



World War I

Causes of World War I

Transcript

Narrator: World War I: a war fought on a scale never seen before that stretched around the globe. All the European powers, their colonies and dominions were dragged into the conflict. Why did war, the first world war in human history, break out in 1914? How did so many nations become involved?

In the early part of the 20th century, the world was divided into competing alliances. And as they competed for land, resources, wealth and power, tensions grew. All that was needed was a spark to set off a major international conflict. Unresolved conflicts saw European powers separate into two competing alliances: the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. The Triple Entente's big three were the empires of Britain, France and Russia. On the other side, the Triple Alliance was made up of the empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Ottoman, which included modern-day Turkey. So why did war break out in 1914?

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand on June 28th, 1914, triggered a chain of events that would lead to the outbreak of war across Europe. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalists wanting to break away from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

July 23rd, 1914: the Austro-Hungarian Empire responded by violently suppressing Bosnian nationalists and threatening Serbia, which supported them. The Austro-Hungarian Empire placed unrealistic demands on the Serbian government with the intention that once their demands weren't met, they would invade and defeat Serbia.

July 25th, 1914: surprisingly, Serbia met most of the demands while also mobilising their troops along the Austro-Hungarian border in readiness for an attack. Russia entered the fray, putting its support behind their ally, Serbia, with an eye to expanding influence and empire. Russia warned the Austro-Hungarian Empire not to invade Serbia.

July 28th, 1914: despite Serbia meeting their demands, the Austro-Hungarian government declared war on Serbia. The Austro-Hungarian Empire believed that with the backing of Germany, they could quickly defeat Serbia and keep Russia out of the conflict. Germany did form an alliance with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This was because they saw conflict with Russia as unavoidable. Drawing Russia into the conflict meant France would also become involved because of standing alliances.





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Another empire that could be drawn into the conflict was the Ottoman Empire, which included the territory that makes up modern-day Turkey. Should the Ottoman Empire support Germany, it could block the Dardanelles Strait, Russia's only shipping avenue out of the Black Sea for defence and trade.

July 30th, 1914: Russia, increasingly concerned Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire would take control of the Balkan States, mobilised its defence forces. Russia's military strategy assumed Germany would join the war to support Austro-Hungary, so they amassed their troops along the German and Austro-Hungarian border. Germany saw this as an act of aggression.

July 31st, 1914: Austro-Hungarian troops continued to build against Serbia as Germany demanded Russia demobilise theirs. Russia refused to demobilise any of their troops.

August 1st, 1914: Germany's response was to mobilise troops against both Russia and France and then declare war against Russia. Germany planned to quickly defeat France, the stronger of the two military powers, before Russia was ready for war. German forces would then move east and defeat Russia. The French saw the escalating conflict as a chance to reclaim regions lost to Germany in 1871. They mobilised for war against Germany.

August 2nd, 1914: Germany invaded Luxembourg and were now within striking distance of France across an unprotected border.

August 3rd, 1914: Germany declared war on France. Up until this point, Britain hadn't taken a clear position on what was unfolding in Europe. The time had come to take a stand. Britain told Germany not to invade Belgium. Britain's long-standing treaty with Belgium meant if Germany did invade, Britain would be drawn into the conflict. Britain was also worried that Germany could capture a port in France, Belgium or Holland and use it as a base to attack Britain's naval fleet, its most powerful defence force.

August 4th, 1914: Germany invaded Belgium. This was in breach of Belgian neutrality and so Britain used this as a justification to enter the conflict. They joined France and Russia to form the Triple Entente, in opposition to Germany and its allies in the Triple Alliance. At 7 PM on the night of August 4th, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. The empires of Europe were at war.

