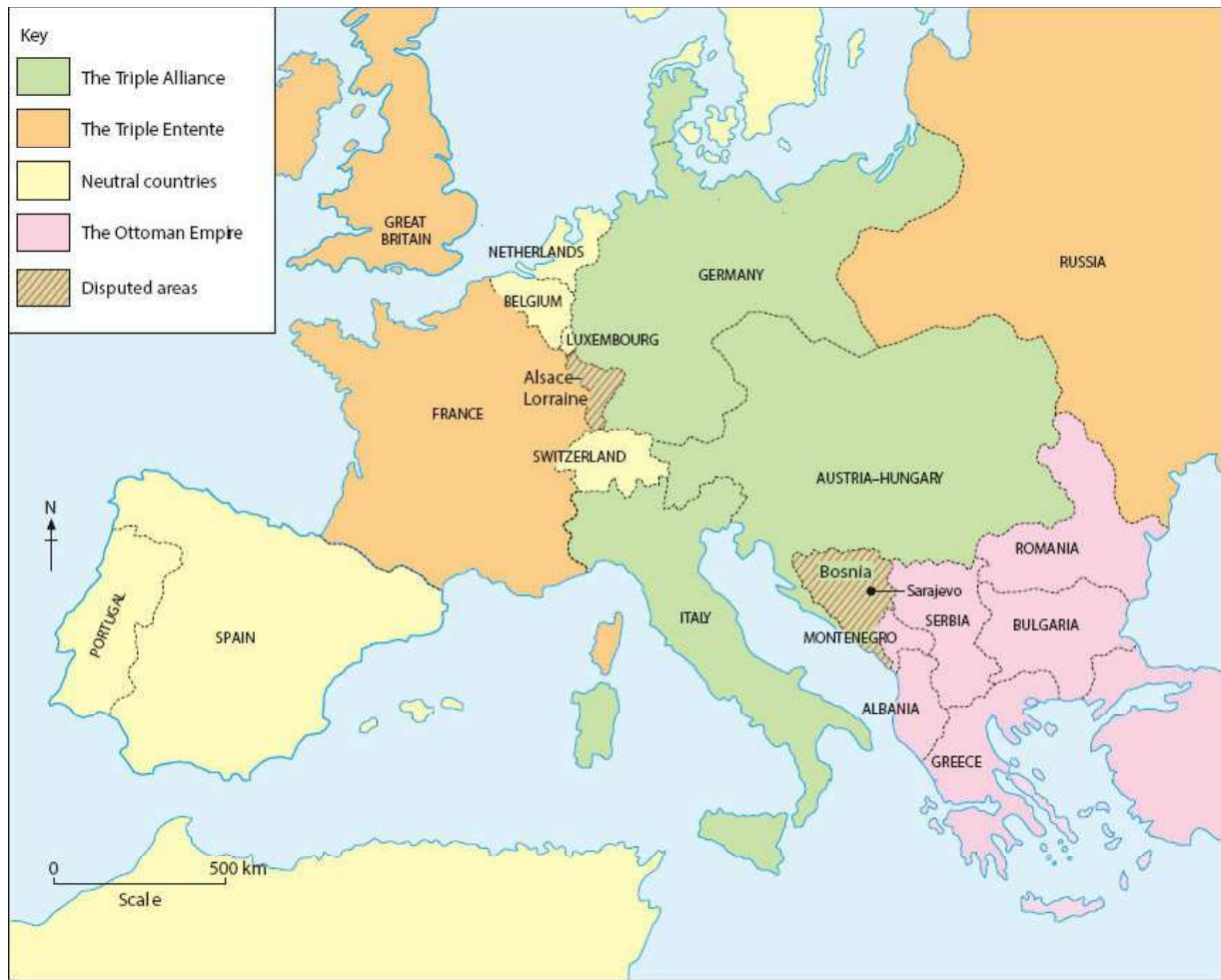
Alliances had been formed in a bid to increase security. The **Dual Alliance**, between Germany and Austria-Hungary, agreed in 1878, was largely a response to German insecurity following a fracturing of Russo-German relations (see page **16**). The Dual Alliance was enlarged to the Triple Alliance when Italy joined in 1882. It was a defensive military alliance which committed the signatories to providing military support should one of their number be attacked by one of the major European powers. In the case of Germany and Italy, however, they were only committed to helping each other should either be attacked by France.

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#### SOURCE C

? Look at Source C. Why might Germany have felt particularly threatened by the existence of the Triple Entente?

**Europe in 1914 showing the major alliances.**



In turn, Russia sought an ally against its main rival Austria-Hungary, who had been strengthened by the alliance with Germany. Russia was also concerned by the growing potential German threat, an anxiety shared by France. In consequence a Franco-Russian military alliance was signed in 1894. This too was a defence alliance, committing each country to support the other in the event that either one of them was attacked by a member of the Triple Alliance. In 1904, Britain and France drew closer by signing the *Entente Cordiale*. This was not a military alliance but a series of agreements finally settling imperial rivalries and recognizing and agreeing to respect each other's spheres of colonial influence. In 1907, Britain reached a similar accord with Russia, in the Anglo-Russian Convention, which ended animosities generated by their competition for colonies in central Asia. This paved the way for Britain to join with France and Russia in the so-called Triple Entente in 1907. Unlike the Triple Alliance, this was not a military

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alliance.

## How far did the alliance systems contribute to war in 1914?

The impression that the alliance systems led to war by a chain reaction during the summer of 1914 is only superficially compelling. Although by mid-August 1914 all the signatories of the two rival alliances, with the exception of Italy, were at war, the manner in which they entered the war was not in adherence to the terms of the alliance agreements, nor primarily motivated by them. France did not immediately declare war on Germany, despite the German declaration of war against France's ally Russia. Neither did Austria-Hungary declare war on Britain or France, despite their declarations of war on Germany. Italy also failed to enter the war in support of its Triple Alliance partners, despite the British and French declaration of war on Austria-Hungary. The fact that all the major signatories of the alliances, with the exception initially of Italy, ended up at war was more a reflection of their own individual agendas rather than their blindly being pulled into conflict by the existence of the alliance systems. The terms of the Triple Entente in particular did not commit its signatories to military action in any event.

The existence of the Triple Entente did contribute to war, however, by fostering insecurity within Germany since it accentuated fears about the vulnerability of Germany's position as it was now encircled by hostile powers. This added to the appeal within the German military high command of the merits of provoking a preventive war in which Germany would have the advantage through launching a first strike before its rivals were fully prepared. This increasingly came to be seen as the most effective way to improve German security prospects, in part accounting for German decisions during the summer of 1914 which seemed to positively encourage the outbreak of war (see page 30). However, the existence of the Triple Entente alone was not enough to stimulate this agenda, not least because the terms of the Entente were *defensive* and vague, meaning it posed little immediate or direct threat to Germany. German insecurity, if real and not a cloak for a more aggressive agenda, was at least as much prompted by concerns about France and Britain's growing military strength due to increased defence expenditure (see pages 19–22).

# Militarism

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## How did militarism contribute to war in 1914?

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The growth of **militarism** on the eve of the First World War manifested itself in the glorification of military strength and an **arms race** in which escalating amounts of money were spent on defence, leading to increases in the size of armies and weaponry. In part this was stimulated by economic and technological developments that not only enabled the more effective mass production of weaponry, but also led to the invention of new types of weapons. New weaponry, such as explosive shells and the machine gun, massively increased the rate, range and accuracy of firepower so that any nation not prepared to invest in these new technologies, and the railways to transport them, would be at a grievous disadvantage in any future military engagement.

## The arms race

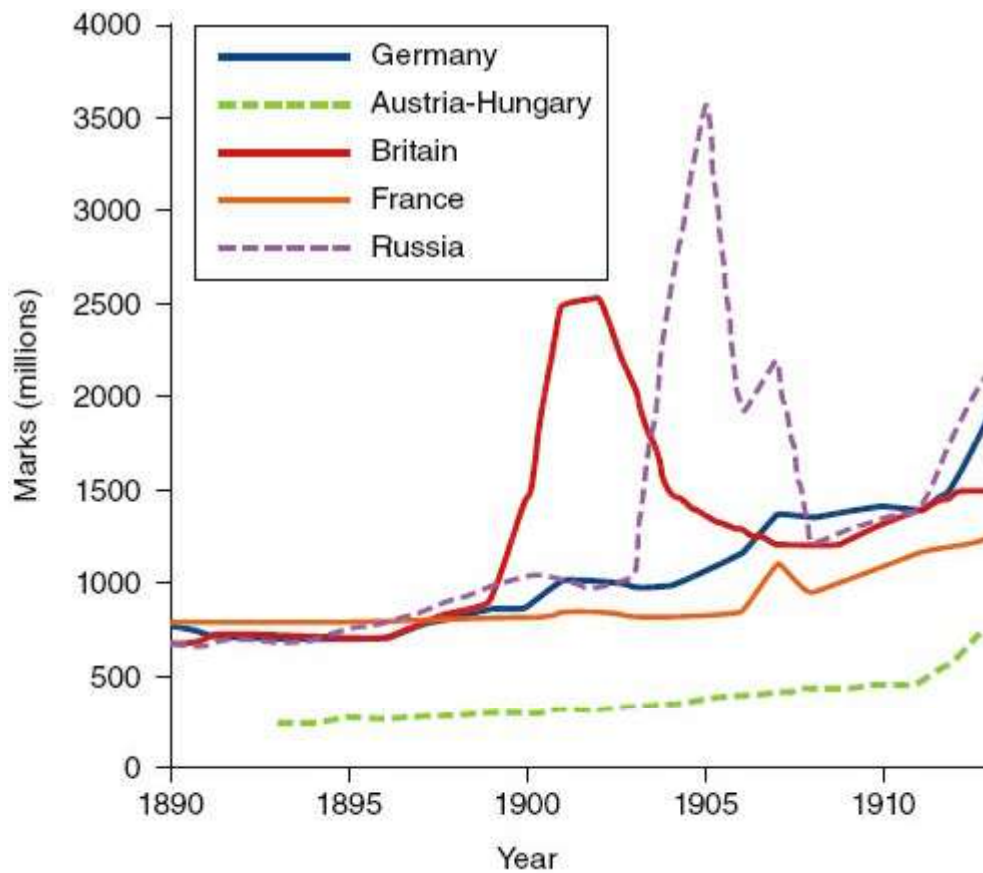
There had been a steady increase in defence expenditure in all the major European countries from the mid-1890s that increased more rapidly from 1905 (see [Source D](#)). In a large part this increase was prompted by economic and technological developments which made possible a new range and scale of armaments.

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### SOURCE D

? What can be learned from Source D about the defence spending of the major European powers between 1890 and 1913?

**The defence spending (in millions of marks) of the major European powers, 1890–1913.**



### ***The growth in armed forces***

There was substantial investment in increasing the troop numbers in the **standing armies** of most of the major European countries in the decades leading up to the First World War (see [Source E](#)). By 1914, all the major European powers possessed mass armies. The Triple Entente, however, had a substantial advantage in terms of the overall manpower of its standing armies, outnumbering the combined troops of Germany and Austria-Hungary by 1.5 million. The rate of increase of the size of the standing armies in the Entente nations was also greater than that of Austria-Hungary and Germany, the latter actually increasing at the slowest rate.

#### **SOURCE E**

? How much can Source E tell us about the relative military strength of the major powers on the eve of the First World War?

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### Approximate standing army and population sizes of the major European powers in 1900 and 1914.

	Britain	France	Russia	Germany	Austria-Hungary
Number of troops in standing army in 1900	281,000	590,000	860,000	601,000	397,000
Number of troops in standing army in 1914	710,000	1,138,000	1,300,000	801,000	810,000
Population in 1914	46,407,000	39,602,000	167,000,000	65,000,000	49,882,000

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However, the size of the standing armies only gives a partial impression of military strength, for all countries had plans to call up reservists, and then conscripts, in the event of war.

### ***The naval arms race***

Naval power was the focus of a particular arms race that developed between Britain and Germany in the decade before 1914. The Kaiser, admiring and envious of the British Royal Navy, sought to build a German navy which would challenge British naval supremacy. An ambitious plan to increase the size of the German navy was drawn up by Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and implemented in the Navy Bill of 1900. The British interpreted this as a challenge to their dominance of the seas, and an implied threat to the security of their empire for which a strong navy was a prerequisite.

The British, seeking to retain their lead in naval supremacy, increased their own shipbuilding programme, culminating in the launch of a new class of **battleship**, the HMS *Dreadnought*, in 1906. The *Dreadnought* was the first

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example of a heavily armoured battleship equipped exclusively with large guns capable of destroying enemy ships from great distances, setting a new standard for modern battleships. The Germans, anxious not to be left behind, responded in kind with the launch of their own dreadnought battleship in 1908. An intensification of the naval arms race ensued (see [Source F](#), page 22).

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#### SOURCE F

? How valuable is Source F as evidence of the relative naval strength of Britain and Germany in the years before the First World War?

#### A comparison of British and German dreadnoughts, 1906–14.

Dreadnoughts	Britain	Germany
1906	1	0
1907	4	0
1908	6	4
1909	8	7
1910	11	8
1911	16	11
1912	19	13
1913	26	16
1914	29	17

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## How did the arms race contribute to war in 1914?

The German actions which were key in escalating the crisis of July 1914 into war (see page 30) can in part be seen as motivated by anxieties generated by the arms race. In the years leading up to 1914 there was a growing perception within the German government and military that Germany was actually losing the arms race in terms of its long-term ability to keep pace with its rivals. There was some evidence for this fear. Germany was particularly anxious about Russia, whose increase in defence expenditure was rising at a more rapid rate and whose potential resources were far greater than those of Germany.

In consequence, there developed a view within the German military high command that if European war was inevitable in the near future, then Germany's best chance for success lay in a pre-emptive strike while it was still militarily stronger than its rivals. This attitude of 'war the sooner the better' was voiced by General von Moltke at the Kaiser's so-called 'War Council', a meeting held between the Kaiser and his military and naval advisers in December 1912, and can be seen to influence the German decisions in July 1914 which directly contributed to the escalation of military conflict.

## Military plans

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**In what ways did the existence of military plans before 1914 contribute to the likelihood of war?**

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New military technologies necessitated a rethinking of military strategy and tactics. New military plans were drawn up by all the major powers in the decades leading up to the First World War. The premise behind all these plans was the importance of the rapid offensive. Military planners were convinced that any war would be short in duration. This belief, mistaken as it turned out, reinforced the view that the decisive battles would be those of the initial offensives. It was therefore crucial that mobilization was achieved quickly, since any delay could give the enemy a potentially insurmountable advantage.

## German military plans

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German military planners faced a particularly concerning problem, the danger of a two-front war. This became a realistic prospect following the alliance between France and Russia in 1894 (see page 18). In response to this threat, and in accordance with the primacy placed on the offensive, German security came to rest on the plan devised in 1897 by the head of the German army, Count Alfred von Schlieffen. The so-called **Schlieffen Plan** set out that German troops attack France by way of a several-pronged hook advancing through northern France, Belgium and The Netherlands, avoiding the heavily fortified French border with Germany, to surround Paris and defeat France within six weeks (see Source G). This would then enable German troops to turn around and face the Russians to the east before the vast Russian army was mobilized. It was estimated that it would take at least eight weeks for the Russian army to be fully operational. The key to the success of the plan would lie in the swift movement of the hook formations into France; any delay either before or during the offensive would hand the initiative to Germany's enemies. In this context, rapid German mobilization was crucial to its security plans.

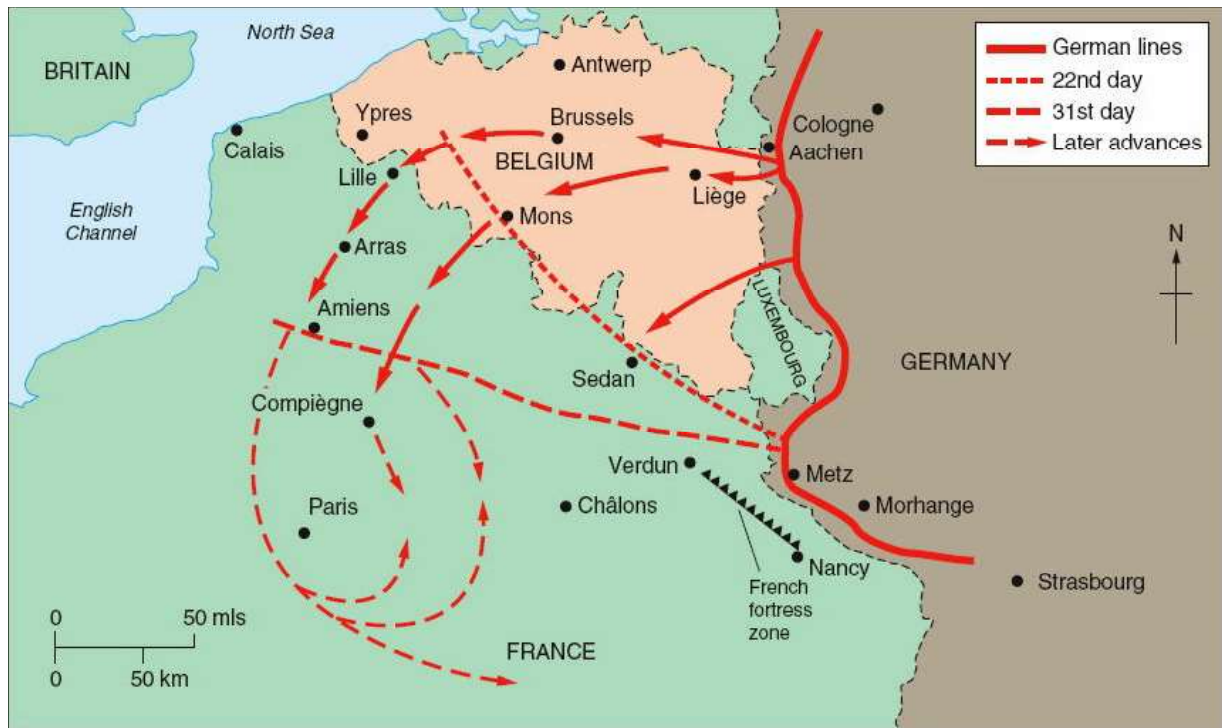
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#### SOURCE G

? What can be learned about the nature of the Schlieffen Plan from Source G?

#### **The Schlieffen Plan.**





## Russian military plans

Russian military plans also emphasized early mobilization in order to compensate for the logistical and organizational difficulties that meant the Russian army would be comparatively slow to reach military readiness. This explains the early Russian order for mobilization on 30 July 1914 that dramatically escalated the crisis. However, unlike the German military plans, mobilization did not have to presage war.

## French military plans

French military plans were based on Plan XVII drawn up by the chief of the general staff, Joseph Joffre, in 1913. Again the offensive was emphasized. Central to the plan was a concentrated attack through Lorraine on German forces across the German border. The mismatch of this plan with the nature of the German advance in 1914, which avoided the Franco-German border near Lorraine, revealed the limitations of French military intelligence as well as the exaggerated optimism of the French high command in the comparative strength of its forces.



## Austro-Hungarian military plans

Austro-Hungarian military planners, like those in Germany, had to deal with the prospect of a multiple-front war. Austria-Hungary would be likely to have to face Serbian troops to the south, and Russian forces to the east in **Galicia**. If Romania entered the war (which it did from August 1916), Austria-Hungary would have to deal with a three-front war. The Austro-Hungarian army was comparatively weak technologically and would be outnumbered by its enemies. Austria-Hungary therefore certainly hoped for substantial assistance from its German ally.

## British military plans

The British had a relatively small standing army on the eve of 1914 (see page **21**), but it was planned that this would be rapidly mobilized and transported to France to help counter any German attack. The British Royal Navy would be used to:

- destroy the German navy
- impose a **blockade** on Germany
- protect the Triple Entente's supply shipping from attacks by enemy vessels.

## How did military plans contribute to war?

The nature of most of the pre-1914 military plans contributed significantly to the likelihood of war. All were based on the optimistic premise that war was winnable in certainly no more than a few months. This assumption turned out to be deeply flawed. Had this been suspected to any significant extent before war was underway, it is likely that the majority of nations would have tried harder to stay out of war in the summer of 1914 than they actually did.

The German Schlieffen Plan bears particular responsibility for the outbreak of war as its emphasis on swift action immediately following the order to mobilize meant that Germany was more likely to perceive mobilization in other countries as an inevitable prelude to war. It also made war unavoidable once Germany issued the order to mobilize.

## Nationalism

## To what extent did the rise in nationalism contribute to war?

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The decades before the First World War witnessed the growth of an increasingly strident and aggressive nationalism in the major countries of Europe. This was frequently connected to pride in a nation's military strength as well as its cultural values and traditions.

### Reasons for the growth of nationalism

Nationalistic sentiment in the decades before 1914 was not new, but had been encouraged by a number of recent developments. It had been boosted by national pride generated by the growth of militarism and economic strength in these years and the international competition these stimulated.

There were also more subtle ideological reasons behind the inclination to trumpet national superiority. These developed from the gradual assimilation of the naturalist **Charles Darwin**'s ideas about evolution. Darwin's presentation of a process of natural selection, in which the weaker elements of a species die out and in which the 'fittest' survive, gave rise to the idea that some nation's were innately 'fitter' or stronger than others and that it was their destiny to triumph over weaker nations.

Nationalistic sentiment grew too because it was promoted by the press and governments. In part, the press was responding to an already existing nationalism which it knew would appeal to its readership, but its promotion of patriotism served to reinforce and encourage it further. Governments promoted nationalism to justify growing military expenditure.

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#### SOURCE H

? How useful is Source H as evidence of why so many men volunteered to enlist in the army in 1914?

**Private George Morgan of the 16th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment explaining why so many volunteered to enlist. Quoted in *Minds at War* by David Roberts, published by Saxon, London, 1999, page 21.**

\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*

*We had been brought up to believe that Britain was the best country in the world and we wanted to defend her. The history taught to us at school showed that we were better than other people (didn't we always win the last war?).*

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## How did nationalism contribute to war?

The feelings of rivalry and superiority generated by nationalism created an environment in which war was not as assiduously avoided as it might have been, but was rather seen as an opportunity to assert dominance. Indeed, in so far as nationalistic pride encouraged optimism in victory, it may have made the risk of going to war seem more worth taking. Nationalistic sentiment influenced entire populations, diplomats and governments, making the latter increasingly likely to risk war in the belief that their populations would bear the financial burden and mobilize when called to arms. In the case of Slavic nationalism, it contributed to the war in a more direct way by leading to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, which triggered the escalation to conflict in 1914.

## Conclusion

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**To what extent had the long-term causes of the war made conflict likely by 1914?**

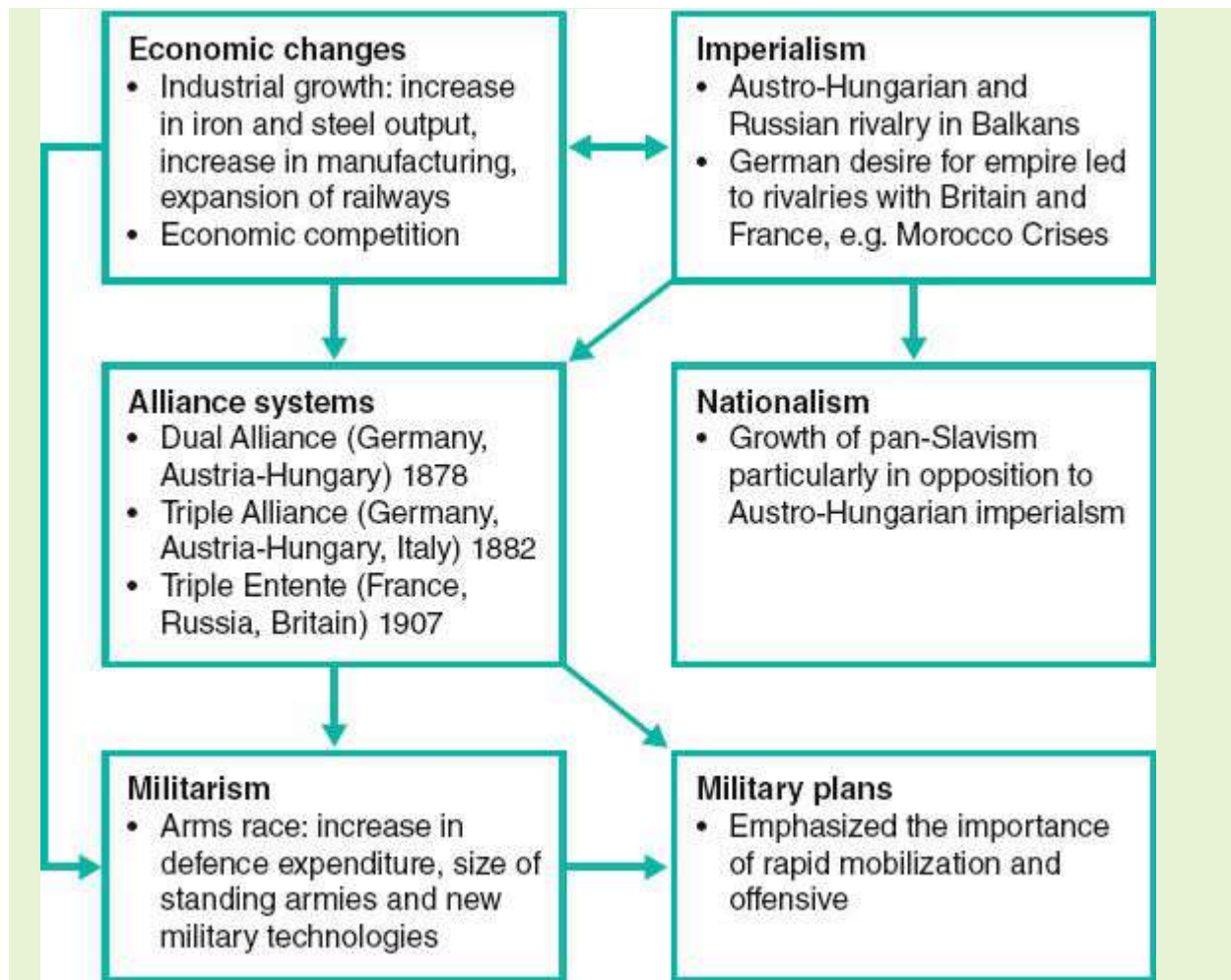
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European conflict was a likely prospect by 1914 but not inevitable. Relations between European countries had become increasingly fragile due to economic and imperial competition, the alliance systems and escalating militarism. These factors simultaneously contributed to increased insecurities and nationalistic pride within the governments of Europe. This, in turn, would make the governments more likely to resort to war in 1914 as the best way to safeguard their power and position before their adversaries became too strong. However, it would take a particular crisis to convert the potential for war into actual conflict.

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## SUMMARY DIAGRAM

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## Long-term causes of the First World War

## 2 The short-term causes of the First World War

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*Key question: How significant were the short-term causes to the outbreak of war in 1914?*

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Although war had become a likely prospect by 1914, it was the short-term causes that determined the precise timing of the outbreak of war. The main short-term causes were the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, which provided the trigger for war, and the failure of diplomacy in the following weeks to provide an alternative to military conflict.

### The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, 28 June 1914

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**Why did the assassination of the Archduke trigger war?**

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The First World War had its roots in long-term social, economic and political developments in Europe in the decades before 1914. The event which brought together these pressures in such a way as to trigger war was the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo, capital of the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina which Austria-Hungary annexed in 1908. The assassin was a Bosnian Serb nationalist who was a member of the Black Hand, an anti-Austrian terrorist organization that was sponsored and trained by members of the government of Serbia.

### The significance of the assassination

The assassination was the spark that ignited the long-term tensions into war. The particular significance of the assassination was that it raised the Balkan issue, which was a source of serious rivalry between Austria-Hungary, Russia and Serbia. This rivalry was long standing, but had not yet triggered war,

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although it had come close to doing so on a number of occasions (see page 15). In 1914, however, Austria-Hungary did take military action. This was mostly because the changed military and political circumstances made Austria-Hungary more confident in taking provocative action, but in part also due to the nature the assassination itself. Not only was the murder of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne of sufficiently serious magnitude to prompt an extreme reaction from Austria-Hungary, but it also provided Austria-Hungary with good reason to hope for international sympathy, encouraging it to risk more decisive action against Serbia without it necessarily enlarging to a wider conflict. In particular, there were grounds to believe that Russia would not intervene on the side of Serbia given the Tsar's abhorrence of terrorist action; Russia's tsars were not infrequently the targets of terrorist violence themselves. This highlights the importance of the assassination in particular as a trigger.

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#### SOURCE I

? What can be learned about the assassination of the Archduke from Source I?

**The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo as illustrated in *La Domenica del Corriere*, an Italian newspaper, in 1914.**





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## Diplomatic crisis

The assassination of the Archduke triggered a diplomatic crisis that rapidly escalated into world war. The enlargement of the crisis beyond an internal affair of the Austro-Hungarian Empire began when Austria-Hungary blamed the Kingdom of Serbia for the assassination. Austria-Hungary had long been desirous of war with Serbia, its main rival in the Balkans, and seized on the opportunity presented by the assassination to provoke military action. Austria-Hungary's accusation that Serbia was complicit in the assassination

was not without justification, although without formal proof, given the activities of the Serbian-based Black Hand terrorists (see page [27](#)).

### ***Austria-Hungary's ultimatum***

Austria-Hungary took the first step in escalating the crisis when it issued a deliberately harsh ultimatum to the Serbian government on 23 July 1914. It demanded, among other things, that the Serbian government open a judicial inquiry into the perpetrators of the assassination and that this investigation be open to scrutiny by Austro-Hungarian investigators. Since such Austro-Hungarian intervention would represent a violation of Serbian independence, it was unlikely to be acceptable to the Serbian government. Austria-Hungary gave Serbia just 48 hours to respond, fully expectant of a rejection.

### ***The 'blank cheque' guarantee***

Austria-Hungary was emboldened to take such a provocative stance by the encouragement it had received from its ally, Germany, to take decisive action against Serbia, even if this precipitated a war with Serbia. On 6 July, the German government essentially offered unconditional assistance to Austria-Hungary in whatever action it may take against Serbia in the crisis. This unconditional offer became known as the German 'blank cheque' guarantee to Austria-Hungary. Germany's motives in doing so are not entirely clear. Some believe it wished a limited war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, in which the victory of the former would strengthen Germany's ally Austria-Hungary, and by extension Germany itself. Others believe that Germany wanted a wider European war and saw the crisis triggered by the assassination as an opportunity to provoke one.

### ***Serbia's response***

Serbia, on 24 July, accepted all the demands except that relating to Austro-Hungarian intervention in a judicial inquiry into the assassination. Although Serbia was aware that it was likely that military action would result from this refusal, they were perhaps emboldened by hopes that Russia might act to protect Serbia against Austria-Hungary. Russia styled itself as the protector of Slavic interests in the Balkans and public pressure in Russia to honour this role was considerable. In addition, Russia was anxious to prevent any potential extension of the territory of its rival Austria-Hungary in the Balkans. There existed, however, no formal alliance between Serbia and



Russia, and so no guarantee of Russian assistance.

The crisis rapidly intensified during the July Days, the name given to the period in which diplomatic efforts were made to try to avert the outbreak of war, and within weeks, despite various initiatives to diffuse the crisis, all the major countries of Europe had become embroiled in conflict (see page 11).

## Attempts at diplomacy

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### Why did diplomacy fail to prevent the outbreak of war?

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There were significant efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis. These negotiations ultimately failed to prevent the outbreak of war.

Communications between the ambassadors and governments of the major powers were continuous in the weeks following the assassination of the Archduke, and various proposals were made to attempt to settle the developing crisis:

- 26 July: a conference to settle the crisis was proposed by Britain. France, Italy and Russia signalled their willingness to attend. Germany rejected the proposal. The conference never met.
  - 29 July: Britain proposed international mediation, the day after the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia.
  - 29 July: the German **chancellor**, Bethmann-Hollweg, urged Austria-Hungary to limit its invasion of Serbia to an occupation of the Serbian capital, Belgrade, only, and urged Austria-Hungary to open talks with Russia. These proposals were ignored by Austria-Hungary.
- 

#### SOURCE J

? What can be learned from Source J about the intentions of Russia in the days leading up to the outbreak of war?

**Tsar Nicholas II to his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II in a telegram on 28 July 1914.**

\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*

*To try to avoid such a calamity as a European war, I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to prevent your allies from going too far.*

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## **The failure of diplomacy**

Germany's opposition, until the last moment, to diplomatic initiatives to resolve the crisis contributed to the failure of a negotiated settlement. Until 29 July, Germany was urging Austria-Hungary to take prompt and decisive action against Serbia, not least by offering its unconditional support through the blank cheque guarantee (see page [29](#)).

### ***Germany's 'calculated risk'?***

The motives that informed the German escalation of the crisis have been much debated. Some historians, such as Erdmann and Zechlin, argued that despite appearances, Germany did not want a European war, but a more localized Balkan conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. This could have been advantageous to Germany in that victory by Austria-Hungary would have significantly strengthened Germany's main ally. In this interpretation, Germany was pursuing a policy of 'calculated risk', the 'risk' being that Russia might intervene on behalf of Serbia, necessitating German military involvement, and might even bring in Russia's ally, France.

In the 'calculated risk' interpretation, Germany's misreading of the situation in the early weeks of July emphasizes the significance of short-term diplomatic miscalculations in causing the war. These miscalculations were the German government's flawed assumptions that Russia, France and Britain would not intervene. There is certainly evidence to suggest that the German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, did not expect the major powers to get involved, and that when Britain and Russia made their intentions more transparent from 29 July he backtracked and urged restraint on Austria-Hungary. By that point, however, Austria-Hungary was already at war with Serbia and could not very well call its troops off without significant humiliation.

Germany may have misinterpreted the Russian mobilization order on 30 July as a direct threat and a prelude to war, since in the German Schlieffen Plan

mobilization and war were virtually synonymous (see page 23). This was not the case in Russian military plans, and a German misunderstanding of this may have contributed to the decision to mobilize and the subsequent escalation of the crisis.

### ***Did Germany deliberately seek war?***

Other historians reject the view that German diplomatic miscalculations satisfactorily explain German actions in escalating the crisis. They highlight that there was strong evidence to suggest that the war could not be contained throughout July. Indeed, warnings to this effect were issued by the British and Russian governments. They dismiss the German government's last-minute attempt to halt escalation as a mere face-saving measure. Instead, they see German actions as symptomatic of a policy that deliberately sought European war, motivated either by **expansionist** desires (see page 16) or by the desire for a preventive war in which German victory would safeguard its position in Europe before its rivals grew sufficiently in strength to overwhelm it (see page 20).

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#### **SOURCE K**

? How useful is Source K in showing German motivations on the eve of the outbreak of the war?

**The German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, in August 1914. Quoted in *The Origins of the First World War* by A. Mombauer, published by Pearson, London, 2002, page 21.**

*Should all our attempts [for peace] be in vain, should the sword be forced into our hand, we shall go into the field of battle with a clear conscience and the knowledge that we did not desire this war.*

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## **How did the failure of diplomacy contribute to war?**

The immediate consequence of the failure of diplomacy was the outbreak of war. Certainly diplomatic miscalculations were important in accelerating the

descent into war, but the tensions, insecurities and hostilities generated by the longer-term causes of the war arguably made effective diplomacy unlikely in any event by July 1914. Indeed, the long-term causes contributed to many of the miscalculations made by governments in the July Days.

## Conclusion

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### **How significant were the short-term causes in the outbreak of war in 1914?**

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The short-term causes dictated the precise timing of the outbreak of war, although the fundamental reasons for the conflict lay primarily with the long-term causes. It was, for example, the insecurities, rivalries and hostilities generated by the long-term causes that largely undermined the effective operation of diplomacy in the weeks leading up to the war. Similarly, while the assassination was necessary to trigger war, without the long-term causes, it was probable that the animosity between Serbia and Austria-Hungary could have been contained to a Balkan affair.

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### **SUMMARY DIAGRAM**

### **Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, 28 June 1914**

- Triggered conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, which ...
- Triggered rivalry and possible war between Austria-Hungary and Russia over the Balkans, which ...
- Triggered many of the long-term anxieties and causes of the war, such as the alliance systems and military plans



### **Failed diplomatic attempts at resolving the crisis**

Various conferences proposed and negotiations ongoing but all failed due to:

- long-term mistrust and anxieties (due to long-term causes)
- desire for war (although this is more controversial)
- mistakes and wrongful assumptions in diplomacy



### **Long-term causes of war**

- Economic changes
- Imperialism
- Alliances
- Nationalism
- Militarism
- Military plans



Short-term causes of the First World War

## 3 Key debate

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*Key question: To what extent should Germany be blamed for causing the First World War?*

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### The Treaty of Versailles and German war guilt

The historiography of the origins of the First World War has frequently focused on assessing the actions and motivations of the leading powers. From the outset, German culpability was emphasized. In the Treaty of Versailles (see page 65), German delegates were forced to accept responsibility for the war. However, this verdict was soon challenged as unfair.

### Collective mistakes

In the 1920s and 1930s, verdicts about the origins of the war shifted towards an emphasis on collective mistakes.

US historians, such as Sidney Bradshaw Fay (see [Source L](#)), took the lead in formulating this interpretation. This is not surprising given the widespread opposition in the USA to the German War Guilt clause; it had been opposed by the US President Woodrow Wilson even in 1919. In Europe, an acceptance of collective responsibility was increasingly embraced in the context of greater efforts at political reconciliation with Germany in the 1920s. These efforts were manifested in the German entry into the [League of Nations](#) in 1926, something prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles, and a series of financial loans to Germany by the USA which aimed to rescue Germany from financial crisis, which was in large part brought on by the heavy financial penalties imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.

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SOURCE L

? What view does Source L express about who was to blame for causing the First World War?

**Excerpt from *The Origins of the World War* by Sidney Bradshaw Fay, published by Macmillan, New York, 1929, pages 547–8.**

*No one country and no one man was solely, or probably even mainly, to blame ... None of the Powers wanted a European War ... one must abandon the dictum of the Versailles Treaty that Germany and its allies were solely responsible ... Austria was more responsible for the immediate origins of the war than any other Power ... [indeed, Germany] made genuine, though too belated efforts, to avert one ... the verdict of the Treaty of Versailles that Germany and its allies were responsible for the war, in the view of the evidence now available, is historically unsound. It should therefore be revised.*

As the political mood in Europe became more tense in the 1930s with the rise of the **Nazi Party** and the increasing possibility of another European war, the extent of German guilt for the First World War acquired a heightened significance. For those who wished to justify the policy of **appeasement** adopted by the Western **Allies** towards Germany's increasingly assertive and expansionist foreign policy, the interpretation that the Treaty of Versailles' verdict had been too harsh made sense. If Germany had been unfairly blamed and too harsh penalties imposed on it, then it was only fair to agree to some revision of these terms as Germany was demanding and as appeasement allowed.

## **German responsibility again: the Fischer thesis**

The publication of German historian Fritz Fischer's book *Grasping for World Power* in 1961 reignited controversy over the origins of the war. In Fischer's interpretation, European war was the deliberate and desired result of an aggressive and expansionist German foreign policy. Fischer placed particular weight on the 'War Council' held between the Kaiser and his military advisors in December 1912 (see page 34) in order to show that a desire for

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war was already apparent in 1912. Central to Fischer's arguments that German foreign policy was expansionist was his discovery in the archives of the Reich Chancellery of a memorandum written by the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg's private secretary Kurt Riezler on 9 September 1914. This document, often referred to as the 'September Programme', set out details of Bethmann-Hollweg's views about what Germany could hope to gain from German victory. These gains included the annexation of territory belonging to Germany's European neighbours, a customs union ensuring German economic dominance of Europe and German colonial expansion in Africa.

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#### SOURCE M

? What can be learned from Source M about German responsibility for causing the First World War?

**Excerpt from *War Aims and Strategic Policy in the Great War* by Fritz Fischer, published by Rowman & Littlefield, Totowa, 1977, page 109.**

*War simultaneously seemed [in the eyes of the German élites] to secure the stability of the social order and to guarantee the dissolution of the Entente and freedom to pursue an imperialistic policy on a global scale ... Hot on the heels of the mid-November 1912 decision to enlarge the army came the so-called 'War Council' of 8 December 1912 [at which] the Kaiser demanded the immediate opening of hostilities against Britain, France and Russia. Moltke concurred, adding his dictum, 'the sooner the better', since the strength of Germany's land opponents could only continue to grow. But Tirpitz requested a postponement of one and a half years [to ready the German navy] ... The 'not before' of the navy and the 'no later than' deadline of the army led to the appointment of a date, of an optimal moment, for the war now held to be inevitable.*

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Fischer's thesis immediately attracted critics, especially in Germany, where one of his strongest challengers was historian Gerhard Ritter. Ritter attacked



Fischer's reliance on the September Programme, arguing that given it was written at a time when the war was *already* underway, and when a German victory seemed a real possibility, it cannot be taken as evidence of German pre-war aims. The vehemence of opposition to Fischer's views within Germany was not just motivated by differing interpretations of evidence from the archives. It was also coloured by contemporary politics and an understandable aversion to any interpretation of Germany's role in the First World War, which seemed, in the light of the more recent and substantial German responsibility for the Second World War, to suggest some kind of innate, or at least cultural, aggression on the part of Germany.

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## TOK

‘Historical facts are like fish swimming about in a vast and inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use – these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch.’ E.H. Carr, historian, 1961.

To what extent does this quotation have relevance in understanding the different interpretations about the origins of the First World War? Can the historian be truly objective? What factors might influence his judgement of historical events? Does this mean we can never really know what happened in the past with any certainty? (History, Language and Reason.)

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## Towards a consensus of predominant German responsibility

The prevailing consensus that has emerged tends towards arguments of collective responsibility with a particular emphasis on the relative importance of German actions (see [Source N](#)).

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### SOURCE N

? What view does Source N give about why the First World War began?

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**Excerpt from *The Experience of World War One* by J.M. Winter,  
published by Greenwich Editions, London, 2000, page 38.**

*On the one hand, somebody had to pull the trigger. That was Germany. But on the other hand, its actions exposed the weaknesses and confusions of both its allies and its adversaries ... If Germany may be said to have brought about World War I, it did so as part of a political community which collectively let the peace of Europe slip through its fingers.*

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# 4 The course of the First World War

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*Key question: How far did the nature of fighting in the First World War represent a new type of conflict?*

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In many ways the First World War represented a new type of conflict. It was arguably the first example of modern total war (see page 4). As such, countries mobilized resources on an unprecedented scale towards the war effort, frequently blurring the distinction between civilians and combatants to a new degree. On the battlefield, new weapons played a decisive role in shaping the nature of the conflict, although tactical thinking did not always evolve rapidly enough to maximize their potential.

## The land war in Europe 1914

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**Why had neither side been able to make decisive gains by the end of 1914?**

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The First World War, contrary to the pre-war expectations of a short war that would 'be over by Christmas', became a prolonged war of exhaustion in which victory ultimately went to the side more able to sustain such conflict. On the Western Front, primarily in Belgium and northern France, the mobile warfare of the opening month rapidly turned into stalemate and trench warfare (see page 37). On the Eastern Front, Russian forces were mobilized for action far more rapidly than had been predicted.

## The war on the Western Front

### *Belgium and Luxembourg*

The initial phase of the war on the Western Front was characterized by rapid movement in accordance with the Schlieffen Plan (see page 22). Within the

first three days German troops had occupied Luxembourg, and the Belgian capital, Brussels, was captured in 20 days.

The German violation of Belgium neutrality, which Britain had promised to protect in the Treaty of London of 1839, was used by the British government as the ostensible reason for its declaration of war on Germany on 4 August. In reality, Britain had more fundamental reasons for entering the war, not least to ensure the defeat of its main rival, Germany. Britain feared that a French defeat would mean German domination of Europe and the capture and use of the French navy against Britain.

### ***The race to the sea***

The German advance began to slow through a combination of resistance from Belgian, French and British troops, as well as exhaustion and failing supply lines. Belgian troops held up the Germans at the forts of Liège, which were finally shelled into submission by German artillery. The 150,000 strong British Expeditionary Force (BEF) confronted German troops at the Battles of Mons on 23 August, delaying, but not halting, the German advance. By the end of August, German troops were exhausted trying to keep pace with the ambitious timescales set by the Schlieffen Plan, and supplies were lacking due to the inability of a damaged and incomplete railway system to transport vital food and equipment. By the end of August, the nearest available **railheads** were some 135 km from the leading troops. In particular, the troops of General Alexander von Kluck, occupying the right outside edge of the German advance, were struggling to cope with the 30–40 km per day march stipulated by the plan. This jeopardized the plan's success since it was important that all the 'hooks' advanced in conjunction with each other to avoid creating gaps in the line that could be exploited by the enemy.

The German advance was finally halted by the combined French and British counterattack along the Marne River on 6–9 September. The German armies were forced into retreat and entrenched their positions; initially digging trenches to provide some temporary shelter. Subsequent French and British attempts to break through the German line failed, as did efforts by both sides to advance by **outflanking** each other. A succession of failed outflanking manoeuvres led to the extension of the trench lines from Ostend in the north of Belgium to the Swiss border in the south, in what has become known as the 'race to the sea'. Neither side was able to advance, so more trenches were

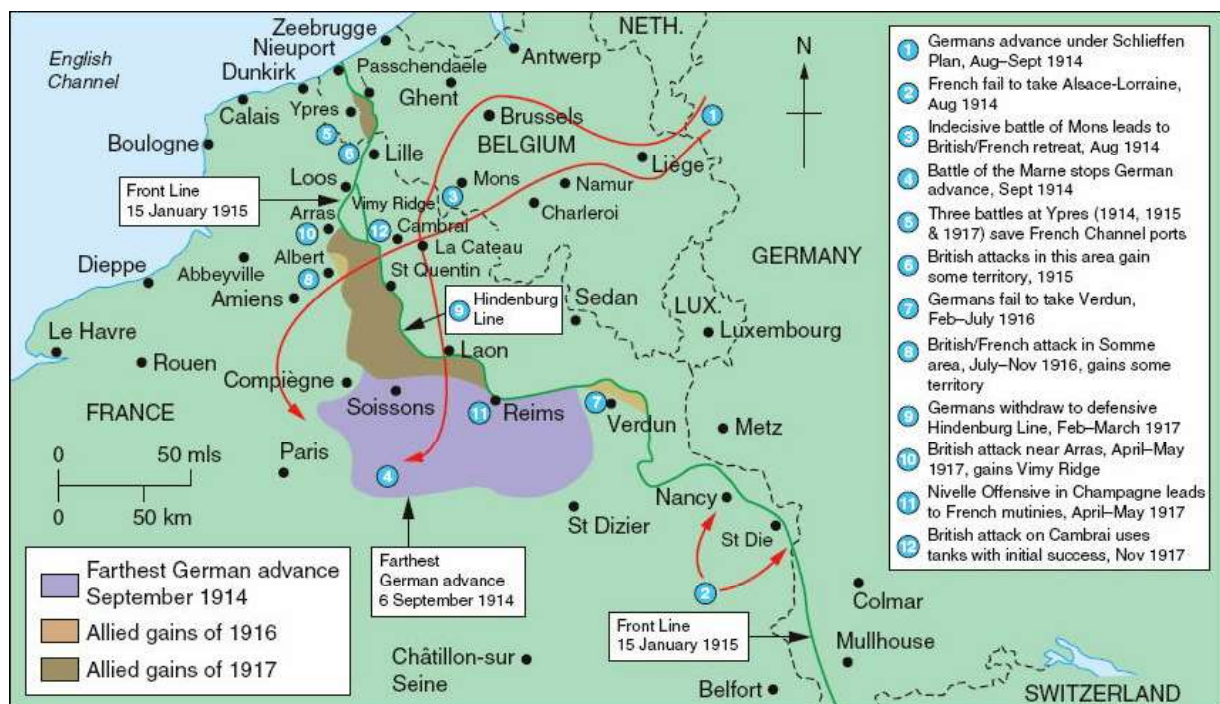
dug for protection. These trench lines would dominate the war on the Western Front for the next four years. The war of manoeuvre was over, at least on the Western Front.

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## SOURCE O

? What can be learned from Source O about the fighting on the Western Front?

### The Western Front 1914–17.



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### Trench warfare

The construction of trench systems along the Western Front necessitated the development of entirely new strategic and tactical approaches to try to break the stalemate in order to achieve victory. Trench warfare posed particular difficulties for the attacking side since the military technology available conferred huge advantages on the defenders in this type of warfare. The advancing infantry would have to cross the exposed ground of **no-man's**

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**land**, in the face of artillery bombardment and machine-gun fire. Even if the infantry succeeded in crossing no-man's land, the enemy trenches were protected by rolls of thick barbed wire which was almost impossible to traverse, making the infantry easy targets for machine-gun or sniper fire. It was little wonder that few offensives resulted in a decisive breakthrough or significant territorial gain.

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## Technology of the war: machine guns

Machine guns were mainly used for defensive purposes, given the lack of manoeuvrability of early tripod-mounted machine guns. They were formidable weapons against infantry. Machine guns fired on average over 500 rounds per minute. Later in the war, technological developments led to the creation of machine guns that could be carried by one person, allowing them to be used for offensive purposes.

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### SOURCE P

? What can be learned from Source P about armament production in Britain and Germany during the First World War?

### Approximate machine-gun production in Britain and Germany 1914–18.

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Britain	300	6,000	33,500	79,700	120,900
Germany	500	1,000	2,000	10,000	13,000

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### Offensive strategies in trench warfare

The main basis of attack strategy throughout the war on the Western Front remained the infantry advance in which waves of troops would cross no-man's land in an attempt to capture enemy trenches. New tactics were developed to weaken the enemy defensive positions *before* exposing infantry



to an advance and to *support* the infantry once the advance was underway (see the table on page [38](#)).

The key offensive tactics used in the First World War

Offensive tactic	Description of the tactic	Aims of the tactic	Weaknesses with the tactic
Preliminary artillery bombardment	Artillery shells bombarded enemy trenches and defensive positions before the start of an infantry attack. The bombardment halted once the advance had begun	To weaken enemy trench systems To kill enemy troops To destroy enemy machine guns and artillery To cut rolls of barbed wire	The inaccuracy of artillery fire The relatively high proportion of dud shells Many enemy trenches were strongly reinforced with concrete and were not destroyed by bombardment Barbed wire was frequently not cut by artillery shells A preliminary bombardment gave advance warning to the enemy that a probable offensive was imminent, giving them time to bring in reinforcements and supplies
Creeping barrage	Artillery was used simultaneously with an infantry advance. Artillery shells were set to explode just ahead of the advancing troops	To provide continuous cover for advancing troops To kill enemy troops To destroy enemy machine guns, artillery and trench systems To cut rolls of barbed wire	The effective synchronization of artillery and infantry was difficult to achieve due to inaccuracies of artillery fire and the rudimentary field communications that limited the contact which infantry could make with the artillery once the advance was underway. In consequence, creeping barrages sometimes advanced too rapidly to provide any real cover for troops, or too slowly, leading to casualties from friendly fire
Mines	The detonation of mines in advance of an infantry attack which had been laid under the enemy's trenches via underground tunnels	To destroy enemy trenches and troops and create a breach in the enemy front line	The digging of tunnels was hazardous; miners could be killed by collapsing tunnels, lack of oxygen or the build-up of poisonous gases The detonation of mines was not always accurate. Sometimes mines did not detonate at all, sometimes they detonated after a delay once the infantry advance had begun, killing members of their own troops
Poison gas	The release of poison gas, initially from canisters and, later in the war, fired in shells towards enemy trenches	To kill and cause panic among enemy troops	If the wind changed direction suddenly the gas could be blown back towards the trenches of those who fired it Gas masks were quickly developed which offered protection against gas
Tanks	Tanks, first used by the British in September 1916, were used to support an infantry advance	To provide additional firepower To provide cover for infantry advancing across no-man's land	The tank was only available from 1916 and then only in very limited numbers Tanks frequently broke down or became stuck in the uneven ground of no-man's land

Given the difficulties of launching a successful offensive in trench warfare, it was unsurprising that infantry casualty numbers were frequently devastatingly high and that a decisive breakthrough was rarely achieved, with stalemate characterizing the war on the Western Front for most of 1915–18.

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In consequence, First World War commanders have not infrequently been accused of incompetence and callousness. However, what often limited their options and the effectiveness of their tactics was the technological limitations of the military equipment available. This, combined with political and strategic pressure on commanders to continue to launch offensives, makes it difficult to identify alternative tactics that would have worked better.

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#### SOURCE Q

? How useful is Source Q as evidence of trench warfare?

#### German troops in a trench in 1915.



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## The war on the Eastern Front

On the Eastern Front, Germany and its allies Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria (who entered the war in October 1915) fought against Russia and Serbia.

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Major confrontation with Russia began sooner than Germany had expected as the result of the quicker than estimated mobilization of the Russian army. The Russians made good progress against the armies of Austria-Hungary, driving deep into Galicia, but were less successful against German troops.

Russian forces invaded East Prussia and pushed the Germans back until the Battle of Tannenberg on 22–29 August 1914 when the Russian army of General Alexander Samsanov was encircled and defeated by the Germans. Never again in the war did Russian troops seriously threaten the German border, although they did tie down huge numbers of German troops on the Eastern Front. Further defeats were inflicted on Russian forces at the Masurian Lakes on 5–15 September 1914.

## The land war in Europe 1915

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### **How did the nature of fighting on the Western Front differ from fighting elsewhere during 1915?**

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The second phase of the war on the Western Front was characterized by efforts to break the stalemate of trench warfare. The failure to do so led to the development of a **war of attrition**. The lack of progress made on the Western Front encouraged the British to enlarge their commitment to other **theatres** of the war, contributing to the launch of the Gallipoli Campaign (see page **41**) against the Ottoman Empire.

### **The war on the Western Front: stalemate**

The Germans attempted to break the stalemate by launching an attack against the Allied line in Belgium at the Second Battle of Ypres between 22 April and 25 May 1915. Germany used poison gas for the first time (see below) against Allied troops. Estimates of the casualties of this first gas attack vary considerably, but an approximate number is 1500, of whom 200 were killed. This first use of gas created panic and the flight of troops from their trenches, leading to a 7-km wide gap emerging in the Allied front line into which the Germans advanced. The Germans, however, were halted before they reached the key city of Ypres. By the close of the Second Battle of Ypres, in a pattern which would become familiar, casualties were high, with the Allies

sustaining 69,000, the Germans 38,000, while the territory gained was minimal.

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## **Technology of the war: poison gas**

Poison gas became a standard weapon by the end of the war; by 1918 roughly one shell in four fired on the Western Front was a gas shell. Gas released was heavier than air and therefore infiltrated trenches. The impact of gas was rarely decisive in battles and its military effectiveness was limited due to the introduction of gas masks and its reliance on favourable weather conditions (see the table below). Casualties caused by gas from all sides amounted to 88,498 fatalities, less than one per cent of the total killed in the war.

Gas was a potentially lethal weapon, but its psychological impact was often greater than its military effectiveness. It has often received attention beyond its real impact on the fighting as a consequence of psychological aversion to its use due to its potentially horrendous physical effects.

### **The three types of poison gas used on the Western Front**

Type of gas	Effects of gas
Chlorine (the only gas available between April and December 1915)	Suffocation, as inhalation of the gas in significant quantity destroyed the lungs
Phosgene (introduced from December 1915)	Suffocation, as inhalation of the gas even in relatively small quantity destroyed the lungs
Dichlorethyl sulphide or mustard gas: an odourless gas, slightly yellow in colour (introduced from July 1917)	Highly toxic, if inhaled, even in small quantities. If skin was exposed to the gas it caused internal blistering and (usually temporary) blindness

## The war on the Ottoman Front: Gallipoli

The Allies launched an assault against Ottoman forces on the Gallipoli peninsula between 19 February 1915 and 9 January 1916. With stalemate dominating the Western Front, it was hoped that the attack on Gallipoli would:

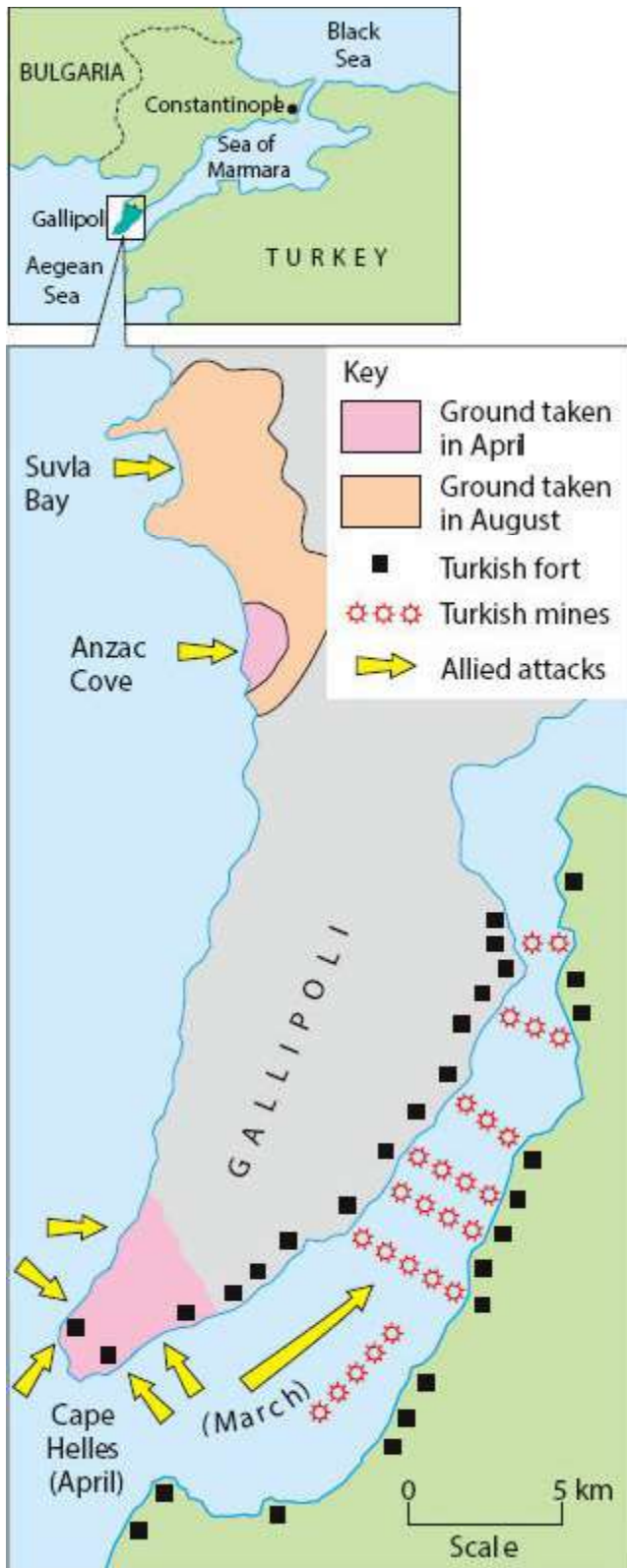
- provide a much-needed success to boost Allied morale
- knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war
- open up Allied supply routes to Russia through the Dardanelles
- weaken Germany and Austria-Hungary by opening up another front to their south.

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### SOURCE R

? How useful is Source R in learning about the Gallipoli Campaign?

### The Gallipoli Campaign.



## ***The campaign***

The British army, using troops mostly from New Zealand and Australia, known as ANZACs, was the primary Allied force at Gallipoli. These forces stormed the peninsula in an **amphibious assault** in late April 1915 after a preliminary bombardment of Ottoman forts by Allied warships. Allied troops, eventually numbering almost half a million, made little headway against entrenched Ottoman soldiers, conceding defeat only in January 1916. There were 45,000 Allied deaths at Gallipoli, with Ottoman deaths numbering at least 60,000. With the evacuation of Allied forces from Gallipoli, the possibility of supplying a failing Russia was greatly diminished.

## **The Italian Front**

Italy joined the war on the side of the Allies in 1915 as a result of the secret Treaty of London in which Italy was promised territorial gain at Austria-Hungary's expense at the war's conclusion. Almost immediately, poorly trained and equipped Italian soldiers became bogged down in a form of trench warfare in the mountains between Italy and Austria-Hungary, capturing only a few kilometres. British and French hopes that Austria-Hungary would be successfully invaded from the south evaporated.

## **The land war in Europe 1916**

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### **Why did a war of attrition develop on the Western Front?**

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The war on the Western Front in 1916 was characterized by huge battles of attrition in which enormous casualties were sustained in return for very little territorial gain. The stalemate remained unbroken. On the Eastern Front, despite some impressive gains by the Russians, it was clear by the end of the year that Russian forces were not winning, nor would be able to win, the war against the Germans.

## **The war on the Western Front: Verdun**

German troops launched a massive assault on the series of French fortresses at Verdun between 21 February and 18 December 1916. Verdun was considered crucial by France for its defence and morale. The German Chief

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of the General Staff, Erich von Falkenhayn, aware of the importance of Verdun to the French, predicted that a massive German offensive on the fortresses would encourage the French to pour in reinforcements, thereby weakening other points along the Western Front where a decisive offensive could be more easily launched.

The German assault began in February 1916 and soon developed into an epic battle of attrition. Total French casualties are estimated to have amounted to 542,000. Despite these enormous losses, and the temporary capture of several of the major forts, the French held Verdun. By the close of the battle after 10 months, Germany held only 8 km more territory than when it had begun. The Germans also suffered heavy casualties in the offensive, estimated at 434,000 dead, wounded or missing.

## **The war on the Western Front: the Somme**

The British attempted to break the stalemate on the Western Front and to draw some of the German forces away from Verdun, with a large offensive near the Somme River between 1 July and 18 November 1916.

The offensive employed the classic tactics of trench warfare, beginning with a lengthy preliminary artillery bombardment of the German trenches, before an infantry advance across no-man's land towards German trenches. Tanks were used for the first time by Britain, but not effectively and had no real impact on the battle. The preliminary artillery bombardments failed to significantly weaken the German trench defences so that the advancing British infantry suffered horrific casualties from German machine-gun and artillery fire. On the first day alone the British sustained 57,470 casualties (21,392 of them killed or missing). The territory gained was minimal.

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### **SOURCE S**

? How useful is Source S as evidence of the use of the tank in the First World War?

**A British mark I tank on 15 September 1916, the day tanks went into battle for the first time.**

\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*





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## **Technology of the war: tanks**

The tank is an armoured military vehicle with caterpillar tracks, designed to be able to cross difficult terrain. The tank was armed with significant guns; in the First World War, these were cannon and machine guns. It was first used in combat in September 1916 by Britain. It was hoped that the use of the tank would break the stalemate of trench warfare. Tanks were only produced in very limited numbers in the First World War.

### Numbers of tanks produced by country in the First World War

Year	Britain	France	Germany	Italy	USA
1916	150	0	0	0	0
1917	1277	800	0	0	0
1918	1391	4000	20	6	84

The early tanks were slow, difficult to steer and liable to break down and get stuck in mud or shell craters. There were also few tanks available for use, with only 49 at the Somme, for example. Tanks also had only a limited range, making it impossible for them to penetrate deeply into enemy lines. Tanks underwent considerable development during the war and were primarily fitted with machine guns, designed to deal with trench warfare. Tanks would eventually be used successfully in large groups to attack enemy positions as at Cambrai in November 1917 when 476 British tanks took control of 9.5 km in just a few hours. In September 1918, this tactic regularly broke through German defensive lines. Some of the main models in production by 1918 are included in the table below.

Country	Tank model ( <i>date first in service</i> )	Armaments	Speed	Range
Britain	Mark V (from 1918)	Two 57-mm guns and four machine guns	8 km/h	72 km
France	Renault FT (from 1917)	One 37-mm gun and two machine guns	7 km/h	65 km
USA	Mark VIII (from 1918)	Two 57-mm guns and seven machine guns	8 km/h	89 km
Germany	A7V tank (from 1918)	One 57-mm gun and six machine guns	12 km/h (but very unstable over rough terrain)	80 km
Italy	Fiat 2000 (from 1918 but never used in combat)	One 65-mm gun and six machine guns	7 km/h	75 km

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**SOURCE T**

? What are the values and limitations of Source T as evidence of the importance of the tank in the First World War?

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**Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, second-in-command and Chief Staff Officer of the Tank Corps Head Quarters, writing after the war. Quoted in *The Battlefields of the First World War* by Peter Barton, published by Constable & Robinson, London, 2005, page 342.**

*The first period of the war [was] the reign of the bullet, and the second the reign of the shell, and the third was the reign of the anti-bullet. We introduced the tank, and though, until the Battle of Cambrai was fought ... our General Head Quarters in France showed a tactical ineptitude in the use of this weapon that was amazing, ultimately it beat their ignorance and stupidity and won through.*

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The Somme Offensive continued until 18 November 1916, despite the continuation of high casualties which were in total even greater than at Verdun: 420,000 British, 200,000 French and 500,000 German. The Allies had advanced only 13 km in some places; the Somme had become a battle of attrition despite this not being the intention of Britain's military commanders.

## **The war on the Eastern Front: the Brusilov Offensive**

A major Russian offensive, known as the Brusilov Offensive after General Alexei Brusilov who directed the campaign, was launched predominantly against Austro-Hungarian troops in the region of what is now Ukraine on 2 June 1916. The timing of the assault was in part to relieve the Italians, who were hard-pressed fighting the Austro-Hungarians in northern Italy along the Isonzo River, and to help the French at Verdun. The offensive was initially highly successful for the Russians, who made rapid progress, capturing 96 km by the end of June 1916.

However, the momentum of the Russian advance faltered by July due to

insufficient supplies and reinforcements, which meant it was impossible to maintain the gains. In addition, the transfer of substantial numbers of German troops from Verdun to the Eastern Front shifted the balance of forces in the region against the Russians. In consequence, the Russian offensive ended by September 1916. Although Russia's territorial advance had been considerable, in the vast territories of the Eastern Front where mobile, rather than trench, warfare was the norm, even relatively good gains did not often translate to substantial strategic advantage. The cost in casualties and war supplies had also been high; almost a million men were lost. This had a detrimental impact on morale on the Russian home front where discontent against the war and the government's management of it was increasing due to the substantial privations borne by the population (see page 60). The offensive did, however, fatally cripple Austria-Hungary's military, which could no longer operate without substantial help from Germany.

## The land war in Europe 1917

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### **To what extent did the war begin to turn in favour of the Allies in 1917?**

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Although the stalemate remained unbroken on the Western Front in 1917, there were signs that an Allied victory was increasingly imminent. The Allies were boosted by the USA's entry into the war and by victories achieved through the more effective deployment of their new weapon, the tank. However, on the Eastern Front their ally Russia looked on the point of collapse, beset by military and political problems.

## The war on the Western Front: the stalemate continues

Throughout 1917 there were several Allied attempts at a breakthrough but none was decisive. The most significant attempts came with the French Nivelle Offensive between 16 April and 9 May 1917 and the British third offensive at Ypres in Belgium, known as Passchendaele, between 31 July and 10 November 1917. Both failed to achieve significant gains, while casualties were substantial. In the three-month-long Battle of Passchendaele, the Allies

gained approximately 8 km while sustaining 325,000 casualties, the Germans 260,000.

## **The USA joins the war**

The USA entered the war on the side of the Allies in April 1917 as a result of Germany's submarine warfare, which increasingly targeted US vessels, and the discovery of evidence that Germany was encouraging Mexico to invade the USA. The impact of US troops and supplies was an enormous boost to the exhausted Allies. Although it would take several months for significant numbers of US soldiers to arrive on the Western Front, by March 1918, 250,000 men were arriving in Europe every month. The knowledge of this had a hugely detrimental impact on German morale, as Germany's own reserves of men were rapidly running out by 1918 (see page 57).

## **The war on the Eastern Front: the retreat of Russian forces**

Russia underwent a revolution in February 1917 in which the tsar, or emperor, was replaced by an army-appointed **Provisional Government**. The Provisional Government attempted to continue the war, launching a failed offensive in July 1917. Conditions in Russia were so poor as a result of hunger and political dissatisfaction that a second revolution occurred in October 1917 by the **Bolshevik Party**. The Bolsheviks ended the war with the **Central Powers**, signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (see page 47), which allowed Germany to move troops from the Eastern to Western Fronts for a major offensive in 1918.

## **The Italian Front**

In October 1917, Austro-Hungarian and German troops launched a major offensive against Italian forces in northern Italy. At the Battle of Caporetto, Italy suffered a crushing defeat with at least 300,000 dead, wounded or captured. The Central Powers took control of a large portion of northern Italy and the Italian government contemplated leaving the war. Britain and France were forced to rush reinforcements to prevent a complete collapse of Allied lines there.



# The land war in Europe 1918

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## Why were Germany and its allies defeated in 1918?

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The defeat of Germany and its allies in 1918 brought about the end of the war, although fighting at the start of the year seemed to be in their favour. On the Eastern Front, Russia surrendered, while on the Western Front, the stalemate was finally broken by a massive German offensive.

## The war on the Eastern Front: Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

The collapse of the Eastern Front came early in 1918 when the new Bolshevik government of Russia, which had seized power in a revolution in October 1917, sued for peace. This decision was motivated not only by repeated Russian losses on the Eastern Front and the collapse of morale on the home front, but also by the ideological opposition of the Bolsheviks to the war. They condemned a war in which ordinary working men were sent by their rulers to fight other workers. In Bolshevik eyes, the workers of the world should instead be united in struggle against their ruling oppressors. Germany and its allies agreed to an **armistice** but not without imposing punitive peace terms in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 3 March 1918. Thereafter, Russia withdrew from the war.

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### Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918

Russia lost:

- 2.6 million km<sup>2</sup> of territory including Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Ukraine
- 75 per cent of its iron ore and 90 per cent of its coal
- almost half its industry
- 55 million people
- almost half of its best agricultural land.

Most of this territory was placed under Germany's control.

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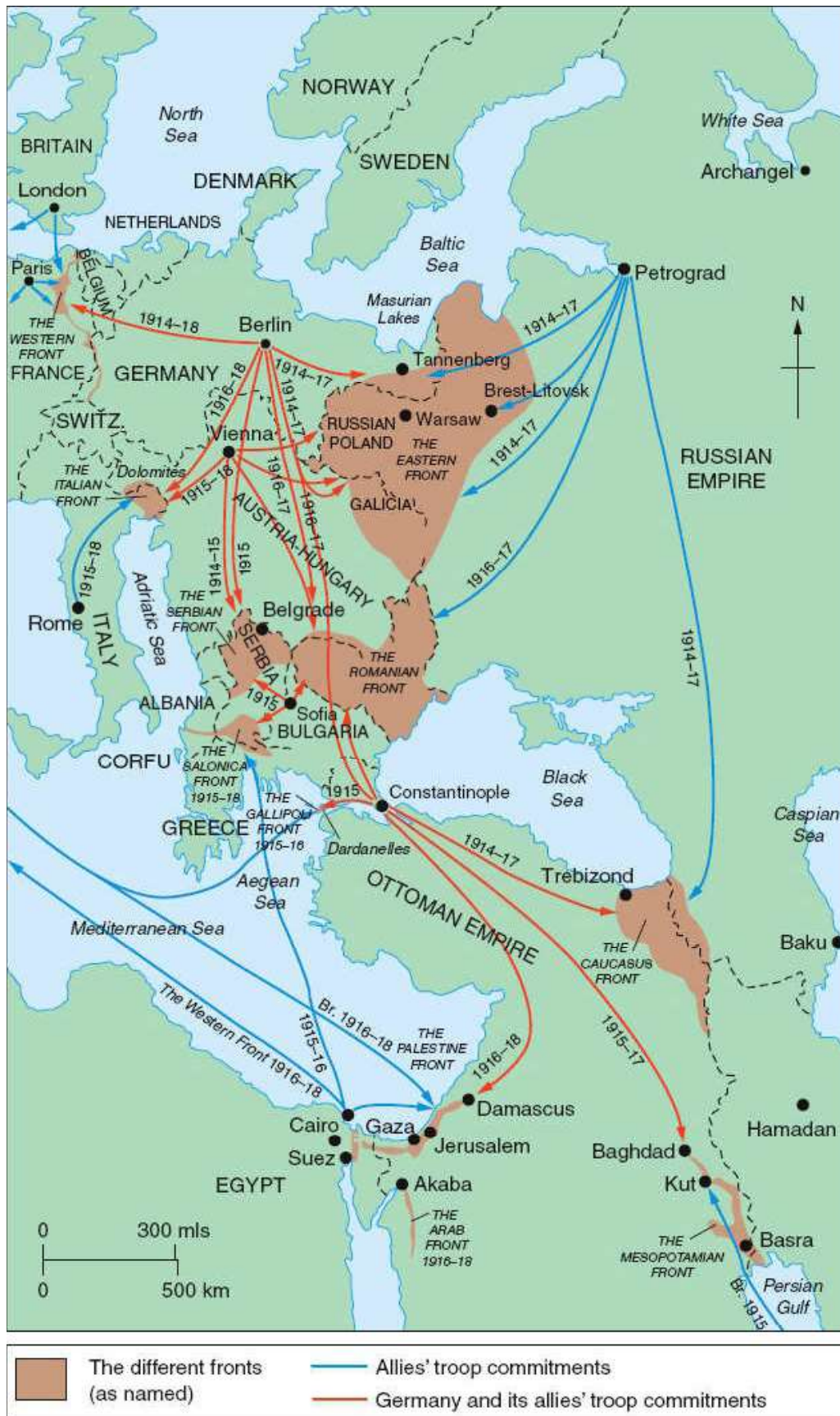
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## SOURCE U

? What can be learned from Source U about the fighting on the Ottoman, Italian and Eastern Fronts?

### **The different fronts 1914–18.**





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## The war on the Western Front: the Ludendorff Offensive

The final phase of the war on the Western Front saw an end to the stalemate due to a massive German offensive designed to bring about a decisive victory. The German campaign, known as the Ludendorff Offensive after the German commander General Erich Ludendorff, took place between 21 March and 3 June 1918. Ludendorff realized that this was Germany's last opportunity to win the war since Germany's manpower and *matériel* resources were not sufficient to sustain the war, especially in the face of US war production.

The Ludendorff Offensive made use of new infantry and artillery tactics to break the stalemate. No lengthy preliminary bombardment was used, but instead a short intensive bombardment, known as a **hurricane barrage**, was employed to saturate Allied lines with explosive and gas shells 30 minutes before the infantry assault began. This was followed not by a massed infantry advance towards the Allied lines, but by the rapid movement of small detachments of **stormtrooper** infantry. These were armed with lightweight sub-machine guns and grenades with the objective of penetrating and infiltrating Allied lines by focusing on taking previously identified weak points, while avoiding strong points which could then be isolated for subsequent attacks by troops with heavier weapons. The stormtroopers, frequently covered by a creeping barrage, had greater flexibility of movement than a massed infantry advance, and the element of surprise and speed was crucial to their success. A second wave of infantry then was sent to consolidate the capture of the Allied line. These tactics became known as **infiltration tactics**.

The German advance initially made significant progress, advancing 65 km in the first week. The breakthrough, however, was not decisive and the advance lost momentum. This was largely due to a lack of **reserve forces** and sufficient supplies to exploit the initial successes. German troops were forced to draw back in the face of Allied counterattacks such as that launched at the Second Battle of the Marne between 15 July and 3 August 1918, and at

Amiens on 8 August 1918, which made good use of the new technologies of the tank and aircraft (see pages [44](#) and [51](#)). For Germany, the retreat was irreversible as their armies were repeatedly forced to draw back until fighting ceased with an armistice on 11 November 1918.

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## Disease

Soldiers lived in crowded conditions with poor sanitation. This meant an increase in disease, with outbreaks of malaria, typhoid and other diseases more common throughout Europe during the First World War. The worst outbreak of disease was Spanish influenza, which lasted from January 1918 to December 1920. This virus killed up to 120 million people around the world or six per cent of the world's population. In 1918, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, including up to half a million German troops, were too ill to fight, weakening armies and the morale of civilian populations.

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## The collapse of Germany and its allies

The German armistice came shortly after the collapse of its allies, who had all already made armistice agreements:

- Bulgaria on 29 September 1918
- Ottoman Empire on 30 October 1918
- Austria-Hungary on 3 November 1918.

The collapse of the Central Powers was in large part brought about by their inability to sustain conflict any longer. Their combined reserves of manpower and supplies were by 1918 far inferior to those of the Allies, making continued military conflict, let alone the likelihood of victory, impossible. Their collapse was hastened by the difficulties that had beset their home fronts. Extreme privations (see page [59](#)) led to a collapse in support for the war and revolt among the civilian populations and mutiny within the German navy (see page [60](#)).

## The war in the Middle East

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**What was the nature of fighting in the Middle East?**

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\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*

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The entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war in October 1914 led to fighting in the Middle East, which formed part of the empire. The conflict in this region primarily involved Russian troops to the north in the Caucasus region, and British and Arab tribes in **Mesopotamia** and **the Levant**. On all fronts, the Ottoman forces were eventually forced into retreat. The nature of the fighting was very different from that on the Western Front, but similar to that of the Eastern Front in that warfare was more mobile.

## **The Mesopotamian Campaign**

The Mesopotamian Campaign was fought between troops from the British and Ottoman Empires and was a highly mobile conflict. Indeed, British troops made significant advances, occupying Basra in November 1914, thereby safeguarding access to vital oil supplies, and capturing the town of Kut in 1915. The subsequent British advance on Baghdad was, however, repelled by Ottoman troops, which led to the Ottoman siege of Kut between December 1915 and April 1916. In April 1916, 13,000 British troops surrendered, becoming prisoners. A later British offensive on Baghdad succeeded in March 1917 (see the map on page **48**).

## **The Arab Revolt**

The British were also involved in fighting Ottoman forces in the area around Palestine and Arabia. The conflict was triggered by an Ottoman attack on the **Suez Canal**, a vital supply route for Britain. British forces subsequently pushed the Ottomans back into Palestine.

Arab tribesmen were encouraged by Britain to revolt against the Ottoman government with promises of support for Arab independence after the war. The Arab Revolt began in June 1916 and Arab efforts, in conjunction with British troops, captured Medina in June 1916. Arab fighters, using guerrilla tactics (see page **3**), attacked Ottoman railways and supply lines, driving Ottoman troops out of Arabia and Palestine and eventually into today's Syria, where Damascus was captured in 1918. In October, the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allies.

## **War in the colonies**

\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*

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## How was the wider world involved in the war?

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The world outside Europe and the Middle East was largely affected by the war through the supply of men, *matériel* and food to the armies of the European powers. The peoples of the British *dominions* and colonies alone suffered 200,000 dead and 600,000 wounded in the fighting. Limited fighting also occurred, primarily in the German colonies.

## Conflict in Asia and Africa

In Asia in 1914, fighting focused on German colonial possessions:

- New Zealand forces occupied and quickly took German Samoa.
- New Guinea fell to Australian forces.
- Micronesia, the Marianas and the Marshall Islands were also captured by Allied forces virtually unopposed.
- The German naval base at Tsingtao, in China, was taken by Japanese forces.

There was more sustained fighting in German colonial Africa. German South-West Africa was taken by British Imperial forces in 1915, while German forces in German East Africa did not surrender until 25 November 1918. German forces were able to hold off larger British-led forces by using guerrilla warfare tactics.

## The war in the air

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### What impact did air power have on the war?

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The First World War brought about a transformation in air power. There was a significant increase in the range of military usage to which aircraft were put, reflecting innovations and improvements in aircraft technology during the war. Overall, air power did not play a decisive role in the war, but the huge technological and tactical developments made suggested the military potential of aircraft.

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### Technology of the war: reconnaissance aircraft

\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*



Initially aircraft were used solely for **reconnaissance**, flying behind enemy lines to gather information about troop movements. This remained a significant function throughout the war. The importance of aerial reconnaissance was shown at the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914 (see page 39) when, as a result of information provided by German/Austro-Hungarian Rumpler Taube aircraft, outnumbered German troops were able correctly predict Russian troop movements in order to encircle and defeat the advancing Russian army.

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## Technology of the war: fighter aircraft

To try to prevent aerial reconnaissance, both sides developed fighter aircraft to attack enemy aircraft in the skies. Fighter aircraft made use of the newest technological developments which saw planes able to increase their speeds and to carry machine guns. Considerable technological developments were made over the course of the war. In the initial months of the war, aircraft were flimsy, slow and unarmed. By the end of the war, aircraft were faster and more manoeuvrable and had more powerful guns. Some of the main fighter aircraft in operation in 1917 are shown in the table.

Country	Aircraft model (date first in service)	Armaments	Speed	Rate of climb	Number built
Britain	Sopwith Camel (from 1917)	Two machine guns	77 km/h	5 m/s	5490
France	Spad S. XIII (from 1917)	Two machine guns	218 km/h	2 m/s	8472
Russia	Anatra (from 1916)	Two machine guns	144 km/h	3 m/s	184
Germany	Albatros DV (from 1917)	Two machine guns	186 km/h	4 m/s	2500
Austria-Hungary	Aviatik (Berg) DI (from 1917)	Two machine guns	185 km/h	4 m/s	700

By 1918, even though Germany possessed the most technically capable fighters, such as the Albatros DV and the first steel-framed fighter, the Fokker DVII, aerial superiority went to the Allies mainly because their aircraft substantially outnumbered those of Germany. The numbers of aircraft produced increased during the war, reflecting the growing importance of air power and the role of war production in total war.

The total number of aircraft produced by country in the First World War, taken from *World War One* by S. Tucker, *An Encyclopedia of World War One: A Political, Social and Military History*, published by ABC-CLIO, 2005, page 57.

Year	Austria-Hungary	France	Germany	Britain	Italy	Russia
1914	64	541	694	193	NA	NA*
1915	281	4,489	4,532	1,680	382	NA
1916	732	7,549	8,182	5,716	1,255	NA
1917	1,272	14,915	13,977	14,832	3,861	NA
1918	1,989	24,652	17,000	32,536	6,488	NA
Total	4,338	52,146	44,385	54,957	11,986	5,300

\*Russian statistics relating to yearly production are not available.

NA, not available.

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## Technology of the war: Zeppelins and bomber aircraft

At the start of the war aircraft lacked the capability to carry significant bomb loads, so the practice of bombing was limited and was carried out by **Zeppelins**. In total, 51 German Zeppelin raids took place over Britain during the war causing damage and the deaths of 557 people. Zeppelins were often inaccurate, slow moving and easy targets for anti-aircraft fire. As such they sustained high losses, with 60 of the 84 built during the war destroyed.

Over the course of the war, technological developments saw the emergence of specifically designed bomber aircraft. Their capabilities, however, remained limited in terms of range, speed and bomb load.



### Examples of bomber aircraft from the First World War

Country	Aircraft model ( <i>date first in service</i> )	Bomb load	Speed	Range	Number built
Britain	Handley Page O/400 ( <i>from 1916</i> )	907 kg	157 km/h	1120 km	600
Russia	Ilya Muromets ( <i>from 1913</i> )	500 kg	110 km/h	550 km	83
Germany	Gotha GV ( <i>from 1917</i> )	500 kg	140 km/h	840 km	205

Technological developments nevertheless made the tactic of aerial **strategic bombing** possible, and this was practised for the first time in the First World War. The British launched raids on industrial targets in the Saar Basin in Germany from 1916, while German Gotha IV bombers carried out 27 raids on Britain in 1917, for example. Strategic bombing, however, played little military significance in the war overall.

Aircraft also began to be used to provide support for troops on the ground by destroying artillery and supply depots. German squadrons, consisting of aircraft specifically designed for ground-attack, dropped bombs and fired machine guns on ground troops at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917 and in the Ludendorff Offensive of 1918, for example.

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## The war at sea

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### What impact did the war at sea have on the war?

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Although there was only a very limited number of major naval battles in the First World War, naval power had a decisive impact on the war. This was primarily due to the use of naval power by both Britain and Germany to restrict vital supplies by imposing blockades and targeting **merchant shipping**.

### British naval action against Germany

In the naval war, the initial priority of the British was to prevent the German

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navy from leaving its ports and to end Germany's overseas trade. To this end the British imposed a blockade on German ships by laying mines and having patrols guard the North Sea and English Channel. These manoeuvres resulted in a number of clashes between British and German ships in the early months of the war, such as off Heligoland Bight on 28 August 1914 in which Britain sank four German warships. The naval blockade had a devastating effect on supplies of vital food, fuel and raw materials into Germany, which contributed significantly to the German defeat in 1918 (see page [59](#)).

There was only one major battle between the fleets, the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. In this confrontation, where Germany hoped to break Britain's blockade, Britain lost 14 ships and Germany 11. British losses were not enough to give the German navy any hope of breaking the blockade and the German navy was largely confined to its own ports for the remainder of the war.

## German submarine warfare

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### SOURCE V

? What does Source V show about how German submarine attacks were used in British government propaganda?

**A propaganda recruitment poster produced by the British government in 1917 following the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*.**



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From 1915, German naval strategy shifted to a much greater emphasis on submarine warfare in order to more efficiently target merchant shipping supplying Britain. On 4 February 1915 Germany declared the seas around Britain a war zone and that shipping there would be targeted by German **U-boats** and sunk without warning. In 1915, U-boats sank 748,000 tons of shipping, mainly merchant ships. This campaign of unrestricted submarine

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warfare was temporarily halted in the wake of increased criticisms, not least from the neutral USA, which lost many ships (such as the *Lusitania*, see [Source V](#)), and citizens as a result of submarine attacks. However, the campaign was relaunched between February and June 1917, by which time U-boat numbers had risen to 152 (in August 1914 Germany had only 28 U-boats). In consequence, in April 1917 alone over 500,000 tons of British merchant shipping was lost. This had a critical impact on food supplies in Britain (see page [59](#)). The introduction of a [convoy system](#) and new anti-submarine devices helped to reduce the losses caused by U-boats. Ultimately German attempts to force a British surrender by submarine blockade failed.

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## Technology of the war: submarines

Submarines were a relatively recent innovation and first made a significant impact in the First World War. Submarines were used to target naval warships and increasingly merchant shipping as they became an integral part of the implementation of the strategy of naval blockade used by both Britain and Germany. The strategic importance of submarines was reflected in an expansion in their numbers in both German and British navies.

Submarine numbers from Germany and Britain in 1914 and 1918

Country	Submarine numbers in 1914	Submarines built between 1914 and 1918	Submarines lost during the war
Britain	76	146	54
Germany	28	327	204

Britain introduced a number of measures to minimize the impact of the U-boat menace. One such measure was the Q-ships, well-armed ships disguised as merchant ships, which would lure U-boats into surfacing to make an attack and then attack the submarines themselves. The most significant measure introduced by the British to counter the impact of the U-boats was the convoy system. In addition, naval escorts became increasingly well equipped with more efficient mines and [depth charges](#) for use against submarines. The German strategy to use U-boats to force Britain into surrender ultimately failed, but the U-boat had demonstrated its considerable potential.

## SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Year	Western Front	Eastern Front	Other theatres
1914	German invasion of Belgium, France and Luxembourg Battle of Marne leading to stalemate and trench warfare	Russian invasion of east Prussia Battles of Tannenberg and Masurian Lakes	British forces occupied Basra in the Mesopotamian Campaign German colonies in Asia taken by Allied forces
1915	Second Battle of Ypres (first use of gas)		Gallipoli Campaign British forces took Kut in the Mesopotamian Campaign German South-West Africa surrendered to the Allies
1916	German attack on Verdun The Somme Offensive	Brusilov Offensive	The Ottoman siege of Kut British and Arab forces took Medina British forces took Baghdad
1917	The French Nivelle Offensive Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) Battle of Cambrai (first use of massed tanks)	Kerensky Offensive	Aqaba captured by the Allies
1918	Ludendorff Offensive	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk	German East Africa surrendered to the Allies Damascus captured by the Allies

The course of the First World War



## 5 Managing the war

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*Key question: How significant was the management of the war in determining its outcome?*

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A conflict on the scale and of the duration of the First World War required the management of resources on an unprecedented scale. Governments had to ensure the supply of manpower and *matériel* to the armed forces, and to mobilize the support, and safeguard the needs, of the civilian population. This was particularly true in the context of total war, which affected civilian populations as never before. The ability of some governments to manage these demands better than others had a significant impact on the outcome of the war.

### Military manpower

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**How effectively was each side able to mobilize manpower for their militaries?**

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The priority for all major powers at the start of the war was the mobilization of manpower into their militaries. All the major powers, with the exception of Britain, had large standing armies in 1914 (see page 21), and had measures in place to enlarge their ranks substantially with reservists and conscripts. The rapid mobilization of these forces would be as crucial as the overall numbers in gaining advantage in the early months of the war. The speed and efficiency of German mobilization, which enabled the 1.5 million men needed for the Schlieffen Plan's 'hook' westwards to be ready for action within days of the mobilization order, compensated in large part for the overall numerical advantage of the Entente powers (see page 21).

However, as the war dragged on, the size of the populations that the major powers could draw on to provide recruits for their armies became increasingly important. As a consequence the advantage swung very definitely in favour of the Allies, who could draw on:



- Russia's huge population
- the British Empire's population, which provided over 2.5 million troops
- US soldiers from 1917.

This increasing imbalance contributed to the German decision to launch the Ludendorff Offensive in 1918, which failed in large part due to the lack of reserve troops (see page 49).

All the powers resorted to **conscription** to fill the ranks of their armies. Britain alone avoided doing so in the early years of the war, but did introduce conscription from January 1916 as the initial flood of volunteers dried up.

## War production

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**How successfully were difficulties overcome to ensure the production of sufficient war *matériel*?**

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The mobilization of men for the military was essential, but without sufficient guns and ammunition this would count for little. The ability to cope with these demands had a significant impact on the outcome of the war.

## Munitions

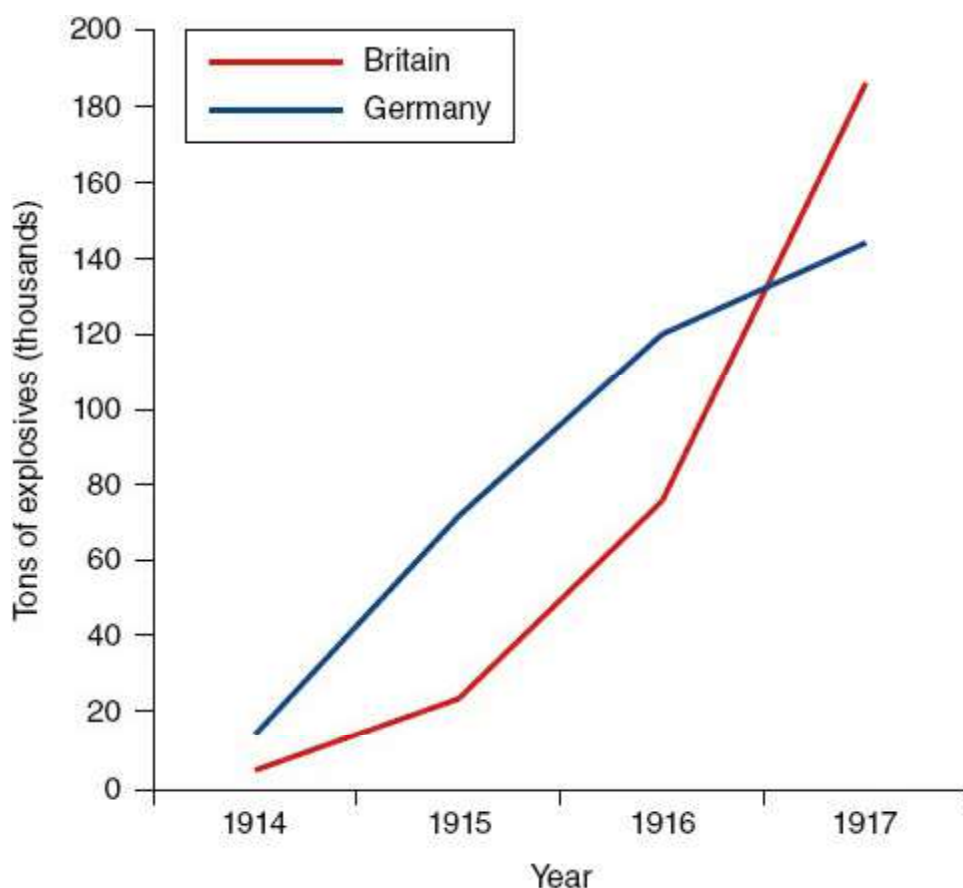
Most countries were not expecting a protracted conflict and were faced with severe shortages of munitions early in the war. In May 1915 the 'shell scandal' broke in the British press, in which shortages of shells were blamed for the failure of the British to achieve a breakthrough on the Western Front. It was estimated that the shortfall in weapons-production targets by June 1915 was in the region of 12 per cent in rifles and a massive 92 per cent in high-explosive shells. However, production was rapidly increased thereafter. France too increased its output of shells from a mediocre 4000 shells per day in October 1914 to 151,000 per day in June 1916. In Britain and Germany, machine-gun production increased, although more rapidly in Britain. This was primarily due to shortages of vital raw materials in Germany, while the Allies also benefited from increased resources and war supplies following the USA's entry into the war in 1917.

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## SOURCE W

? What can be learned from Source W about British and German armaments production during the First World War?

### British and German explosives production 1914–18



The less industrialized Russian economy, in particular, struggled to produce weaponry to equip its vast army. In 1915, the production of 70,000 rifles per month was woefully short of the estimated 200,000 requirement. However, even in Russia, sufficient armaments were soon being produced to supply at least the major needs of its troops. By September 1916, 4.5 million shells were made per month, a figure which bears comparison with the German output of seven million shells and far exceeded the Austro-Hungarian

\*\*\*\*\*ebook converter DEMO Watermarks\*\*\*\*\*

production of just one million per month.

### ***Government control***

The increase in munitions was the result of continually greater government control over industry. Most governments established departments that oversaw all production which gave priority to war industries in terms of raw materials, labour and investment. They also ensured efficient management and production methods and eventually took control over coalmines and other critical industries.

In Russia, government management was poor. The Russian War Ministry failed to co-ordinate distribution of supplies, resulting in serious munitions shortages by the spring of 1915. The situation improved with the establishment of a new War Industries Committee, contributing to increases in munitions production. Rifle production increased from 70,000 per month in 1915 to 110,000 per month by 1916. Central government's failure to supply Russian soldiers with basic food, clothing and medical supplies led to the creation of civilian-led organizations to make up for the shortfall. Russian troops also suffered from a disorganized and limited rail system which prevented effective distribution of supplies.

### **The workforce**

The increase in production of war supplies was only possible due to an enlargement of the industrial workforce. In most countries this was partly achieved by the employment of women on an unprecedented scale. In Britain, women constituted 23 per cent of the industrial workforce in 1914, rising to 34 per cent in 1918. In France, the percentage of female employees in the industrial and transport sectors rose from 34.8 per cent in 1911 to 40 per cent in 1918. In Austria-Hungary, the percentage of women in industry increased from 17.5 per cent in 1913 to 42.5 per cent by 1916. In Russia, the percentage of women in industry went up from 26 per cent in the pre-war period to 46 per cent by the end of the war. Women in Germany formed 55 per cent of the industrial workforce by 1918. In order to retain sufficient expertise within essential war industries, exemptions were also put in place from conscription for those men employed in certain sectors such as mining, steel and munitions production, as well as shipbuilding.

# Food shortages

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## To what extent did warring nations ration their supplies?

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Most warring European nations suffered from reduced food supplies during the war. This was partly the result of millions of farmers being conscripted into armies, but also resulted from factors such as poor transportation, less fertile soil, weather and blockades.

### Britain

Britain imported approximately 60 per cent of its food, in addition to many other products such as rubber and oil. This made it especially vulnerable to Germany's submarine warfare. Britain was reluctant to initiate major rationing and instead focused on growing more food; it farmed an additional 2.1 million acres of land by 1918. Britain also increased its imports of food from the USA, but was forced to establish a rationing system by April 1918 for animal products such as beef and for sugar. The government also tightly controlled food prices and encouraged people to go without certain foods on certain days.

### Germany

Germany imported about 30 per cent of its food before the war, in addition to many other products. Britain's naval blockade meant that Germany had to increase food production or face slow starvation of food and raw materials. By December 1915, Germany imported half of what it imported in 1913. Germany attempted to address its food deficiencies by creating substitute foods where flour, grain and mushrooms were made into a meat substitute. To save grain, the government ordered the slaughter of millions of pigs, which actually decreased the amount of protein available to the country, and removed a valuable source of manure that could be used to fertilize fields, which meant even less food was available in the long term. The lack of food in German cities led to strikes and riots, contributed to thousands of deaths by Spanish influenza and other diseases, and was one of the causes of the revolt in Germany at the end of 1918 that established a new government.

## Russia

In Russia, food shortages in the major cities were such that huge price inflation developed during the war. The average price of food in the major Russian cities rose by 89 per cent between 1914 and 1916, while the price of meat rose by 232 per cent and salt by a massive 483 per cent. The lack of food in urban areas was the result of a disorganized transportation system as well as the fact that peasants increasingly produced less food throughout the war. Peasants had little incentive to sell their products since all they received in return was increasingly worthless paper money for which there were few consumer goods to spend it on. Hunger was one of the main forces behind mass demonstrations against the government which led to the February 1917 revolution in Russia.

## Other nations

Austria-Hungary's transportation system was disorganized and inadequate to ensure proper food distribution throughout the country, leading to severe rationing in cities, as well as riots by 1918. By the end of the war, starving refugees from war zones crowded into Istanbul and other cities of the Ottoman Empire. France suffered far less, producing large quantities of its own food and supplementing these supplies with US imports. The USA was able to feed its own civilians and military, while providing enormous quantities of food to Britain, France and Italy.

## Outcomes and conclusions

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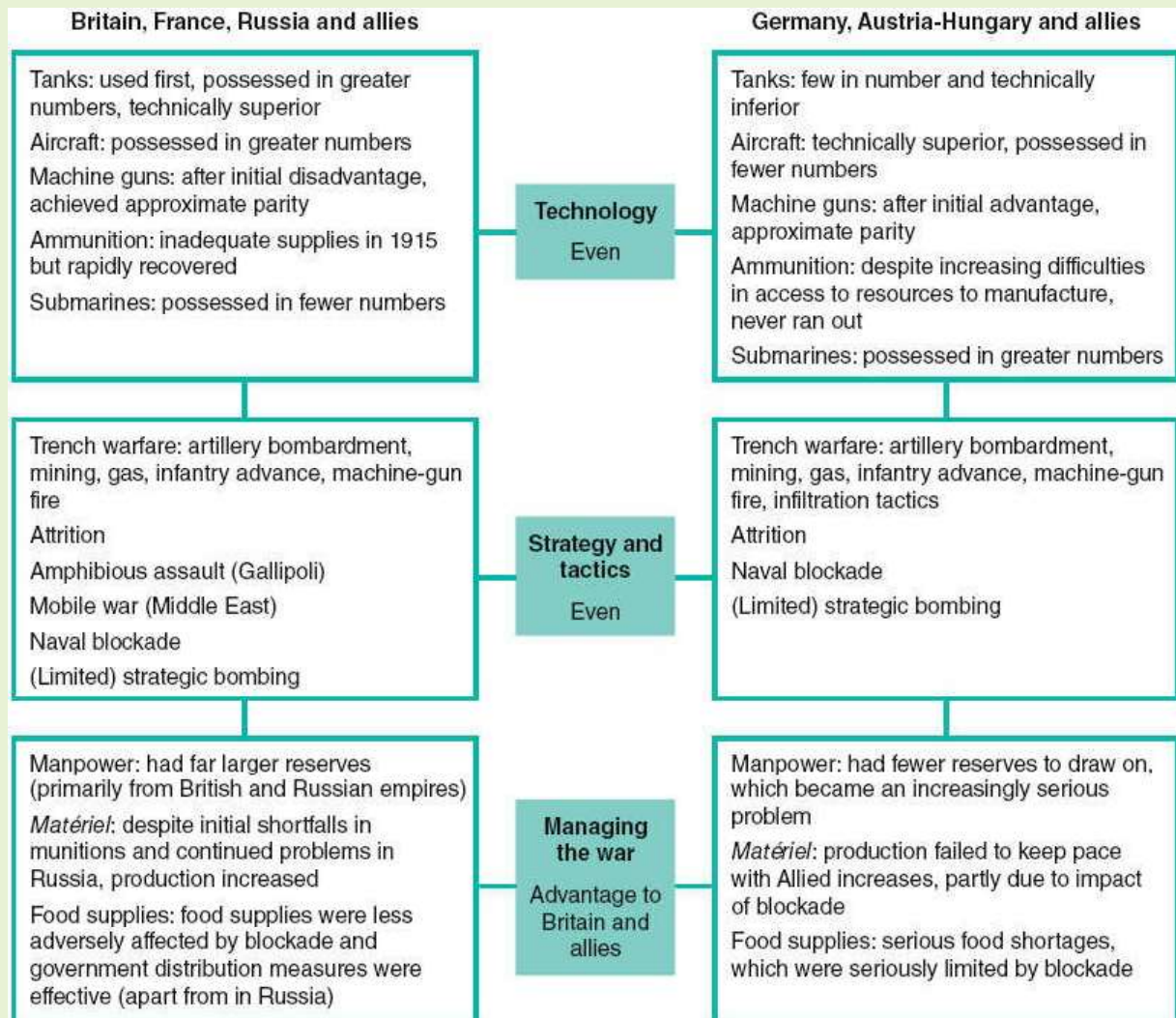
### **Why did the Allies win the First World War?**

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In terms of determining the outcome of the First World War, military strategy and tactics, technology and the management of the home front were all crucial. However, with rough technological parity between the sides, technology did not prove the decisive factor in determining the Allied victory, although it had an enormous impact in shaping the nature of the war itself. Ultimately, the outcome of the war was determined by its management. The Allies won because they had the resources to sustain a prolonged war in a way that Germany and its allies did not. With hindsight, once the Schlieffen

Plan failed and a long, two-front war set in, Germany was doomed to fail unless it could strike a decisive strategic victory against the Allies, something that it failed to achieve.

## SUMMARY DIAGRAM



Why did the Allies win the First World War?



## 6 The effects of the First World War

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*Key question: Did the impact of the First World War make future European conflict more or less likely?*

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The First World War had a profound effect on post-war politics, not least in territorial changes made to the map of Europe in the aftermath of the conflict. The post-war political settlement was an attempt to construct a meaningful peace, but in many ways it left a legacy of resentment and instability which contributed to future unrest. The socioeconomic consequences of the war were no less significant. Huge numbers of men had been killed and the lives of civilians altered through the experience of the war. Post-war European societies, politics and economies bore the influence of the war long after it had ended.

### The social impact of the First World War

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**To what extent did the First World War bring about social change?**

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The First World War had a profound impact on society across Europe. The casualties were enormous. On the home fronts, women experienced new freedoms and employment opportunities, and the state had intervened to an unprecedented degree in the economy and daily life of its citizens. Not all these changes, however, were long lasting.

### War casualties

All countries suffered huge casualties and incurred substantial debts as a result of the war, although some suffered more than others.

#### ***Soldiers***

The loss of life was far greater than any previous European conflict, with as many as 10 million men killed. Many men had been severely wounded and returned to their homes unable to work.

## SOURCE X

? According to Source X, did the Allies or the Central Powers suffer the most dead and wounded?

**The estimated numbers of men killed and wounded who served during the First World War.**

Country	Number of dead	Percentage killed of men who served	Number of wounded
Russia	1,800,000	15%	4,950,000
France	1,390,000	16%	4,330,000
Britain	900,000	10%	2,090,000
Italy	460,000	7%	960,000
USA	50,000	1%	230,000
Germany	2,040,000	15%	5,690,000
Austria-Hungary	1,020,000	13%	1,940,000
Ottoman Empire	240,000	24%	1,270,000

## *Civilians*

Many civilians were killed in the conflict, although estimates of the numbers vary wildly depending on whether the victims of famine and disease are included. In addition to those killed directly by the war, the Spanish influenza epidemic killed millions around the world.

## SOURCE Y

? What can be learned from Source Y about the impact of the war on civilians?

**The estimated number of European civilian deaths caused directly by**

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**military action, excluding famine and disease.**

Country	Civilian dead directly caused by the war
Russia	500,000
France	40,000
Britain	2,000
Belgium	7,000
Italy	4,000
USA	750
Germany	1,000
Austria-Hungary	120,000

---

## Women

Women contributed to the First World War more significantly than in any modern war up to that point.

### *Employment*

The war provided unprecedented employment opportunities for women, as they were needed to perform vital war work and to fill the jobs of men who had joined armies. In consequence, across Europe a larger proportion of the female population was employed than ever before. In France, the numbers of women in employment had risen to 47 per cent in 1918, compared to 35.5 per cent in 1911. In Britain, the rise in overall female employment went from 24 per cent in 1914 to 37 per cent in 1918. In Russia, women constituted almost 45 per cent of the industrial workforce, while Austria-Hungary had over one million women join war production.

Although women were successful as industrial workers, at the war's end many stopped working. By 1920, two-thirds of British women left jobs they had taken during the war. In France, by 1921, the proportion of women

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working had returned to 1911 levels. The nature of women's employment after the war did, however, see a more permanent shift away from **domestic service** to **white-collar employment**, although this was in part due to the expansion of this sector. Women also continued to receive lower wages than men. There was, however, a new spirit of freedom among many women in the 1920s as they began to challenge conventional expectations about behaviour by living alone, smoking, working and wearing new fashions, among other things.

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#### SOURCE Z

? How useful is Source Z in learning about women's employment in the First World War?

**Women workers inspect high-explosive shells in a British munitions factory in 1915.**



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### ***Enfranchisement***

Women were given the vote for the first time after the war in tacit acknowledgement of their contributions during the war in:

- Russia
- Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Canada and Britain in 1918
- Germany in 1919
- USA in 1920.

France did not **enfranchise** women until 1944, with other nations following in later years.

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## **The political impact of the First World War**

**How fair was the political settlement after the First World War?**

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## Post-war peace settlements

Once the fighting ceased, the enormous task of constructing lasting peace out of the ruins of war began. The peace treaties imposed on the losing countries by the Allies were an attempt to create a lasting peace (see page [65](#)).

However, these treaties have been criticized as actually contributing towards future instability in Europe by creating huge resentments among the defeated nations. These post-war settlements significantly redrew territorial boundaries in Europe, with all the losing countries losing land, as well as imposing restrictive military terms and punitive economic penalties.



### The key terms of the peace treaties signed after the First World War

Country	Treaty (date)	Land	Reparations	Military
Germany	Treaty of Versailles (1919)	Ten per cent of its land was removed and redistributed including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alsace-Lorraine to France</li> <li>• West Prussia, Posen and Silesia to Poland</li> <li>• Eupen, Malmedy and Moresnet to Belgium</li> <li>• Northern Schleswig to Denmark</li> <li>• Hultschin to Czechoslovakia</li> <li>• Danzig and the Saarland became mandates of the League of Nations</li> </ul> All colonies were lost	Reparations set at 132 billion gold marks (but never paid in full)	Army reduced to 100,000 men No air force, no tanks, no artillery Navy limited to six battleships, 12 destroyers, 12 torpedo boats and no submarines Rhineland became a demilitarized zone
Austria	Treaty of St Germain (1919)	Lost land including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bohemia and Moravia to Czechoslovakia</li> <li>• Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia to Yugoslavia</li> <li>• Galicia to Poland</li> <li>• The Tyrol to Italy</li> </ul>	Before a reparations figure was set Austria went bankrupt	Army reduced to 30,000 men No air force No navy
Hungary	Treaty of Trianon (1920)	Lost over two-thirds of its territory and 64 per cent of its pre-war population including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transylvania to Romania</li> <li>• Slovakia, Ruthenia to Czechoslovakia</li> <li>• Slovenia and Croatia to Yugoslavia</li> </ul>	Reparations set at 200 million gold crowns (payment suspended due to Hungary's financial difficulties)	Army reduced to 35,000 men No air force, no tanks, no submarines
Bulgaria	Treaty of Neuilly (1919)	Various lands lost to Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia (thereby losing access to the Mediterranean Sea)	Reparations set at £100 million	Army reduced to 20,000 men No air force Navy reduced to four torpedo boats, six motor boats and no submarines
Turkey	Treaty of Sèvres (1920)	Lost land including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South-western Anatolia to Italy</li> <li>• Western Anatolia to create Kurdish and Armenian states</li> <li>• Smyrna and Eastern Thrace to Greece</li> </ul> Middle Eastern possessions became mandates under the control of Britain and France	None	Army reduced to 50,000 men No air force, tanks or submarines

**SOURCE AA**

? What can be learned from Source AA about the ways in which Europe was altered after the First World War?

### **Central Europe after the peace settlements 1919–23**



The most significant changes to the map of Europe came with the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. The new countries of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were formed partly out of the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the closing weeks of the war and were given formal recognition by peace treaties. As the peacemakers redrew the territorial boundaries of Europe, they often tried to take into account the principle of **self-determination** in efforts to minimize the instability caused by the desire for ethnic groups to rule themselves which had helped to trigger the war in 1914. For example, the new state of Yugoslavia was primarily composed of Slavic peoples. Self-determination was not fully achieved, however, with some three million Hungarians and 12.5 per cent of Germany's pre-war population ending up in other states. It has been argued that this contributed to future instability as nationalist groups fought for independence, particularly in eastern Europe.

### ***The economic and political impact of the treaties***

The high **reparations** figures set by the post-war treaties have attracted much criticism for contributing to economic crisis and political instability. One of the first and most vehement critics of the Treaty of Versailles on economic grounds was the British economist John Maynard Keynes who, in his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920), condemned the treaty for imposing too harsh a settlement on Germany. He argued that it would harm German prospects of recovery and also longer-term Allied economic interests by limiting prospects for trade, as well as giving Germany grounds for vengeance in the future.

Criticisms of the post-war treaties have largely centred on the accusation that they contributed to political instability in Europe, ultimately leading to the Second World War. This is discussed in [Chapter 2](#) (see pages [111–13](#)).

## **Change of government and political unrest**

### ***Russia***

In February 1917, revolution in Russia forced the army to replace the autocratic system ruled by the tsar with the Provisional Government, which worked to continue the war against the Central Powers while attempting to alleviate food shortages caused by the war. This government's failures



resulted in another revolution in October 1917 by the Bolsheviks, who signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk that ended Russia's war with the Central Powers (see page 47). By this time Russia was collapsing as an organized state and civil war erupted, ending only in 1921 after the death of up to eight million people. The Bolsheviks were victorious and the Soviet Union, as Russia became known, was established as the world's first communist state. As early as 1918, the Bolsheviks helped to sponsor political unrest throughout Europe, hoping that more regions would come under communist control.

## ***Germany***

Germany became a republic at the end of 1918. This government was formed by the parties of the *Reichstag* with army approval. The republic survived a series of communist-inspired revolts:

- Berlin in January and March 1919
- Munich until May 1919
- Ruhr valley in March 1920.

It also dealt with two attempts by **ultra-nationalists** to overthrow the government:

- Kapp Putsch in Berlin in 1920 by a **paramilitary** group
- Munich Putsch in Munich in 1923 by the Nazi Party.

The German Republic stabilized and prospered with multi-party elections after the economy began to recover in 1924, only to suffer a series of political crises as a result of the **Great Depression** (see page 114).

## ***Italy***

Italy entered the First World War specifically to gain territory laid out in the secret Treaty of London signed by the Allies in 1915. After the war, Italy was denied some of the land it was promised and other territory it also wanted. Soldiers had been promised jobs and land during the war that was not forthcoming afterwards, instead returning to poverty and poor living conditions. The country was politically divided between industrialists, workers, landowners and impoverished peasants, leading to violence and the formation of armed groups. Benito Mussolini emerged as the leader of the Blackshirts, a paramilitary group sponsored by industrialists and who battled opposing groups. By 1922 many **conservatives**, including Italy's king,

believed that Mussolini's group, now formed into a political party, was the only group that could save them from a Bolshevik-style communist revolution. Mussolini was named prime minister and soon established a dictatorship that lasted until 1943.

### ***Central and eastern Europe***

Austria-Hungary was dismantled into a series of new republics, while other territories were granted to **constitutional monarchies**. Essentially:

- Austria formed an unstable republic in which socialists and conservatives often battled, leading to a single-party, conservative state in 1933.
- Hungary formed a version of constitutional monarchy with a former naval officer acting as regent, but serving basically as a conservative dictator, for the deposed Habsburg Emperor.
- Czechoslovakia had a stable, multi-party republic dominated by Czech nationals.
- Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were constitutional monarchies in which kings enhanced their power continually until the outbreak of the Second World War, at the expense of multi-party government.
- Poland established a conservative military dictatorship by the mid-1920s to counter socialists.

## **Economic effects of the First World War**

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**How were countries in Europe affected economically by the First World War?**

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### **Germany**

Germany lost land and people as a result of the Treaty of Versailles (see page 65), including industrialized areas such as Upper Silesia. These losses compounded Germany's economic difficulties since the nation had also lost most of its merchant ships during the war and its international trade. The country was essentially bankrupt and was after 1921 saddled with reparations of 132 billion gold marks which Allied states demanded as compensation for their own losses during the war. Germany declared in 1922 that it would be



unable to make its annual payment, leading to an occupation of part of the country by French and Belgian troops, known as the Ruhr Crisis.

**Hyperinflation** hit the German economy, meaning that Germany's currency lost its value while prices rose. Savings were wiped out, people went hungry and international intervention was required. A US-negotiated resolution of the crisis led to a reorganization of Germany's reparations, the withdrawal of French and Belgian troops, and the extension of loans to Germany which stimulated the economy, leading to major growth in the mid-1920s.

## France

Much of northern France was destroyed during the war, including thousands of factories, villages, railways, farmland and much more. These losses were joined by the loss of overseas markets for French products during the conflict and the loss of all funds lent to Russia; the new Bolshevik government of Russia, named the Soviet Union after 1922, refused to honour any of the old government's debt obligations. France had also borrowed huge sums from Britain and the USA. It was the intention of the French government that German reparations would rebuild their northern regions and pay their international war debt. Limited German payments meant that France recovered slowly economically from the First World War with high rates of taxation to pay for the national debt.

## Britain

Before the First World War, Britain was a nation that lent far more money than it borrowed. During the war, however, Britain borrowed enormous sums from the USA and left the conflict in huge debt. The USA also took control of many of Britain's overseas markets in the early years of the war when Britain shifted to war production. Parts of Britain's overseas territories, such as India, became much more economically self-sufficient for their own consumer goods during the conflict, leading to a further decrease in demand for British goods at the war's conclusion. In order to pay its debt, Britain needed France to pay its debt and Germany to economically recover so that Britain could export its products there. Britain only began to return to economic prosperity in the late 1920s, just as the Great Depression (see page **114**) began.

## USA

The USA entered the war in 1917 after years of lending money to Britain, France and Italy, as well as selling these states war supplies and food. The USA also took control of markets around the world which these nations could no longer supply. The US economy, already by far the world's largest, expanded further when the USA joined the conflict. With millions joining the workforce there was demand for construction of factories, homes and infrastructure throughout the country. At the war's conclusion, the USA was more prosperous than at any earlier time in its history, with expanding businesses, markets and investments. By the late 1920s, however, excessive borrowing and collapsing agricultural product prices led to the Great Depression (see page [114](#)).

## Central and eastern Europe

Many new states were established in central and eastern Europe. Most of these suffered severe economic problems after the war since they were formerly parts of much larger, economically integrated empires. Poland, for example, had been part of three separate countries and each of these three parts was linked to its former empire by railways, but not to each other. Hungary had been the grain-producing section of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now found itself with little industry and producing 500 per cent more farm products than it could consume in the first years after the war. Austria had been the administrative district of the same empire and now found itself with factories, little food and a massive government that once managed tens of millions of people that it could not support. This pattern was repeated throughout central and eastern Europe, where hyperinflation destroyed savings, prevented economic recovery and led to political instability. League of Nations loans helped both Austria and Hungary to re-establish some economic stability, while Czechoslovakia, home to 80 per cent of Austria-Hungary's industry, enjoyed prosperity.

## Russia/Soviet Union

Russia left the war officially in March 1918 after signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and then descended into civil war in which the Bolsheviks fought various anti-communist groups known collectively as the Whites. War

Communism was established in Bolshevik-controlled areas. This was primarily an economic policy in which:

- the use of currency was abolished
- the government owned all property, industries and banking
- peasants were forced to give food to Bolshevik forces
- all production was geared for war.

While the Bolsheviks won the Russian Civil War by 1921, War Communism was a failure. Millions starved as a result of either having food seized by government forces or peasants refusing to grow grain that might be seized. Some Bolshevik soldiers rebelled as a result of privations, and people stopped working in many industries from lack of pay, food and things to purchase. This led to the New Economic Policy in 1921, in which:

- peasants paid taxes in grain and were able to sell for profit anything remaining
- smaller industries could be privately operated
- government industries would produce consumer goods to encourage peasants to grow more grain to buy these goods
- government would export excess grain to purchase modern machinery to build industries to strengthen the nation.

This programme continued through most of the 1920s and restored Russian economic strength, which became known as the **Soviet Union** in 1922, to 1914 levels by 1928.

## Conclusion

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**Did the impact of the First World War make future European conflict more or less likely?**

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Verdicts on the post-war treaties are now moving towards the consensus that although they were certainly flawed, they were not too harsh. They certainly could have been harsher. Germany, for example, remained unified in contrast to its division in the aftermath of the Second World War. The fundamental weakness with the treaties is instead increasingly seen to be that they were simultaneously too harsh and too lenient; that they gave reasons for

vengeance while not removing fully the means to enact that vengeance in the future. Despite this, the causal links also frequently made to the origins of the Second World War are now also increasingly challenged as being too simplistic (see [Source BB](#)).

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#### SOURCE BB

? What is the verdict of Source BB about the extent to which the post-war peace treaties should be blamed for future unrest?

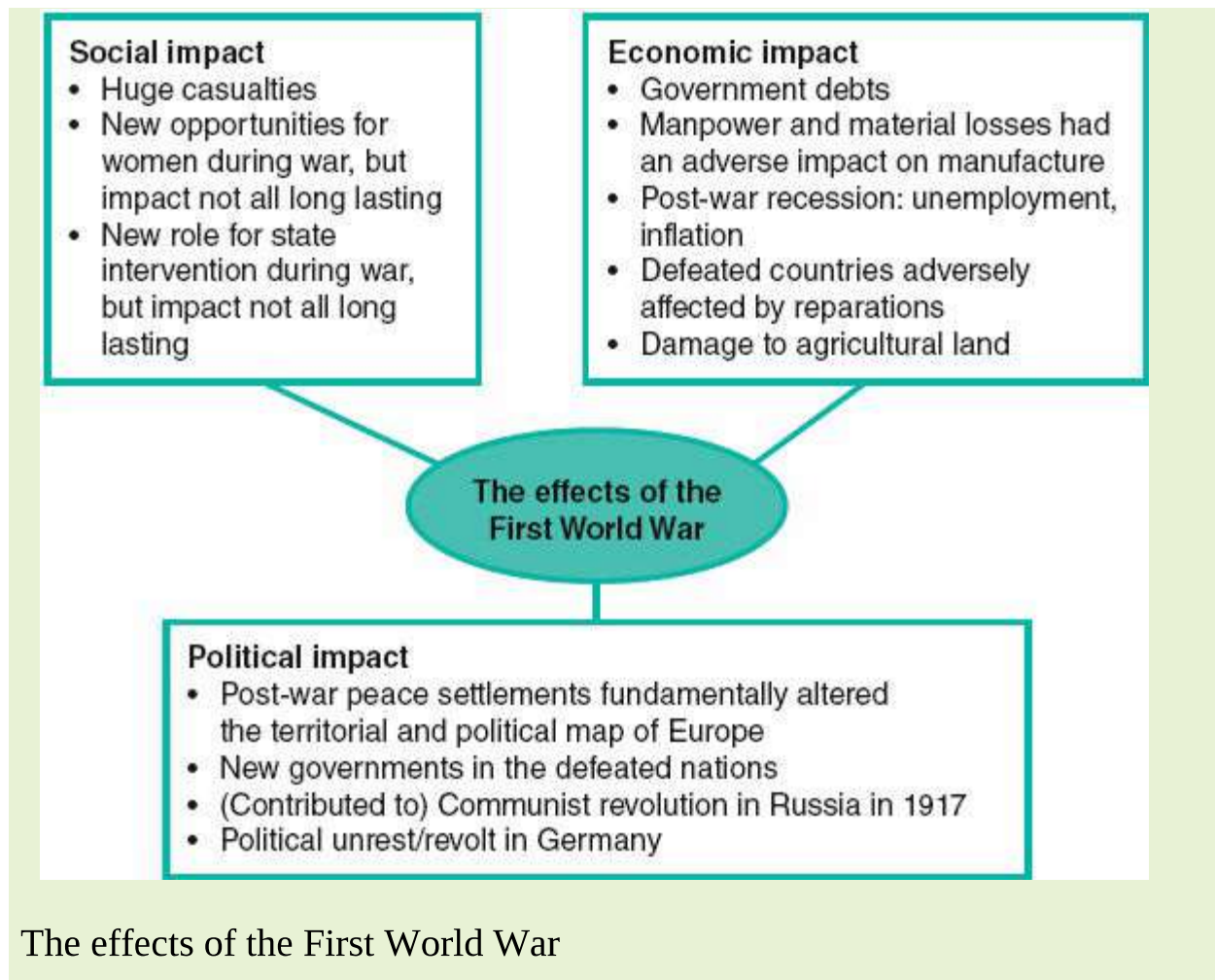
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**Excerpt from *The Peacemakers* by Margaret MacMillan, published by Random House, New York, 2003, page 500.**

*[The Allies] made mistakes, of course. If they could have done better, they certainly could have done much worse. They tried ... to build a better order. They could not foresee the future and they certainly could not control it. That was up to their successors. When war came in 1939, it was as a result of twenty years of decisions taken or not taken, and not of arrangements made in 1919.*

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#### SUMMARY DIAGRAM



## Chapter summary

### First World War 1914–18

The First World War was fought between Germany and Austria-Hungary and their allies, against France, Russia, Britain and their allies. In many ways it marked a new era in warfare. It was the first truly global war, involving 32 nations, with fighting taking place in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. New modern military technologies were employed on a substantial scale for the first time with the first significant military usage of the tank, submarines, aircraft (in fighter and bomber capacities), poison gas and the machine gun. These technologies changed the nature of modern warfare, although in the First World War their tactical deployment and technical capabilities remained highly limited. Military technologies, however, did not

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determine the outcome of the war. This was decided more by the ability of each state to sustain the enormous material and manpower demands of a four-year-long modern conflict. These demands made it the first example of modern total war which inevitably involved civilians as participants and potential targets to an unprecedented degree.

The origins of the First World War were long in the making. The atmosphere of anxiety, tension and hostility between the major European powers which made war likely by 1914 had been generated by decades of economic, imperial and military competition and rivalry. When, in June 1914, the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand ignited various long-term tensions making the prospect of war in the Balkans a real possibility, many of the major powers became embroiled. This escalated a potentially localized conflict to a world war, the length and horror of which none of the major powers had expected.

The legacy of the First World War was profound. In Russia and Germany, where the war had prompted revolutionary political change, the impact was most strongly and lastingly apparent. The Allied peace settlements that were imposed on the defeated nations brought about fundamental territorial, political and economic changes to Europe. Whether these changes, by fuelling resentments and regrets in defeated and victorious nations respectively, contributed directly to the outbreak of the Second World War is however, more debatable. Regrettably, the First World War's epitaph 'the war to end all wars' was not to be one of its lasting impacts.



## Activities

**1** In groups represent one of the following countries:

- Germany
- Austria-Hungary
- Russia
- Britain
- France.

Prepare notes to defend your country from the accusation that they



were responsible for the outbreak of the First World War.

Each country should take it in turns to be questioned by the class to see how well they defend themselves against claims that they were responsible for the outbreak of war.

At the end of the debate take a vote as to which country was most responsible.

- 2 Create a list of the ways in which the First World War could be considered to be an example of total war. Include specific examples from a range of countries.
- 3 Use one of the key questions from this chapter as an essay prompt and, in seven minutes, create an introduction for your essay. Share this with a partner or in a group and discuss what evidence would support your argument.
- 4 As a class, create a timeline of First World War events. Use a different colour to note events on the various war fronts. Add other details to your graph such as dates that certain technologies were introduced, such as tanks, poison gas and so forth. Create essay questions based on your timeline and use these while revising.
- 5 Hold a class debate regarding the following question: Which Allied state was most affected by the outcome of the First World War?
- 6 Hold another class debate regarding the following question: Which Central Power was most negatively affected by the outcome of the First World War? Rank the defeated Central Powers in order of most severely to least severely affected. Justify your answers. Remember that territorial loss is only one possible negative consequence of many for the defeated states.