

⊕
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

The Great War

Western Front and Home Front

2nd edition
HUNT TOOLEY



palgrave





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

© Hunt Tooley 2003, 2016

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First edition published 2003 as *The Western Front*

This edition published 2016 by
PALGRAVE

Palgrave in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave is a global imprint of the above companies and is represented throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978–1–137–47125–3 hardback
ISBN 978–1–137–47126–0 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.



⊕


NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Contents

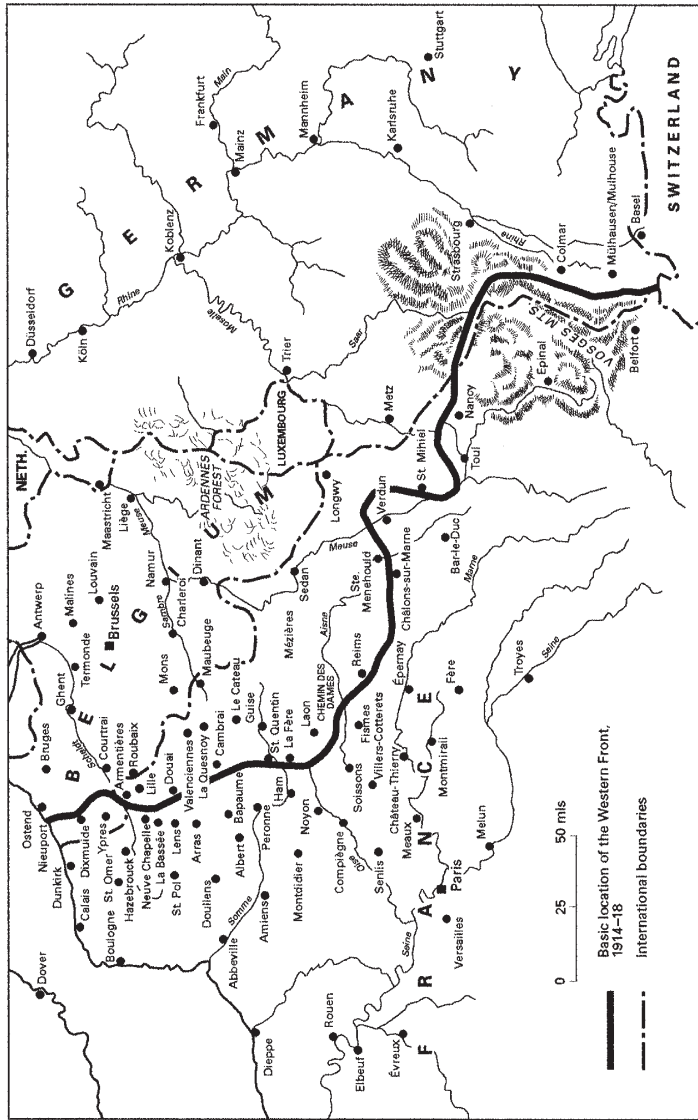
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	vi
<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	x
<i>List of Maps, Photographs, and Cartoons</i>	xiv
1 Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak	1
2 Mobility and Unity	41
3 Stalemate and Mobilization, 1915/1916	75
4 Innovation, Persuasion, Centralization	107
5 The Crucible of War: 1916	145
6 1917: New Strains, New War	179
7 Transformations: Politics, Culture, Warfare	217
8 Collapse, Armistice, Conclusions	259
<i>Notes</i>	282
<i>Suggested reading</i>	306


NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

List of Maps, Photographs, and Cartoons

Map, “The Western Front”	xv
Cartoon, “As Between Friends”	xvi
Cartoon, “I no longer recognize parties...”	40
Photography, Berlin Send-Off, 1914	43
Cartoon, “Unlucky Move”	74
Map, “The Battles in Flanders”	84
Photograph, French Trench System	96
Cartoon, “Cannons, Munitions...”	106
Cartoon, “The Arming of English Trade Vessels”	144
 Map, “The Attack on Verdun”	150
Photograph, German Artillery Deployment	152
Map, “The Battle of the Somme”	160
Cartoon, “Am I as Offensive as I might be”	178
Photograph, Women at Frankford Arsenal, Pennsylvania	206
Cartoon, “Physically Fit!”	216
Photograph, Crowd for the 369th RIUS Parade, Manhattan	223
Photography, Enemy Aliens in Toronto	227
Cartoon, “They are going to make peace.”	258
Photograph, The Spanish Flu at Camp Funston, Kansas	277

NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Map of the Western Front

NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



"British Lion (to Russian Bear): If we hadn't had such a thorough understanding I might almost be tempted to ask what you're doing there with our little playfellow."

The Triple Entente (the "understanding" about imperial disputes that was the heart of the wartime Alliance) took form around the agreement by Russia and Britain to divide Persia into spheres of influence in 1911. The Germans now faced France, Britain, and Russia all locked together in "understanding." The cartoon comments on some early spats between the newfound friends. From *Punch*, London, Dec. 13, 1911. "As Between Friends," cartoon by "Craven Hill" (Leonard Raven-Hill). Made available by the HathiTrust Digital Library.



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

1

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

World War I broke out during the late summer of 1914 as the result of a crisis in the diplomatic relations between two antagonistic states: the rambling, jaded, multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the young but proud country of Serbia, the most dynamic of successor states to the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The antagonisms were both long-standing and real, and the interconnected nature of European power relations brought the two basic prewar camps into open hostilities in the first days of August 1914.

Historians and diplomats have argued about the origins of World War I intermittently, and frequently heatedly, since 1914. Even as late as the 1960s and 1970s, scholars carried on an acrimonious debate about who started the war and how it started. Since this book is about the war itself, we need to look at these historical discussions only enough to make sense of them and in particular to relate trends in the prewar period to the theme of this book, the relationship between the battle front and the home fronts among the Western Front powers. We shall indeed find some important background to wartime behavior and wartime events in the run-up to the war.

In the wake of World War I, scholars in Europe and North America fell into two different camps as to how the war had started, both of them influenced by contemporary events. On the one hand, Germany was seen as the brutal aggressor, a view related to wartime propaganda about “the evil Hun,” but moderated somewhat for calmer consumption. The Germans still came out as the side of evil, though increasingly Austria-Hungary shared the blame, in some cases even eclipsing Germany. Yet by the mid-1920s a number of Western historians began to “revise” the old wartime view by pointing out that all the belligerents had contributed in some way to the outbreak of the war.¹ By the 1930s, this revisionist view had for the most part won the field, and in a sense it comprised one of the bases of thinking about the appeasement of Hitler’s Germany: if the first war had not ended so harshly and unjustly for the Germans, this argument ran, and if they had not been forced to sign a treaty





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



which condemned them alone, the Germans would not have followed so vile a person as Hitler.

Of course, World War II intervened. This time there was no doubt as to war guilt: the Germans, it was said – or rather, Hitler himself – had started the war in spite of enormous efforts by Britain and France to appease the Germans and rectify their just complaints. New histories about the First World War were relatively few in the wake of the Second World War, and they tended either to utilize new sources to condemn German foreign policy before 1914 and after,² or to approach the problem with interpretations that reflected current world problems, in particular those of alliance and international organization.³

Hence, one opinion which enjoyed currency among historians in the 1950s was that the war was caused by the alliance systems dating from the last third of the nineteenth century. In this view, alliances became so tightly knit that they eventually, and blindly, gave up their own decision-making powers and plunged into war. Other historians of the post-World War II period, perhaps in response to contemporary desires for an international order guaranteed by the new United Nations or some other structure, argued the reverse: that the years before World War I represented “international anarchy,” in which the brute interests of each state dominated their behavior to such an extent that all plunged into war together.

Neither of these structural interpretations held together very well after the Fischer Thesis came to dominate discussions about war origins in the 1960s. The German historian Fritz Fischer had in effect combined a structural view of origins with an analysis of the historical contingencies, or “real” events and records. Fischer drew tremendous fire from his fellow German historians by asserting not only that Germany started the war, but that German elites had consciously brought on the war as the solution to domestic problems (rising working-class dissatisfaction) and the attempt to become a “world power,” as opposed to merely a continental one.⁴

After a decade of scholarly strife and a second decade of calmer analysis, historians in Europe and North America tended to accept at least the idea that Germany had started the war, though many historians in the end thought that the Fischerites had stretched interpretations farther than the evidence warranted. Another principal criticism was that Fischer and his followers had generated their whole thesis with very little reference to the other powers. Fischer had adopted as a rule of thumb that domestic politics enjoyed “primacy” when national leaders made diplomatic decisions. But he and






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

3

his followers seemed to recognize this principle only for Germany. Could the British, French, and Russians have had similarly aggressive designs in 1914? The reexaminations which criticized the Fischer school approach did a great deal, if not to rehabilitate Germany, at least to indicate that all the powers nursed aggressive ambitions.⁵ Scholars on both sides of the Atlantic used the opportunity of this kind of intellectual flux to examine anew many older views of war origins and many new issues, in particular the kind of “mentalities” which characterized the social and political cultures on both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, by the 1980s the return of the interest in the contingencies of events, and in narrative itself, led to new perspectives on the outbreak of the war and fresh work on many of the older, purely military or diplomatic issues involved. Indeed, as the hundredth anniversary of the Archduke’s assassination approached, new interpretations and new perspectives seemed to come in waves. Indeed, many of the new studies and recent doctoral dissertations demonstrate the extent to which there are still unread documents and unconsulted sources which can shape our view of the conflict in the future.⁶



What follows is an attempt to incorporate many of the newer, post-Fischer perspectives into a coherent framework for understanding the war’s outbreak. We will be very interested here in such recently emerging issues as the aggressive-mindedness which characterized military planning in the heyday of Social Darwinism. One would also expect that ideas about combat, community, and killing from before the war impacted the shape of the war once it started. We will also review the internal conflicts and financial disruptions (attendant upon modernization and the growth of the state) which made war appear as a viable solution to domestic crises, and not least the whole complex of technological changes which influenced not only the training and tactics of European armies, but their relationship to the policies of their governments as well.



The European system and war

We might begin by looking at the commonplace assertion that Europe experienced 100 years of relative peace after the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815. Scholars have tended to explain the war as an aberration from a relatively long peace, the result of a “powder keg” waiting to explode, then exploding. More recently, some historians have pointed out that the century from 1815 (the settlement of the Napoleonic Wars) to 1914 was after all something of an aberration;



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

since at least the fifteenth century, the “normal” mode of Europe during any given few decades was war at some fairly virulent level.

This view serves as a useful corrective to the exaggerated picture of a peaceful Atlantis sinking under the weight of war. A related and more “global” view likewise qualifies our ideas about “100 years of peace.” Organized violence in Europe had perhaps been alleviated during the period 1815–1914, but one could still count well over a dozen major wars in which one or more European powers participated, even if none of them turned out to be the benchmark “general” war, including most of the Great Powers. Hence, in this period, all European Great Powers experienced warfare, and not just in border skirmishes or colonial pacifications, but in real wars resulting in large numbers of casualties and great public expense. It is true that many of these wars were fought between European and non-European powers, but the bulk were not. It is less accurate to say – as is sometimes asserted – that after the war-intensive period from 1848 to 1871, no two European powers fought each other. This would only be true in the limited sense of the word “powers,” since European states fought each other in the Russo-Turkish War and in the two Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913. And Spain fought the United States in 1898. After 1871, large-scale European military forces were deployed in three major wars, not counting the Balkan wars or the Spanish-American War. Further, in this period of imperialism, minor wars and “pacifications” fought by European armies would number in the dozens. Still, qualified as the term “general peace” needs to be, it is clear that Europe experienced much less war in the 44 years after 1871 than in the 57 years before it.

Indeed, in the year 1871, Great Power relations reshaped themselves dramatically when the north German state of Prussia stepped into the leadership of the confederated German states and defeated France in a short but very violent war. Even as Paris was under siege, the architect of German unification, Otto von Bismarck, was able to convince the various German princes to swear allegiance to the Prussian king and to add to his titles that of German Emperor in a new, united Germany. Italy had followed a similar path of unification a decade before, creating from several disparate states a single Italy under the kingship of the ruling house of northern Italian Piedmont.

The club of large, powerful European states had changed significantly: before 1860, Britain, France, Russia, and Austria formed the membership (with a weak Prussia on the side); after 1871, the list was Britain, France (now weakened and humiliated), Russia,






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

5

Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany. The expansion of the number of Great Powers complicated international relations considerably. The British Prime Minister was exaggerating only a little when he declared the balance of power “entirely destroyed” in 1871. The idea of the “balance of power” had never meant that all Great Powers should be equal, but that things should be arranged in such a way that no dominant combination would be likely. The new configuration could have been “balanced” along the lines of the old thinking, and Bismarck, the preeminent international statesman of his day, created something like a balance during the 1870s and 1880s by keeping France isolated, by keeping Britain unthreatened, and by keeping Russia friendly.⁷



The technical aspects of this system need explaining here only in outline. And one must start with the hatred that the French felt for the new Germany. The victory of 1870/71 had been a crushing, humiliating blow to a country accustomed to humiliating others during 400 years of war-making and aggression. During the war, France’s emperor was captured and imprisoned, the capital was surrounded and shelled, and government members had to escape Paris by balloon. The Germans declared their Empire in Louis XIV’s spectacular Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. In the peace settlement, the French lost the eastern province of Alsace and a part of Lorraine. On top of everything, France had to pay Germany five billion francs by way of indemnity. It is hardly surprising that the French were full of rancor toward the Germans in the wake of 1871. Bismarck predicted, “France will never forgive us,” and ordered Europe accordingly. The Iron Chancellor did attempt to help France toward an expanded colonial empire which would engage French energies and renew French pride. One might also point out that many of France’s home-grown social, demographic, and political problems might have provided distraction from the wounds of 1871. Yet a substantial school of French political and military leaders tended to nurse a smoldering sense of *revanchisme*, a systematic desire for revenge, during the next 40 years.⁸



Bismarck made much of Germany’s status as a “saturated” power, one with no territorial desires in Europe. France hoped fervently to regain lost territory. The centerpiece to Bismarck’s diplomacy was thus the diplomatic isolation of France. He achieved this isolation by entering into a series of alliances with France’s potential suitors.⁹ During the 1870s, Bismarck worked out a “three emperors’ alliance” designed to keep both Austria-Hungary and Russia friendly to the new Germany and on guard against France. Yet during a crisis



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



which drew Germany and France close to war in 1875, the Russians proved unreliable, and indeed the British also demonstrated that another German attack on France would not be acceptable. Bismarck's role, moreover, in scaling down Russian gains at the expense of the Ottoman Empire after the 1877/78 Russo-Turkish War led to bad feelings on the Russian side. Bismarck dealt with this problem at both ends. First, in 1879 he created a new bond with Austria-Hungary, the Dual Alliance, which would remain in effect through World War I. The goal of the Alliance was to arrange for aid from the other partner in case one was attacked by Russia, or benevolent neutrality in the event of an attack by any other country. This Dual Alliance was made Triple when it was expanded eight years later to include Italy.

Yet the great chancellor was always concerned about keeping the Russians on his side, from long-standing association with St. Petersburg (as ambassador years before), from his fear that a France backed by Russia would be able to carry out a war of revenge, and from his hope of keeping solidarity among the three authoritarian European empires: Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. Hence, after a number of desultory attempts to keep the Russians friendly, in 1887 Germany concluded with Russia the Reinsurance Treaty, whereby each side agreed to remain neutral should the other engage in war with another party (though this agreement was not to apply should Germany attack France or Russia attack Austria-Hungary). Secret clauses indicated that Germany would support Russia in gaining access to the straits which contained Russia in the Black Sea, a long-standing Russian goal. The treaty, potentially renewable of course, was to last for a period of three years.

Meanwhile, a new emperor came to power in 1888, 31-year-old Wilhelm II. Wilhelm's personality turned out to be an important factor in European international politics, and the first major international episode he would influence was at hand. Having suffered through two years of Bismarck's irritated and irritating tutelage, the young emperor – with extensive but haphazard knowledge and a vain and overbearing personality – accepted Bismarck's resignation, hoping now to run his country from the throne. Disliking Bismarck's Russian orientation, he favored shoring up flagging relations with the British, whose distrust of Russia bordered on mania. Advisors in the German Foreign Office likewise downplayed the importance of the Russians. Hence the Reinsurance Treaty lapsed.

Like much German policy during the reign of Wilhelm II, this decision reflected an unwillingness to contemplate the potential







NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

7



ramifications of a given measure. In this case, the lost link to Russia had an immediate impact. If Bismarck had managed to keep France in isolation, as a kind of diplomatic pariah, the Russians were in a sense preoccupied with the terrible prospect of becoming a diplomatic pariah themselves. This diplomatic problem was exacerbated by the economic problems of the country. Worried that their country was lagging far behind Western and Central Europe in industrial development, Russian leaders from the time of the Crimean War onward feared that Russia would not be able to hold its own as a great power. From the 1860s onward, they attempted to foster industry, but they needed capital accumulation (typical of the great middle classes of the Western European countries). Sergei Witte, a railway executive who became Minister of Finance in 1893, proposed a dramatic program of “industrialization from above”; and the commitment of the Russian state to this meant that at the same time the Russians were searching for a diplomatic partner, they were also in need of massive loans to fuel the ambitious industrialization program. Russia found both in France. For their part, the French could gain security by making friends on Germany’s east. The Russians could gain not only a diplomatic partner, but the French market of saving consumers, who in fact bought into Russian industrialization by purchasing the Russian loan issues floated in France. Almost incidentally, the French middle class, that class which formed the saving and investing public, came to have a close interest in the industrial development and general economic well-being of the Russian Empire.¹⁰



The Alliance was a fact by January 1894. Each partner would be obliged to join in the war should the other be attacked by Germany, and to mobilize should any member of the Triple Alliance marshal its military forces. Where the Dual Alliance had formed the first link that would become part of the belligerent coalitions in the Great War, the Franco-Russian Alliance formed the first link of the coalition that would become the Entente powers.

Though historians have frequently blamed the “alliance system” – these partly secret, partly open treaties and agreements arranged by Bismarck – for increasing the tensions which led to World War I, in fact this system worked quite well in keeping European powers out of wars with each other during two decades and even beyond. The problem with Bismarck’s “system” was that his successors cut Germany’s ties with Russia. Thus, where Bismarck had effectively kept France without close allies since the 1860s, the rebuff of the Russians sent them into the arms of France. This Franco-Russian





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

connection now produced in reality the threat that had haunted Bismarck: should European powers go to war, Germany would find itself with formidable enemies on both the west and the east. Germany could probably defeat France or Russia singly, but together, the team of backward but well-endowed Russia and industrialized and bitter France produced nightmares for German strategic planners.

Finally, one might supplement this somewhat mechanical reading of the European system with new interpretations which emphasize the shifting of the world balance of forces, not just the European system itself. One would expect that the rise of the new powers, especially the United States and Japan, would impact upon European diplomacy, which was, after all, hardly a hermetically sealed world. Scholars utilizing a global approach to the history of the prewar period have shown that this rapid rise of non-European powers made for tremendous instability within the world subsystem of Europe, as did dramatic changes within the economic and demographic structure of Europe itself. Yet in a sense, Europe never held such a sway over the rest of the globe as it did at that time, politically, militarily, and economically.

In the economic sphere, European world trade skyrocketed at the end of the century and enjoyed the unique advantage of the international gold standard. Until 1914, all countries tying their currencies to gold (which could be cleared through the world's greatest banking center, London) could rely on fixed exchange rates and the self-regulation of international exchange. Since an unhampered market operates as a huge communications network, allowing buyers and sellers to agree on prices, the communications capabilities of the international market at the turn of the century backed a tremendously efficient system of distribution. Yet liberal economic policies in Western countries which allowed this system to spread began to be eclipsed by the end of the century, as economic nationalism and neo-mercantilism dictated beggar-thy-neighbor economic policies of protective tariffs. By 1900, Britain and the Netherlands stood alone as the practitioners of free trade. Steep protective tariffs in all other great trading countries made not only for inefficiencies in the international market, but for frictions among countries as well. The classic gold standard held sway until the end of the twentieth century's first decade, some would argue until a bit later. But one way or the other, the liberal order of a more or less self-regulating international economy was eroding as 1914 approached, and in the economic realm of currency, too, the Western states were devising ways to introduce fiat currencies that





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak


9

would allow their governments much more autonomy, and much less accountability, in times of both peace and war.¹¹

Social conflicts and the origins of the war



Industrialization had a transformative impact on the shape of societies which the European powers would lead to war. By the end of the nineteenth century, over half of the populations of Western Europe and Germany lived in urban settings. The growing working class had been on the minds of most social and political theorists and activists since early in the century, especially after the revolutionary outbursts of the 1840s. Though it seems clear that most working-class people were seeking a better life for themselves and their children individually and not as a part of some broader, altruistic behavior, “working-class” movements did indeed spring up around mid-century in Western and Central Europe, including many led by uprooted middle-class intellectuals, like Karl Marx, who hoped not for gradual improvement in the condition of the working class, but for the overthrow of “bourgeois” society and the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class, or “proletariat,” as Marx called the class of urban workers. After the spectacular class confrontations in the 1840s (the Chartist movement in England, and some phases of the 1848 Revolutions on the Continent), social conflict in this sense relaxed a great deal toward the end of the century. An exception to this general rule would be the unevenly changing societies of Southern Europe, where the jump from manorial relations to the bureaucratic state produced enough discontent to spawn the violent anarcho-syndicalist movement in the late nineteenth century.



But overall the main question here is: did the new shape of industrialized society in some way destabilize Europe, or contribute to the origins of the war? Standard views of the social dynamics of this period have changed a great deal since the 1960s, an early heyday of social history. Inspired to a great extent by Marxist theory, early social historians tended to agree that the main distinctions in Europe were class distinctions that cut across international boundaries, that the great movement of history in the decades before World War I was a world crisis involving capitalist overproduction and the manipulation of European and, indeed, worldwide working classes. “Alienation,” as Marx called it, eased somewhat by the early twentieth century as a result of habitual accommodation by the working class with the capitalist class. But the clash of classes nonetheless led European elites to decide that only war could solve the social crisis



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



at home. Some historians adopted a more sociological view in seeing the discontents as arising from “modernization,” a sociological model designed to give depth to some of the cruder Marxist assumptions of social history.¹² In the intervening years, a number of new approaches have tended to move away from a class interpretation of society (and the coming of the war), many of these interpretations employing Marxist mechanics but with some motor other than class – gender, for example. In these views, the oppression of the underclass is still at issue, and the principal story is still the suppression of the underclass and its relation to war, but the identity of the underclass is changed.¹³

Two problems presented themselves for the social historians of the 1960s and 1970s, as for the hardline Marxists of the 1890s. First, as recent work has shown, the kind of unified proletariat described by Marx never existed; there were many working classes, and the goals of working people were anything but homogenous. Second, class conflict of the sort that aimed at overthrowing systems was rare indeed and was waning rapidly in Western and Central Europe, except for the artificial class consciousness of leftist intellectuals. The vision of workers as primitive revolutionaries in squalid, polluted cities was simply not working out to be the case. Instead of the dramatic bluebook conditions with which Marx and Engels had filled their imaginations, the Europe of the decades before the war was turning out to be a workers’ state of another sort. Real wages rose steadily. Life remained rigorous for working-class Europeans: family budgets were low, housing was cramped, factory discipline was harsh by later norms. But by most measures for which one can find clear data – infant mortality rates, for example – living standards in Western and Central Europe were improving in the years before World War I.¹⁴

Many European workers were voting for workers’ parties, but the old revolutionary vanguard of uprooted intellectuals had a difficult time persuading workers – given the possibility of upward social mobility – that what they should really do was to overthrow the system instead of moving on up the socioeconomic ladder. To European workers who had by choice sacrificed a great deal in order to provide more comforts and a good start in life for their children and grandchildren, the words of bourgeois radicals emerging from their Victorian libraries to advocate workers’ revolts did not always find resonance.

Indeed, socialist parties in Europe began to pick up steam in the last decade of the nineteenth century only as the party leadership became increasingly “reformist” as opposed to “revolutionist.” The most successful European socialist parties, Germany’s in particular,





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

11

managed to ally themselves to the trade unions, which had always called for reform rather than revolution. Naturally, the 1904 Congress of the Socialist International duly condemned the siren calls of reform socialists who proposed to cooperate with bourgeois governments instead of overthrowing them. Hence, in the late 1890s the German Social Democratic Party, already dominated by union activists rather than intellectual firebrands, more or less dropped Marxist revolution in favor of a “revisionist” program of gradual social reforms. The great gains of the German Socialist Party in 1912 put into the German parliament, the Reichstag, mostly socialists who dressed, spoke, and acted like good German patriots. In the United Kingdom, it took the gradualist appeals of the “Fabian” intellectuals to make an alliance with the political forces of the union movement and form the Labour Party after the turn of the century. In France, the various socialist parties took the rebuff of the Socialist International to heart and, under the extraordinary leadership of Jean Jaurès, united to form a single party, whose name even reflected devotion to the radical Socialist International. But the new French Socialist Party was not always prepared to mount the barricades. Its constituency increasingly included civil servants, schoolteachers, and peasants, who hoped for reform, not revolution. Jaurès himself seemed to link socialism and bourgeois democracy, and the new party increasingly reflected the reformist tendency. It is true that immediately before the war, strike activity rose rapidly in industrialized Europe, and that much violence occurred. Yet the goals of almost all of the strikes, even those which turned ugly indeed, were those of higher pay, shorter hours, and better working conditions – in short, something like bourgeois improvements. In the decade and a half before the war, it is clear that class conflicts among the future Western Front belligerents were gradually approaching a stage of compromise worlds away from Marx’s calls for violent revolution. European socialists were experiencing the greatest political gains they would see for many decades, but the gains tended to be in the communities of mainstream “democratic” socialism, which combined the demands of the trade unions with a call for enhanced systems of social welfare.¹⁵

The United States

On the outside of the immediate power competition among the European powers stood the United States. Before 1898 the American Republic counted little on the world scene, since on the one hand







NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



the republic had been designed to avoid any “entangling” alliances not absolutely necessary, and on the other since the United States had, like Germany and Italy, been absorbed with its “national question” from the 1850s through the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction. From the lofty heights of the European Great Powers, observers could admit by the last decade of the century that the United States had achieved a breath-taking rate of industrialization. Indeed, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the American level of industrialization doubled, and it doubled again in the first decade of the twentieth. Already in 1880 the United States had stood second behind Britain in terms of economic productivity, but by 1913 it had for some years been the most industrialized and productive economic unit on the globe. By that year, it was producing about a third of the world’s manufacturing output. In the area of iron and steel production, so relevant to modern war, the United States produced more steel (31.8 million tons) in 1913 than the next three leading steel-producing countries, Germany (17.6 million), Britain (7.7 million), and Russia (4.8 million). With a population greater than that of any European power, the United States had by any measure a significant place in calculations of international strength.¹⁶



Europeans might have seen some clues as to America’s future emergence as a world power, even before the USA’s conscious step in that direction in 1898 in the Spanish–American war, a war fought out in two hemispheres (Cuba and the Philippines) and utilizing the kind of coordinated land-based and naval power which stood as the ideal for most European strategic thinkers. Actually, as will be seen below, the Americans had amassed a great fund of military knowledge during the Civil War, the frontier wars against the American Indians, and a number of imperialist conflicts after 1898. Recent research has begun to indicate that some European biases against all things American stood in the way of realistic planning for some future European war.¹⁷



In any case, it will be seen below that in spite of the Spanish–American War and new urges of the United States to become a world power, traditional tendencies to avoid “entangling alliances” and stay out of European conflicts formed a powerful hurdle to those who hoped to engage the country more in the international system.

War, the nation, and the state in 1900

The emergence of industry-based warfare in the Western world signaled a new stage of thinking about the nation–state, a European






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

13

political form which had taken its earliest shape – amid constant warfare – in the period between 1450 and 1650. Against the brutal aspects of these centralizing tendencies of the European state (mostly in the form of dynastic rule) over the next centuries, Europeans developed a number of defense mechanisms. The most prominent of these mechanisms were the maintenance of regional rights and individual autonomy. In expanding this defense against the unlimited power of the centralized kingdom, with its absolute monarch and his bureaucratic representatives, European anti-absolutists also revived the classical ideas that law ought to operate as a contract, and not as an administrative tool, and that the natural order of things confers autonomy, or natural rights, upon individuals. These ideas coalesced in the eighteenth century in the doctrine called liberalism.



Not limited to liberal thinkers and politicians themselves, liberalism had a great impact on leaders from many parts of the political spectrum, and liberal policies were indeed in operation throughout Western and Central Europe in one form or another during the nineteenth century. Long tarred by enemies from many directions as the representatives of mere business interests, classical European liberals were much less concerned with the form of government than with its size and aggressiveness. Liberals throughout Western and Central Europe tended to work against the growing size and reach of centralized governments. In this they had their work cut out for them: all European bureaucratic states grew relatively rapidly from the eighteenth century onward, though it is necessary to say here that the degree to which central governments could control populations, or even divert their wealth into government coffers, was severely limited by modern standards. Still, the size of governments was increasing, their activities expanding. Looking at the simple comparison of per capita government expenditure, one finds that France's spending per person almost doubled from 1850 to 1875; the ratio of spending for the years 1850, 1875, 1900, and 1913 works out as 1, 2, 2.5, and 3.1, respectively. In the years from 1875 to 1913 alone, German government spending per capita multiplied by a factor of 3.65. Among the three Western Great Powers, liberal Britain maintained the lowest growth in spending, which increased between 1850 and 1913 by a factor of only 1.7.¹⁸



It is important to recognize that thinking about society in terms of the collective or group was likewise potent during the nineteenth century – indeed, more collectivist ideologies, like that of Marx, were being created all the time. Yet in spite of much competition, the dominant European collectivist ideology was the idea





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

represented by the abstract term “state” or less abstractly by the ethnicity-oriented “national state”; that is, the centralized national state in which the citizens were united by fraternal (especially linguistic) and civic ties.

The revolutionary period beginning in the late eighteenth century had forged more and more group identification among populations. For this purpose, the Romantic myth of the mystical ties of linguistic and “blood” relations was borrowed. To achieve this program, which we call “nationalism,” European power centers had to do away with competing loyalties as well as to exalt or glamorize the administration of the state and the state’s monopoly of violence. We must keep in mind that this program formed the background to most discussions of politics and international relations after the mid-nineteenth century. And after the 1860s, a harder-shelled, more aggressive (and often more ethnically exclusive) kind of jingoism represented an intensification of the movement for power and success by centralization. Indeed, though rationalist, individualist liberalism was in most ways diametrically opposed to irrational, collectivist nationalism, during the great nationalist convulsions of the mid-nineteenth century, even many liberals had defected from the cause of freedom, seduced by the attractions of national power, and had supported much growth in the size and intrusiveness of government.

In a classic study, American historian Carleton J. H. Hayes identified late nineteenth-century Europe with the reign of the “national liberals,” a reference not only to the National Liberal Party, which played an important role in German politics, but to the simultaneous mixing of nationalist and liberal goals throughout Western and Central Europe. Similar attempts to harmonize mostly opposing systems led to “national liberal” camps in all the major European states, and these parties tended to be influential in party systems which had a kind of static quality, since both the class politics of the old order (the various aristocratic parties) and of the rising socialist left (the various social democratic parties) had constituencies which were physically limited by class. These national liberal governments introduced state compulsion where it had not existed before, especially in schooling and military recruitment. From the 1870s onward, European governments accelerated measures of economic nationalism as well. Hence, French officials burned the midnight oil in the effort to make true patriotic Frenchmen out of the peasants in remote rural France. Germans were educated in both schools and the military about the glories of their national state, which was increasing its size and influence regularly.





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION





Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

15

Where insufficiently homogenized ethnic groups stood in the way of national cohesion, programs designed to “nationalize” the offending groups were put in place, though by the end of the century the problem was becoming increasingly difficult because many of these recalcitrant ethnic groups – German Poles and Danes, and the Irish, for example – developed national identities and national movements of their own. The same was true for regions with long-standing traditions of autonomy or even independence. The results were the “seamless” national states that went to war in 1914, but the stresses of World War I would reveal that many seams still existed.¹⁹

Hence, all conceptions of planning for eventual war in the years before 1914 took place against not only the background of industrial growth and concomitant social changes, but against an equally important tension between two of the defining tendencies of modern Europe, and indeed, the Western world: that between centralized, powerful, and efficient sovereign governments on the one hand, and the autonomy and integrity of the individual on the other. And yet the enthusiasm of nationalism, or merely national pride, could cover a host of sins. Again and again during the late nineteenth century, European governments showed that where rational arguments failed in support of a given policy, the national argument rarely misfired, whether the issue was taking over tropical real estate to create a new colony, erecting a stiff tariff barrier that would raise the price of goods to “protect” home industries, or building a navy of threatening battleships whose existence would turn friends into enemies.



Superiority, aggression, technology, and violence

By the end of the nineteenth century, another factor that increasingly cut across the social and political segments, permeating public discussions and private attitudes, was a wide set of attitudes called Social Darwinism. Deriving from the widespread discussions occasioned by the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* in 1859, Social Darwinism emerged when a number of Darwin’s popularizers extended Darwin’s evolutionary principle of “survival of the fittest” (philosopher Herbert Spencer, not Darwin, coined the term) to society and eventually world history. Hence, where Darwin assumed that the mechanics of nature depended on natural selection based on what succeeds best (the fittest), Social Darwinists assumed that individuals, institutions, and even nations operated on the same principle: the fittest would survive, and those who survived were clearly the fittest.



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

It is difficult to isolate the multifarious ramifications of Social Darwinism in the Western world in the century after Darwin wrote his book: these ramifications are indeed many, complex, and frequently contradictory. Social Darwinism could cut across the political spectrum easily. For conservatives, it seemed to justify elitist social position; for old-style liberals it seemed to argue for free-wheeling competition within society; for national liberals and social imperialists it gave a scientific patina to imperial conquest; for socialists, it could work well as a secondary (and materialist) explanation of historical evolution. Spencer himself, a rugged defender of individual liberty, is often counted in the Social Darwinian camp, though recent studies have tended to expose a much more complex use of evolution in Spencer's thought. Certainly in science and the academic world, Social Darwinism gave impetus to the whole field of behavioral studies. Management science, Taylorism at the start, was an outgrowth of the Social Darwinist view, as were many schools of thought hoping to "direct" social evolution by one scheme or another. It also gave rise to the related movements of eugenics, birth control, and scientific racism. Social Darwinism was nothing like a coherent philosophy and only a very blurred set of doctrines, but it had at its core a few powerful ideas which influenced the attitudes of millions of people in the Western world who had never read Darwin and never heard of Spencer.²⁰

The influence of Social Darwinism on both the outbreak and course of World War I has been only superficially studied by historians and deserves much more attention. In the confines of this overview, three important influences should not be passed over. First, Social Darwinism was, when intermixed with nationalism, a potent impulsion to the foreign conquests we call imperialism. And it may not be merely coincidence that the renewed and feverish imperial activity that historians call the "new imperialism" after the 1860s was concomitant to the percolation of Social Darwinism throughout European society. Those pushing for imperialist ventures in the 1870s and 1880s already had a powerful argument in the appeal to national pride: "let us take this tropical region, lest our national rival take it first and exclude us from our place in the sun." A number of ingredients could be added to this argument. Naturally, some businessmen added economic and fiscal ingredients; and religious people could add missionary ingredients. But the double-sided Social Darwinist contention was a powerful one: European states had the *right* to conquer inferior peoples because they were inferior and needed organizing for the good of the human race, and





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

17

advanced states had the *duty* to conquer these peoples in order to pull them upward (at least some distance) toward the civilized level already achieved by the Europeans. This appeal was not limited to industrialists and merchants, or to church leaders or churchgoers. Indeed, in the on-going work to create stronger and more powerful national identities in Europe and its appendages, this kind of argument contributed to the secular civic ethos which European states hoped to create. As British imperialist Cecil Rhodes put it in 1877: “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race.”

Hence, the Great Powers and lesser powers of Europe launched an outburst of imperialist activity after the emergence of the new Europe of 1871. To take the busy imperial field of Africa, in 1875 a Conservative British prime minister engineered the British purchase of the Suez Canal, though little else in Africa was ruled by Europeans; in 1884–85, the imperial powers met in Berlin to lay ground rules for the rough-and-tumble scramble for Africa; by 1895 nearly the whole of Africa was under some form of European sovereignty. The same process, with variations, was replicated across the globe. From 1876 to 1914, the colonial powers of the world annexed over 11 million square miles of territory. The new imperialist outburst was characterized by the planting of European flags and occupation of whole hinterlands, rather than informal control of a few coastal areas. By the 1890s, even the United States, a state born in the fight against empire, had gotten into the act in the Pacific region: in 1898, American troops, having “liberated” the Philippines from Spain, were sent in to “pacify” local groups and leaders and, all, as President Taft said at the time, to help protect “our little brown brothers.” Indeed, in a speech at this time an American legislator, Albert J. Beveridge, managed to assert that the Social Darwinian justification of “might makes right” was actually intertwined with providence:

God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-admiration. No. He made us master organizers of the world to establish a system where chaos reigned. . . . He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples.

The rivalries of imperialism helped lead to World War I in two ways. First, and most evidently, the various rivalries kept the European powers at each other’s throats, or at least on their guard,






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




since in most cases at least two powers were in competition for the same territory. In the end, as will be seen below, imperial rivalries can hardly be said to have led directly to World War I, since the opponents in most of the imperial competitions later fought together in alliances after 1914. This was certainly the case with the most spectacular of these competitions: the Anglo-Russian rivalry in northwestern India–Central Asia, the Anglo-French rivalry in North Africa, and the Russo-Japanese rivalry in northeastern Asia. Precisely these powers would make up the core of the Alliance that won the Great War.

Yet these imperial clashes had a less direct, but quite significant, influence in bringing Europe to war simply by generating military emergencies and, indeed, the occasion for keeping large armies and large navies. These tensions, moreover, kept states aggressive and military in outlook and posture, and the availability of military personnel, equipment, and material made it seem natural for European powers to contemplate war in connection with any international crisis in the decades before 1914. The soldiers, moreover, were trained for war in these imperialist adventures, as the listing of late nineteenth-century wars above indicates.



Social Darwinism was again embedded in thinking about military matters, whether imperial or not, and indeed whether it was a matter of current clashes or planning for future war. Here Social Darwinist doctrine was reflected in the new, heightened insistence on aggressive behavior and an aggressive attitude – often expressed as “vigor.” In practice this attachment to the offensive combined with new technologies of war to create a new doctrine of attack.



One of the effects of the military–technological revolution of the nineteenth century was the ability to deliver higher levels of metal and more powerful explosives to a given target than ever before. During the short span of one or two decades, most Western armies dropped the smooth-bore musket (essentially the same weapon in use since the late seventeenth century) and adopted, by stages, rifled, breech-loading (as opposed to muzzle-loading) weapons which enabled regular infantry soldiers not only to load and fire more rapidly, but to do so without standing up. Moreover, the newer weapons had a rifled barrel, with spiraled grooves inside, which could shoot both farther and more accurately.

Hence, infantry alone could produce enough firepower to make advancing on the battlefield, or even standing up, a much more deadly proposition. Recent work in the history of the American Civil War emphasizes that this change alone altered some of the





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

19

fundamental dynamics of battlefield behavior as early as the 1860s. Observing that they had a much greater chance of being shot, soldiers clearly tended to stop advancing and find cover more often, and they spent more time under cover. Within a given battalion or regiment, this kind of individual behavior multiplied by 500 or 1,000 could decide the outcome of a battle. All in all, the effectiveness of troops on the *attack* seemed to be blunted; *defensive* tactics in a battle could prove capable both of lessening casualties and of winning the battle. And rifled, fast-shooting infantry weapons were only a beginning of this trend. By the end of the century, all Western armies were experimenting with machine guns, which could deliver rates of fire which were higher by magnitudes. Hence, even more lead could be hurled across the battlefield to stop attacking troops.

Still, lessons which seem clear to us today were less clear to students of warfare in 1900 or 1914, in part because few wars of the period pitted one European-style army against another. Indeed, advances in artillery production and utilization would prove to be the most decisive factor in creating a new battlefield dynamic in World War I. But the tactics of artillerists did not catch up to the technology until the war itself. It could hardly be predicted from any contemporary war experience that artillery would become the primary weapon of the next war.²¹

In sum, no one could be certain about the effects of the new advances. Among the few instances of fighting which incorporated at least some of the new technology were the Cuban battles of the brief Spanish-American war in 1898 and the longer Russo-Japanese War of 1904/1905. In the former, the most publicized action was the charge of Americans up the heights above the San Juan River. One could hardly say that it was a victory for the defense. Earlier in the battle, the Americans had used Gatling guns, an early machine gun, in the process not of defending against an enemy onslaught, but in taking Spanish positions. Six years later, the Russo-Japanese War incorporated much more of the new technology, and ferocious land battles developed in the Amur River region, fighting in which trenches screened with barbed wire and protected by machine guns were components of the battlefield. Still, though the Japanese lost extraordinary numbers of killed and wounded in the course of the great battles, ultimately, the human waves of Japanese overwhelmed the entrenched Russian defenders. If one could also find evidence for the contrary in both of these wars, generally, most European military experts chose what they regarded as the psychologically sounder position that offensive-mindedness would win battles and wars.²²







NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



From the beginning of these developments strengthening the defensive in the 1860s, military thinkers began to analyze what it meant to attack and to receive attack. One of the earliest of these analysts was the French officer Charles Ardant du Picq (who died in action in 1870). In battle, said Ardant du Picq, men rarely fight hand to hand; the “clash” of battle rarely occurs. Instead, one side or the other tends to give way before the actual clash. It was morale, not numbers or accurate shooting, which counted. Further, since it is such a terrible and nerve-racking thing to await attack, and since attackers have the psychological advantage of being able to see their own forward progress, the attackers will have the advantage in most battles. The attack gives, Ardant du Picq wrote, a “moral superiority”: “The moral effect of the assault worries the defenders. They fire in the air if at all. They disperse immediately before the assailants who are even encouraged by this fire now that it is over. It quickens them in order to avoid a second salvo.” Ardant du Picq did add, however, that an unprepared attack could indeed be defeated by a prepared defense, and he was not so dismissive of physical factors in battle as to dismiss the need for as heavy an artillery and rifle fire as possible, right up to the point of the final bayonet charge.



Ardant du Picq thus articulated what many military officers in the nineteenth century thought anyway. Indeed, his psychological arguments were especially taken to heart in France, where military training at all levels increasingly emphasized “morale” over mere technical advances. At the level of military doctrine, perhaps the most convincing of the theorists of the “morale” movement was Ferdinand Foch, later, of course, Commander-in-Chief of Allied armies during World War I. As a teacher of officers at the French War Academy (Foch was born in 1851) and a military theorist in the years before the war, he was perhaps even more significant to the attitudes and events that made the First World War.



In lectures and writings, Foch began, around the turn of the century, to enunciate a carefully reasoned doctrine of the offensive as the preferred military mode. A defensive posture may keep the enemy from accomplishing some aim, he wrote, but this kind of “negative result” will never achieve victory. Even a successful defensive battle merely postpones the outcome of the war: “A purely defensive battle is like a duel in which one of the men does nothing but parry. He can never defeat his opponent, but on the contrary, and in spite of the greatest possible skill, he is bound to be hit sooner or later.” It also follows that the goal of winning the battles, and therefore the war, does not mean that the victorious army will





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

21

always be the one with the fewest casualties. An army might be physically decimated, Foch insisted, and still maintain the attack, put the defenders to rout, and win the battle. In any case, he points out, soldiers on the battlefield have no way of knowing who is losing more men, their own army or the enemy. Foch was only one of the teachers of this inspiring doctrine of the offensive, and most writers on the French generalship of World War I associate this offensive-mindedness most directly with Colonel Louis de Grandmaison, operations chief of the General Staff in 1914. Hence, the whole mode of thinking is sometimes spoken of as the “Grandmaison school.”²³

Though one recent interpretation of World War I holds that tracing links between “war and society” confuses us by connecting what is in reality hermetically isolated,²⁴ the “war and society” historians from the 1970s to the present have much expanded our analytical weaponry for understanding the Great War. In the case of planning for war, we see a critical connection between war plans and the great shift in European intellectual development which began in the 1890s, a shift away from purely positivistic or rationalistic ideas and toward approaches to the problems of life involving depths of will, psychology, and “creative forces” within the human mind. In this connection, and from various directions, European thinkers and writers, from Nietzsche to Freud to Bergson, emphasized – each in a different way – an interest, an enthusiasm for the darker forces within human beings and human society.

A new interest in violence and aggression certainly lay very close to the core of the new thinking. Though the great Nietzsche was institutionalized for mental illness by 1889 and dead by 1900, his complex philosophy could be popularized by lesser thinkers, who gave to increasing numbers of readers in the West views of self-assertion and power of the will which could verge on glorifying brutality. Freud, whose work began to gain notice in the 1890s, was not in any sense glorifying violence, but he was certainly interested in violence and aggression as important components of the makeup of any individual. French philosopher Henri Bergson hung his ideas on a beneficent “vital force,” which determined the course of “creative evolution” (the title of his famous 1907 book), but Bergson’s contemporary Georges Sorel used the same somewhat mystical style (or “intuitionism”) to raise social violence to the level of a necessary and cleansing force, especially when carried out by the working class in general strikes and other workers’ revolts.

Through these thinkers and their popularizers, Europeans were increasingly attuned to an intellectual response to violence which





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



could easily mesh with older mental constructs, such as patriotism. And indeed, on the popular level, it is important to remember that most of the millions of men who would eventually be in uniform during World War I had never heard of Freud and Sorel. They also had no clear information about the experience of recent wars. For one thing, popular information during the period before World War I was carefully sifted, not by governments for the most part, but by public sensibilities.

The vast new hordes of lower- and lower-middle-class readers (the result of expanded state schooling) now avidly read the penny press and formula, escapist fiction, in which wars and violence, to be sure, were present in large measures. But both newspapers and fiction, while they sensationalized violence and disaster, nonetheless sanitized them, avoiding graphic depictions of the results of violence. In general, the European wars around the turn of the century reached the public in mediated forms, which emphasized *esprit* and heroism, the virtues of the “stiff upper lip” and self-sacrifice, and did so in an elevated language borrowed from Romantic poets of the mid-nineteenth century. Hence, as literary historian Paul Fussell pointed out, before the war Europeans tended to think of battlefields in terms of “sacrifice” and the dead in terms of the “fallen.” In popular fiction, the deadly confrontations in South Africa, Cuba, and the Philippines seemed more like dangerous larks. This image of heroism and sacrifice combined with fun was especially prominent in boys’ fiction, a genre in which – from the 1890s right up to wartime – familiar heroes in numberless serial episodes faced evil foes and won through pure grit. Many readers of these novels became, of course, the young men who stood in the long lines at recruiting stations in Europe under the sunny skies of August 1914, just as did a large number of young intellectuals who welcomed the coming of war as a kind of cleansing of a generation.²⁵

Further, even in staid Europe itself, the quiet years of the *belle époque* began to give way, offering examples of violence at home. The enormous industrial strikes of the prewar period – in France, Germany, and Britain – displayed organized violence by the workers, when in the attempt to gain higher wages and better conditions strikers used physical violence to take over workplaces, fight non-union workers (scabs), and the like. Authorities also used violence to quell many of these strikes. Hence, both elements of the strike could create large-scale violence. And to the east, in Russia, the discontented 1860s and 1870s had given rise to a kind of cult of terror based on violence against the “oppressor.” This cult intermingled






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

23

and overflowed as syndicalists sometimes had to vie with Russian leftist terrorists in killing bourgeois and royal leaders across Europe. And the counter-violence often outdid the original violence. Moreover, as nationalism spread its reach into Eastern Europe, creating homogenous national communities often took the avenue of simply “cleansing” populations of the wrong ethnicity. Hence, violence was a regular feature of collective action in the prewar world, and strikes were practically everyday matters, at least to the newspaper-reading public. Hence, Europeans knew something about violence even at home.²⁶



Oddly, two sources of prewar European public violence were the more striking because they issued from traditionally staid, calm, phlegmatic England. The first came in the form of a branch of the women’s movement. Generating perhaps more headlines than the hundreds of thousands of striking workers in the years before the war was the spectacular and often destructive movement of the “suffragettes.” The women’s movement in Britain had, since the 1860s, called for the vote for women. Two main approaches emerged in the campaign for women’s suffrage in the decade before the war: a constitutionalist movement (the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies – called “suffragists”) which was based on working primarily by means of education and at the local level, and a small but violent movement which adopted the Sorelian approach of violent acts of protest which would frighten politicians into national change. The latter group was the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), usually called “suffragettes,” founded by socialist feminist Emmeline Pankhurst, the wife of a Manchester barrister, and her daughters, Sylvia and Christabel. The movement organized heckling and disruption of Liberal Party speeches from 1905 onward, and beginning in early 1912, after the failure of one of several women’s suffrage bills, Pankhurst and over a hundred other women marched on Number 10 Downing Street with hammers and rocks, smashing the prime minister’s windows. They continued on throughout the West End of London, breaking the windows of thousands of shops and department stores. “The argument of broken glass,” commented Pankhurst, “is the most valuable argument in modern politics.” Despite arrests, the suffragette “arguments” continued, becoming increasingly violent: members chained themselves to railings in public places, dropped acid in mailboxes, slashed paintings in public art galleries. In hiding in Paris, Christabel Pankhurst organized a campaign of arson which succeeded in burning a good many public and private buildings. At the 1913 Derby races, veteran suffragette Emily Davison – who was,





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

perhaps, suicidal – rushed onto the track in front of a racehorse owned by the king, injuring the jockey and killing herself. These violent activities were criticized by “suffragists,” the more moderate workers for the vote for women, who pointed out that reason and education made more sense for the cause than the politics of violent confrontation. Some gains were, indeed, made in minor issues, but constitutional reform in the matter of the vote for women would only come about after the war.²⁷

Still more in the minds of most Britons on the eve of the war, the Irish problem reached the level of a really violent outbreak. Since Ireland had been dominated by England in a colonial relationship for several hundred years, the nineteenth-century movement for Home Rule, autonomy within the British system, had occasioned an inordinate share of political maneuvering since the first Home Rule bills were voted down in the 1880s and 1890s. The central problem of the “damnable question” was that the northern counties, called Ulster, had roots that were to a large extent Scots Presbyterian. For historical and social reasons, many considered the large majority of Irish Catholics throughout Ireland as a whole as the real problem – certainly an implacable foe should Ulster find itself submerged in a Catholic polity run from Dublin. The Liberal cabinet of Asquith introduced a Home Rule bill on the heels of significant parliamentary and constitutional reforms in 1911, and the bill was to become law in 1914. The Protestant Unionists in Ulster, led by Sir Edward Carson, proceeded to prepare for armed resistance to incorporation even into an autonomous Ireland. George V, king since 1910, found himself caught in the middle and at the mercy not only of events, but also of the Liberal cabinet. He wrote to Asquith in August 1913, “I cannot help feeling that the Government is drifting and taking me with it.” After seeing several compromises rejected by both sides, the cabinet tried armed force in the north, ordering the army to suppress the Ulster Volunteers. This too backfired, when a number of officers resigned rather than face the prospect of ordering soldiers to fire on the pro-Empire Unionists. This “Curragh Mutiny” made it clear that the army could not be relied on in this civil conflict. Meanwhile, the Irish nationalists in the south created their own fighting force and looked for weapons. A month before World War I would break out, Britons were expecting a war, but a civil war in Ireland. As writer Alec Waugh later wrote, “There were no clouds on my horizons during those long July evenings, and when the Chief in his farewell speech spoke of the bad news in the morning papers, I thought he was referring to the threat of civil war in Ireland.”²⁸



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

25

Planning for war

At the level of national planning, the strategic level, we can begin to see the threads of the various preconditions and origins of the war coming together. The technological changes in warfare that seemed, paradoxically, to make aggressiveness both more necessary and more deadly offered the consolation that the next war would be, if violent, at least short. Social Darwinist ideas about great climactic struggles led many military intellectuals to assume that the next war would consist – like the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 – of short preliminaries and a colossal battle of decision. For another, close observers predicted that the next war would be a storm of steel involving weapons and ammunition so expensive and casualties so great that no government could sustain it either physically or spiritually.²⁹

The national budgets of the eventual belligerents in World War I were not only not up to the task of financing modern, industrialized, total war: they were many times too small to collect the revenues needed to fund it. Hence, the short-war prediction was an illusion, but still a very good guess. The war states of the twentieth century – one thinks automatically of Soviet Russia and National Socialist Germany, but we might include many “democratic” states as well – which achieved ratios of wealth transfer from private to public coffers previously unheard of, were still in the future. The self-generating powers of the modern state during World War I are still surprising in retrospect: they could hardly have been guessed at in advance.

Hence all grand strategies among the prewar belligerents tended to be based on rapid, relatively cheap victories. And these strategies inflated the meaning of the gearing-up stage for each national plan, that is, “mobilization.” One of the “lessons” taught by late nineteenth-century wars was that only the richest armies could fight much more than one or two battles without “reorganization,” a process analogous to retooling, rebuilding, and reloading a weapon. With the ponderous millions of troops necessary to modern warfare, and the enormous stocks of supplies and materials needed for the briefest of campaigns, gearing up for war meant a whole range of activities, including manning forts, calling up reserves, stockpiling material, declaring martial law for certain regions, commandeering rolling stock, and hundreds of other activities. As historian Laurence Lafore pointed out, the prewar dictum that “mobilization equals war” was not strictly true, but mobilization was certainly more than a slight threat.³⁰ The expenses of mobilization were so great, that if a state mobilized its military forces, it had to mean it.



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

All of these elements are seen in the great war plan of the Germans. Named after the German Chief of the General Staff Alfred von Schlieffen, the plan emerged in the War Department as a direct result of the altered international politics of the Franco-Russian Alliance of the early 1890s. With potential enemies now linked, Germany's strategists had to plan for precisely the case which Bismarck had seen as the worst. Hence, the new staff chief devised a plan by which Germany could come to grips with two enemies at once. The basic outline of the plan came from the calculation that the French could put their army on a war footing, or mobilize it, in about two weeks, while the Russians would take up to six weeks to do the same. Schlieffen therefore proposed, first of all, that France must be defeated first, before the Russians could mobilize their full forces.

A major problem was that France, though perhaps weaker than Germany militarily, was nonetheless a prime military power whose defeat was in no way assured. To solve this problem, Schlieffen relied on surprise and high technology. The surprise was dependent on geography. The Franco-German border is for the most part marked by high, forested hills, and even mountains, in any case serious obstacles to early twentieth-century armies. The exception was the "Lorraine Gap," a relatively flat passage from northeastern France to southwestern Germany, defined by the Ardennes/Eiffel forests in the north and the Vosges mountains all the way to Switzerland in the south. But the French army was likely to close this gap. Schlieffen therefore proposed to put only a relatively small holding force in front of this French army. The bulk of the German army would form a line which was to pivot, something like a gate. The key to the plan was the decision to send the bulk of this swinging gate through Belgium and the Netherlands, flat countries which could accommodate a planned human wave a million strong (the Netherlands part of the invasion was eventually dropped by Schlieffen's successor).

The greatest problem with this plan was the political one: the major European powers had signed the London Treaty of 1839, in which Belgium's existence, borders, and neutrality were all recognized. Hence, to violate the internationally agreed-upon neutrality of Belgium by invading the country on the way to France would hand to any other possible allies of France (we may read "Britain" here) the opportunity to declare war, the *casus belli* in the legal phrase. It was not certain that Britain would declare war in such a case, and at the period when the plan really adopted the Belgian invasion, Britain and Germany had been experimenting with a short-term





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

27

friendship, or *rapprochement*. Still, Schlieffen knew that this political problem could well result in bringing the British into the planned war. He simply decided that there was no other way to effect the rapid destruction of France's armies required in the desperate case of fighting two powerful enemies in two different directions at once.

The second element in the French defeat would be technology. Since the Prussian military reforms of the 1860s, the Prussian army had prided itself on the use of telegraphy, railroads, and advanced weapons. Schlieffen now tapped into this tradition by having his staff plan in detail the precise movements of the invading army, utilizing rail transport as far as possible and using the network of roads in such a way as to allow minimum delays. Naturally, horse transport was still a significant means of moving supplies and heavy weapons in 1914, but the whole "timetable" style of coordination represented real sophistication in logistics.

The strategy of defeating France first was of course dependent on the slowness of the Russians and on Germany's ability to hold off any offensive the Russians could mount until France was defeated. After finishing with France, German troops would board trains in France, and make their way eastward as rapidly as possible to reinforce the fairly small holding force which the Germans had stationed in East Prussia.³¹

This was the Schlieffen Plan in the form it had from about 1905 onward, though the General Staff was constantly updating and upgrading (and, some would have it, weakening certain aspects of) it. Apart from the significant political problem associated with routing the offensive through Belgium, the plan seemed sound when viewed as a whole. Its efficiency, its rapidity, and its sweeping mobility certainly represented qualities called for by the great theorists and practitioners in military history. Yet it did not take into account the problem of what the nineteenth-century German strategist Carl von Clausewitz called the "frictions" of war. Schlieffen and his officers did not make enough allowances for human error and machine breakdown. They did not worry enough about a British expeditionary force, which was at the very least a distinct possibility in the wake of the swing through Belgium. Indeed, they did not allow for Belgian resistance either. As we shall see, the plan also relied too heavily on intelligence estimates that Germany would have a six-week window of time before the Russians could mount a real invasion of Germany's East. Yet as will be seen below, at moments during August 1914, the Germans in fact would come very close to success.







NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Of course, as a causative factor, one must inquire into the extent to which the Schlieffen Plan was held secret. Schlieffen himself at times discussed aspects of the plan in public. German maneuvers – often carried out with observing officers from other countries on hand – might give away some aspects of the plan. Yet, by and large, British and French intelligence analysts did not comprehend enough of the general picture to overcome their own ideas about what they should do when the next war broke out. All major powers had their strategic plans for the next war, and all the plans were based, like Schlieffen's, on the premise of intensive mobilization and a knock-out blow. The French Plan XVII envisioned mobilizing the bulk of the army opposite the Lorraine Gap, and with the onset of war driving through the Gap into central Germany. By wedging the army between Prussia in the north and the lesser German states in the south, the French hoped to talk the less aggressive south Germans into a separate peace, and eventually perhaps an existence separate from Prussia. In this way, Plan XVII, highly charged politically, would not only regain Alsace-Lorraine in the first stroke, but undo 1870/71 completely.



Perhaps the most fateful war plans apart from the Schlieffen Plan, however, had to do with planning in the context of the Anglo-German naval rivalry after 1898. Here again, military thinking reflected trends of thought in European society at large. By the mid-1880s, it has been seen, Europeans were increasingly preoccupied with oceans, navies, and exotic places overseas. This preoccupation was both cause and consequence of the “new” imperialism. Navies were necessary to maintain colonies and sea routes to them. The shining example was, of course, the British Empire, whose opening of the Suez Canal in late 1869 shortened the distance between London and the Indian subcontinent and signaled the heyday of the Empire on which the sun never set. France got into the scramble in the 1870s, Germany only in the 1880s.



Providing a different support for “navalism,” in 1890 American naval officer Alfred Thayer Mahan published *The Influence of Seapower Upon History, 1660–1783*. In it, Mahan “demonstrated” that the greatness of empires (the British in particular) rests on the potency of their “seapower.” Hence, in each of the great military and commercial struggles he discussed historically, Britain came out ahead because it controlled the seas. Since the battle of Trafalgar played a decisive role in Mahan's construction, a corollary to his basic premise came to be the necessity of maintaining a potent fleet which could triumph in a decisive battle (like Trafalgar, according to Mahan).³²




NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

29

Not only did Mahan's work harmonize with popular Social Darwinist modes of thinking; it also spoke to the imperialist factions in all the countries of the West (the United States included). But nowhere did the book have the direct impact it did in Germany. The Kaiser reported that he was "not reading but devouring it," and the German Colonial Society put out 2,000 copies of the book. Their activities coincided with the arrival of a new and dynamic head of the German navy, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, in 1897. Supported by numerous pressure groups and politically influential individuals, Tirpitz called for the construction of a German battle fleet. Tirpitz justified the massive expenditure by asserting, first, that the fleet would pay for itself by the returns on German colonies; and, second, that the building of a great navy would woo working-class sons away from the Social Democratic Party and engage them instead in the great national work of achieving "world," as opposed to merely continental, power. Tirpitz and his allies were successful, and as the result of the two great German Navy Bills, of 1898 and 1900, Germany set out to build a battleship-heavy fleet.³³



Like the Schlieffen Plan, Tirpitz's creation contained a terrible political liability, in that the only possible foe of a German battle fleet – given geography and politics – was Britain. The results of Germany's fleet creation were spectacular. Alienating the previously ambiguous British, the Germans had driven them into the arms of the French within five years. Domestically, expenditures on the fleet spiralled nearly out of control in the decade before the war, making German leaders more desperate for success. Irony haunted the program in its main goal. Germany did indeed jump from fifth to second as a naval power by the time of World War I, but the British not only retained the lead, but in 1906 introduced a new class of battleship in the form of the *H. M. S. Dreadnought*, a ship of larger size, more firepower, and increased firing range. The *Dreadnought* and the other dreadnought-class ships which soon appeared could destroy their counterparts before they could use their guns. Hence, the Germans set about, within months, appropriating funds for even greater ship expenditures.³⁴ It should be added here that if the German plans seemed to be technically adept and politically inept, it is nonetheless true that all the eventual belligerent powers harbored plans which resembled those of the Germans in relying on rapid and massive mobilization for a knock-out blow and in their tendency to preempt a great deal of political decision-making.³⁵







NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



The formation of opposing camps



Overall, the effects and dynamics of these aspects of the European world led to a situation in which war could occur, indeed, one in which war was expected in many quarters. Yet after all, the two “camps” which seem in retrospect to have been quite clear-cut were in fact not as rigid as we might think. Between 1890 and 1914, Europeans were engaged in at least a dozen major attempts to head off conflict, and in many ways, international cooperation and contacts increased. While historians have tended to emphasize the frictions between future enemies, there were in fact many instances of close relations and diplomatic cooperation between powers which would oppose each other in war in 1914. Moreover, international business ventures flourished, and the still largely open markets of Europe worked for the most part to make peace a project of producers and consumers throughout Europe. A lively international movement promoted the peaceful resolution of conflict, and as one of its many manifestations, the Nobel Committee started giving its peace prizes in 1901. Regional European fairs and exhibitions, and indeed world fairs, brought peoples of many stations of life together across borders, and European states devoted significant efforts to promoting such exhibitions and making a good showing at them. European powers cooperated in the Hague Conference agreements, results of meetings in 1899 and 1907, which seemed likely both to lessen the brutality of future war and through cooperation perhaps make it more avoidable, and in any case set up an international court of arbitration designed to referee international disputes. If we take the Europe of 1914 to have been *only* a maelstrom of nationalist passions and hatreds, we will misunderstand the world which plunged into war.



Yet the war came nonetheless, the direct result of the diplomatic crisis of July 1914. We have seen above the very significant linkage of Germany and Austria-Hungary and Russia and France by the last decade of the nineteenth century. We must now turn to the formation of the great alliance that came to stand opposed to Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Though Britain and France certainly enjoyed closer relations in the nineteenth century than in the eighteenth, it was still the case that the British did not go out of their way to remove France from its predicament of international isolation after 1871. Indeed, the increased pace of imperialism brought Britain and France into direct conflict in North Africa and other areas by the 1880s. In 1898 the two powers almost went to war over the Sudan, but the Fashoda






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak


31

Crisis ended with the French backing down, faced as they were with a domestic problem of much greater enormity, the Dreyfus Affair.

The Dreyfus Affair, which crashed into French public consciousness in late 1897, was both symbol and result of many of the tendencies of European life which contributed to the coming of the war. The scandal broke out after the top-ranking Jew in the French army – Captain Alfred Dreyfus – had been found guilty of espionage for the Germans, court-martialed and sent to Devil’s Island. The circumstances were quite hazy, and the captain’s family enlisted the help of others to find out that Dreyfus had been railroaded. By the time of the Fashoda Crisis in 1898, the real turning point in Anglo-French relations, the Affair was creating opposing camps within French public life. On the one hand were the *anti-Dreyfusards* – Catholic, conservative, pro-monarchy, and anti-Revolution elements – and on the other the *Dreyfusards* – anti-clerical, liberal (or Radical, in the French nomenclature of the day), pro-republic, and pro-Revolution elements.



This was a crisis which convulsed France not just for months, but for years, revealing a fissure far more fundamental to French culture than a mere political squabble. It revealed heightened antisemitism, distrust, political hatred, and frequently violence. In later years, those who had stood up for Dreyfus were proud of their civil courage, and indeed many of them would be around to make hard decisions before and during World War I, including the political journalist Georges Clemenceau, who would finish the war as France’s prime minister. Consequences for military affairs were significant: before the war French officers tended to be chosen based on the great cultural divide, and this political influence often held back competent and even brilliant officers of the wrong persuasion. In the years before the war, the republicans were in the ascendancy, and hence the “wrong persuasion” was that of officers who were from the conservative/Catholic/monarchist group.³⁶



The scandal also had a direct, and quite immediate, effect on the international origins of World War I. Imperial rivalries tended to emphasize national clashes and struggles. Yet when France found itself facing Britain in the Sudan, the French simply deemed the domestic situation too unstable to risk engaging in foreign hostilities. Indeed, France appeared amenable to some kind of colonial agreement. The British, moreover, found German naval construction increasingly alarming and aggressive. Hence, the two powers put their colonial disputes on the negotiating table in 1904 and reached an amicable agreement, the *entente cordiale*. In the wake of



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



this understanding, British and French military planners began to meet for “conversations,” and these conversations, especially after Major General Henry Wilson – an outspoken advocate of military alliance with the French – became British director of operations in 1910, were extraordinarily frank. There was no question in the “talks” who the mutual enemy would be.³⁷

Yet forging the third side of the triangle of powers seemed an impossibility. If France and England had a tradition of being opponents, from the Congress of Vienna onward, Britons had tended to feel about the Russians something like the Americans felt about the Soviets during the Cold War a century later. And colonial clashes likewise fueled this long-standing mutual animosity. One aspect of the enormous popularity of the writer Rudyard Kipling was his ability to cast the Russian “Bear” as a sinister force in the world and correspondingly to demonstrate the essential hard-nosed benevolence of the British Empire.³⁸ The clash was especially clear on the northern borders of India, the centerpiece of this empire.

And it was quite clear that Russia’s imperial ambitions were expansive. Indeed, it was expansion in Asia, east of Siberia and north of Japan, that brought the Russians into the clash of war with Japan in 1904. Under their brilliant admiral, Togo, the Japanese navy defeated two Russian fleets, and the land war which raged in the Amur River region approximated the kind of fighting which would characterize World War I.

It was this clash which would reorient Russian attitudes toward Britain, for though the war ended with negotiations umpired by the President of the United States, the Russians had clearly had the worst of it. Moreover, the strains of modern industrial war had impacted Russia as fundamentally as they had in 1855 or would in 1917: shortages in the cities led to major worker unrest and extensive strikes while widespread revolt eventually broke out in the countryside. With social revolution in progress, the parties and individuals who had been fighting for an even incipient liberalism seized the opportunity to revolt politically. In essence, vacillating Tsar Nicholas II was forced to grant Russia’s first constitution and its first “parliament,” the Duma, fighting the liberals at every step of the way, but conceding at last the points of a limited parliamentary regime under the threat of true revolution from below. In exchange, the constitutionalist politicians agreed to and facilitated the suppression of the urban and rural insurrections and the return of social order.

Much like the Dreyfus Affair, which had so shaken France as to lead to conciliation toward Britain, so the Russian Revolution of





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

33

1905 weakened Russian imperial capabilities and led Russia to engage in conciliatory talks with the British over the most irritating colonial rivalries of the moment, especially that over Persia. In fact, the two powers – encouraged by their mutual ally, France – agreed in 1907 to divide Persia into spheres of influence, in the same way that Britain and France had made agreements to stay out of each other's way in North Africa.³⁹ This agreement signaled a real diplomatic change and an alliance that overcame animosities dating back at least 100 years. It also signaled the admittance of Russia into the “understanding” that now came to be called the Triple Entente.

In fact, the configuration of powers in the upcoming war had already made its first appearance a few months earlier at a conference in Algeciras, Spain, an international meeting to settle the first of the great “crises” which led to World War I. The crisis derived from the aggressive diplomacy of both Germany and France in seeking the economic domination of Morocco. Seeing a chance to test the strength of the new *entente cordiale*, the German foreign office arranged for Kaiser Wilhelm to visit Tangier and make an inflammatory speech, an assignment well suited to him. There was talk of war, but instead the powers met at Algeciras in January 1907. There the Germans found to their surprise not only that they were unable to split apart the new Franco-British Entente, but also that the whole community of powers, with the exception of the Austrians, lined up in support of France. This array included Germany's putative ally Italy, as well as Russia and the United States. Hence, from Algeciras onward, the two armed camps may be viewed as forming opposing entities.

With one exception – that of the Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911 – the great diplomatic clashes which punctuated the seven years before the outbreak of the Great War had to do with the Balkans. The background takes us far afield from our themes and can only be outlined here. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century led to instability among the emerging powers in the Balkans and those neighbors who hoped to fish in these troubled waters. The key to the series of crises which led up to the war was the so-called Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

Attacking the sanctity of the Ottoman sultan, a group of modernizing nationalist leaders called the Young Turks took power in 1908. On Balkan borders, the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires saw a good chance to use Turkey's disruption to gain territory or influence. These competitors met together at the end of the summer to discuss an idea originating with the Russian Foreign





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Minister, Alexander Izvolsky. An orderly division of influence in the Balkans would satisfy the long-standing desires of Russia and Austria. On the one hand, Izvolsky proposed, the Russians would agree to the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (a region occupied but not owned by Austria since 1878); on the other hand, the Austrians would agree to the use of the Dardanelles Strait by Russian warships under specific conditions. The Russians would gain access to the world's oceans year-round and a shipping outlet for Russian wheat; Austria would solidify its South Slav holdings and lay some of the groundwork for a more equitable and stable governance, perhaps a federal reform, of the Empire as a whole. The arrangement would end cherished Serbian hopes of acquiring Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Austrian Foreign Minister, Aloys von Aehrenthal, agreed to support Izvolsky's plan, but the two ministers planned to introduce the idea gradually and take it up at an international conference, the groundwork for which the Russian would lay in a whirlwind tour of European capitals. Over the next days Izvolsky gained the tentative cooperation of the Italians and Germans, but he arrived in Paris to discover that Aehrenthal had announced the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina unilaterally. Without a multilateral process, Britain would never allow the Dardanelles to go to Russia. Izvolsky's plan was foiled.

The Serbians and Turks were enraged, but in Russia – where it was unknown that Izvolsky had originated the idea – Pan-Slav nationalists were beside themselves. It was probably not Aehrenthal's intent to double-cross Izvolsky. Yet more than any other single event before the assassination of the Archduke, the Bosnian crisis redirected international energies and hardened the loose camps which had been forming. Henceforth, Austria and Russia each regarded the other as the principal enemy in the Balkans. Russia took up the cause of Serbia, and the Austrians were soon mixed up deeply in the politics of the volatile region. Before long the chief of the Austrian General Staff would propose a war to decide which power would be master in the Balkans.⁴⁰

The next six years saw the working-out of these tensions. In October 1912 the independent Balkan states tried to drive the Ottomans out of Europe and divide up the territory left over. In May 1913 the war was stopped chiefly by the intervention of the Great Powers, who managed to create a new state, Albania, out of the conquests. The anti-Ottoman Balkan states really won the war, but fell out among themselves almost immediately when Serbia, frustrated at



NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

35

not getting Albania, attempted to take compensation from the lands that Bulgaria had gained. A Second Balkan War ensued with a reshuffled deck, and the Serbians ended up in Albania. Austria managed to get the Serbs out of Albania by international agreement – anything to cut down on the power of Serbia. The Serbs were now more dissatisfied than they had been before, and they too were focused on how to expand their state and settle old scores. From the spring of 1914 onward, Europe – and even southeastern Europe – was outwardly peaceful, but all interested parties were maneuvering for position against the appearance of the next crisis.

The July Crisis

The immediate crisis of the war came at the end of June 1914, when the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, was shot dead along with his wife during a parade in his honor in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo. Franz Ferdinand, nephew of old Franz Josef, was a complicated man who consorted regularly with Austrian liberals and who had thought a great deal about how to maintain the Habsburg Empire while sharing out the political power to the various nationality groups. However they might have looked, rejuvenating reforms would probably have emerged had Franz Ferdinand succeeded to the throne. Instead, he was assassinated on June 28.

His assassin was Gavrilo Princip, one of several young Bosnian nationalist terrorists in Sarajevo aiming to do the job, seeking to strike a blow for Bosnian independence. In their cause they had made contacts with a secret Serbian ultra-nationalist organization, known as the Black Hand, which had close ties with Serbian military intelligence. Though some of the circumstances remain hazy to this day, it is clear that the planning and equipment (guns, bombs, poison to be taken after the assassination) came from the Black Hand. It is also clear that at least several Serbian government officials were aware of the conspiracy and did nothing to warn the Austrians.⁴¹

Though observers could not know all the facts, it was clear to all that the heir to the Austrian throne had been assassinated on Austro-Hungarian territory by young men probably connected to high levels of the Serbian government. To the Austrians, who viewed Serbia as an aggressive state bent on acquiring Slavic lands belonging to the Habsburg Empire, the act seemed to be the final straw in a long series of provocations. Having already discussed the possibility of ending the Serbian irritant by war, Austrian statesmen made the decision to use the assassination to pressure the Serbians, either for





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



wide-ranging concessions that would end Serbian ambitions, or for war. Indeed, in Vienna, the assassination crystallized forces which had long been calling for war with Serbia. Yet the Austrians did not necessarily have a free hand in the matter, since Russia had, we have seen, taken up the cause of Serbia. Hence, the Austrians had to consult with Berlin to ascertain the extent to which they could count on German support against Serbia (and potentially Russia).

During the sleepless month of July 1914, European statesmen struggled with a truly amazing list of particulars as they tried to balance their countries' interests against international pressure. Far from international anarchy, the diplomacy of the July Crisis reflected the stated interests of all the European states. If all the cards were not played, the players at least knew what was still held in each hand. The July Crisis has been the subject of thousands of books and articles. From 1914 to the present, participants and historians have discussed the most immediate "causes" of the war in terms of the roles that various actors played during the crisis. The Fischer school, as noted above, emphasized the "blank check," that is, the go-ahead which the Germans gave to Austria-Hungary when the Austrians turned to Berlin for back-up. In this view, the Germans "caused" the war. On the other hand, many historians, and recently Samuel Williamson, have pointed out that the Austrians fully understood the nature of their pressure on Serbia in the midst of the crisis, and fully knew that this pressure would result in war, though perhaps not in a general one.⁴² Further research continues to expand the historiography of these difficult questions. The Russians mobilized in support of Serbians who had been less than open about the Serbian connections to the assassination. The British, by prolonged silence, particularly that of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, missed an opportunity to make the Germans understand that Britain would not stand by during another attack on France. The French, perhaps least guilty of all, can nonetheless be seen urging the Russians to mobilize (enormous investments by the French middle class seem to have played a role), a move which precipitated the final crisis. During the aftermath of the Fischer debate, Joachim Remak made the point that all sinned and all were sinned against; he suggested that one might as well regard the Great War as the "Third Balkan" War. Indeed, in a thoughtful comment in the early 1970s, Paul Schroeder suggested that the hunt for the "one true cause," the *causa causans*, is futile in any case. Indeed, even the assertion that the international system broke down is suspect, since war was an accepted part of the international system.⁴³





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

37

Though statesmen made many attempts to head off war, by the end of July, sleep-deprived European diplomats began to weaken in their conviction that war could be avoided or even contained as a regional conflict. As a result both of long-standing Austro-Serbian animosities and of the German backing (the “blank check”), on July 23, the Austrians issued an ultimatum to the Serbians, an ultimatum designed perhaps to be turned down. It demanded full cooperation in investigating the murders and stopping anti-Austrian propaganda and arms smuggling. It also demanded that certain Serbian officers be delivered up to Austria for trial.

The Serbs agreed to as many of the demands as possible, but they stopped short of allowing Austria-Hungary a free hand in investigating the conspiracy in Serbia itself and in other internal matters. In retrospect, from the vantage point of the other end of a violent and brutal century, the assassination of the Austrian archduke still seems startling, the Serbian insistence on legal propriety somewhat disingenuous. The heir to the Habsburg throne had been murdered, and the Serbian government had been implicated. Even if the Austrian ultimatum was blunt and harsh and the Serbian reply two days later conciliatory in many respects, the Serbian government demonstrated only mild concern that the future head of a neighboring state had been shot dead with Serbian bullets.

Meanwhile, on hearing the terms of the Austrian ultimatum, the Russians proved more decisive than was their habit and let the Serbians know that Russian backing was available. According to Luigi Albertini, author of one of the classic histories of war origins, without these Russian assurances, the Serbs would likely have come to terms with Austria.⁴⁴ Instead, two days after the Austrians issued the ultimatum, the Russians instituted a compromise measure of partial mobilization, the first move toward a military solution to the problem. In light of the military factors which lie at the heart of this study, the Russian move was a decisive point in the genesis of the war. It is clear that many European statesmen, including Bethmann-Hollweg and even Wilhelm II in the wake of the Serbian reply, and including many Russian statesmen, still hoped for and worked for a peaceful solution, but mobilization now brought Europe to the brink of war.

In spite of a number of proposals for negotiating a settlement between Austria and Serbia, the war party in Vienna won out. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, and Austrian forces shelled the Serbian capital, Belgrade, the next day. Even now, however, both Britain and Germany pushed the Austrians to occupy






NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION




Belgrade as the opening to international talks regarding the Serbian reply, but the Russians declared full mobilization on July 30.

The Germans now found themselves prisoner to the Schlieffen Plan. Since their whole response would be contingent on the timing of Russian mobilization, the German high command demanded action. Indeed, the other powers involved were little behind the Germans in interpreting mobilization as the signal for war. On the afternoon of August 2, 1914, France and then Germany ordered mobilization. A few hours later Germany declared war on Russia. German troops were already crossing into Luxembourg, just south of Belgium, by August 3, and the Germans found reasons to declare war on France the next day, simultaneously sending the vanguard of the vast right wing of the “Schlieffen” army into Belgium.



London had a more difficult time entering the war from the outset of the July Crisis. Indeed, in London the assassination had aroused much sympathy for the Austrians. Still, it was clear that British leaders would not allow the Germans to challenge British naval supremacy, or indeed, to dominate the Continent. Clearly, the naval rivalry between the Tirpitz navy and the great sea power of the British was decisive, involving as it did financial and economic power, and much else. In the aftermath of war, historians sometimes pointed out that British statesmen were ambiguous as to what they would do in the event of a continental war. In retrospect, however, it is clear that only a great deal of wishful thinking and positive mental outlook kept the Germans from recognizing that in spite of intermittent friendliness and periodic British attempts to make relations bearable, Britain’s creation of a Triple Entente with a military component could have only one meaning for the Germans. The high commands of the French and British armies had been making joint plans, including the landing of as many as two British corps, should Britain and France go to war with Germany.



It was not so easy for the British government to translate its long-range goals and national interests into reasons for war which might satisfy the public. To have argued that Britain must join a war because Austria had invaded Serbia would have been the height of absurdity. Many Britons had little idea where Serbia was. Britain had its own internal problems, in particular the crisis in Ireland, and anything short of a direct attack by Germany or perhaps a highly emotional issue which could be sold to the public would risk the disaffection of that public and hence potential disaster. The first German footfall in Belgium salvaged this situation for the British.





NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION



Origins, Preconditions, Outbreak

39

Treaty obligations can generally provide a sufficient legal justification for entering the war,⁴⁵ and the protection of little Belgium – long considered a strategic extension of Britain – was tailor-made for the kind of public support needed to justify the war. Britain’s interpretation of its guarantor role vis-à-vis Belgium had been public knowledge for decades. Sir Edward Grey referred to this interpretation at least twice on August 2, 1914. German behavior toward Belgian civilians once the Schlieffen Plan was in progress would of course be of tremendous assistance in bolstering public enthusiasm for the war, but we must look at this phenomenon in later chapters.

The British government had long since decided to frustrate German expansion in any way possible. The naval plans of Germany, the falling British share of world commerce, the German desire to become in some sense hegemon of the Continent – all these factors pushed Britain toward participation in August 1914. For the Germans’ part, their government was in effect overtaken by the swiftness of the crisis, and by the Austrians’ insistence on the Serbian invasion in spite of a partially conciliatory Serbian reply (Wilhelm II and others were horrified at the Austrian action). Still, the Kaiser and many German leaders were convinced that the British were determined to strangle the new Germany. Hemmed in such a way, German leaders reasoned, no dynamic power would do otherwise than go to war. As for the remaining Western Front power, the French never blinked as war approached. Bolstered by powerful allies, they were ready to take back both the pride and the territory which the Germans had taken in 1871.

Hence, on August 4, Britain declared war on Germany. Two days later Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia, and the principal actors of the war’s first stage were all firmly registered as belligerents. The most famous quotation from these days comes from the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, who said: “The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.”⁴⁶ In Europe’s capitals, however, crowds flooded the squares to cheer.

