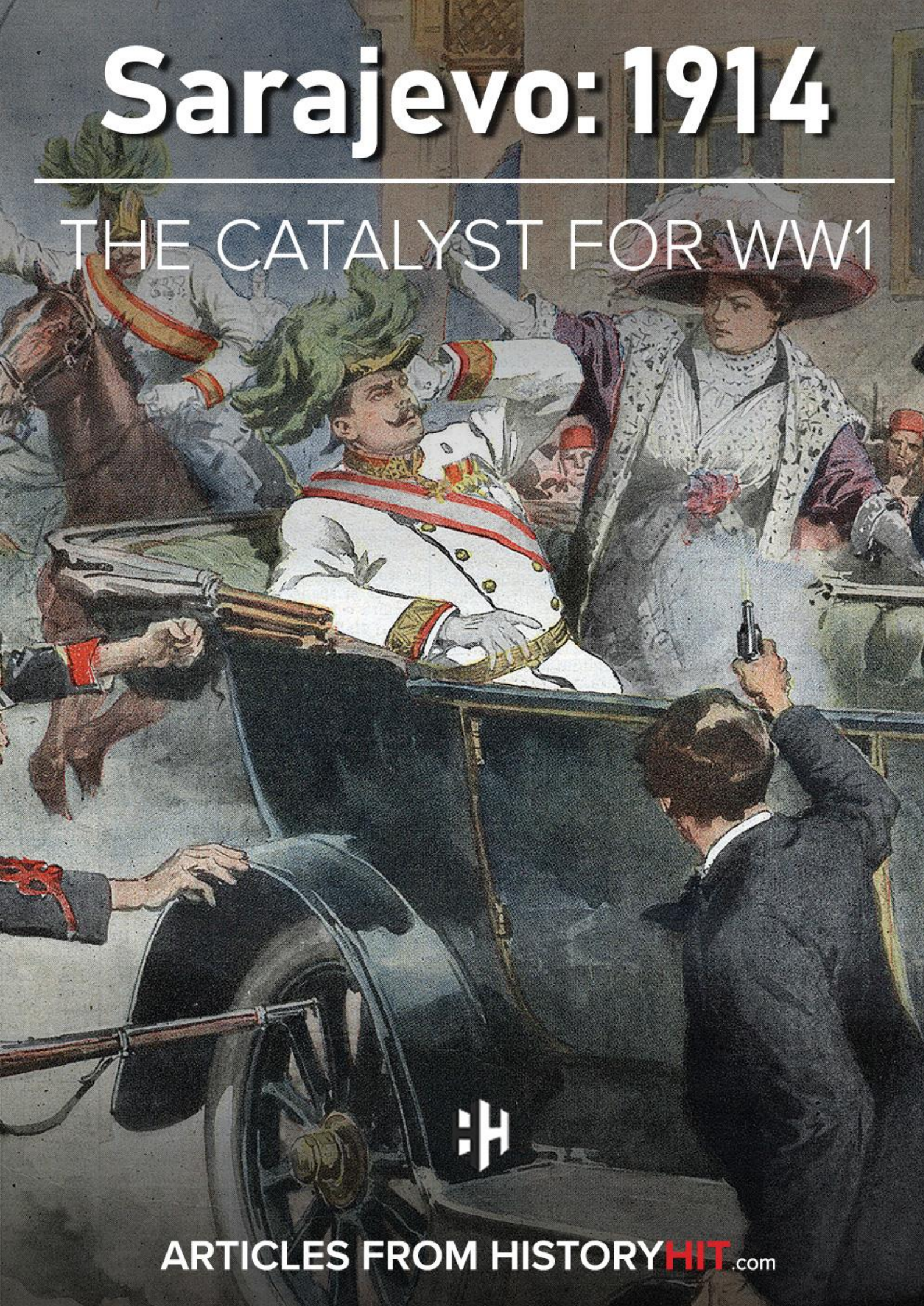


# Sarajevo: 1914

THE CATALYST FOR WW1



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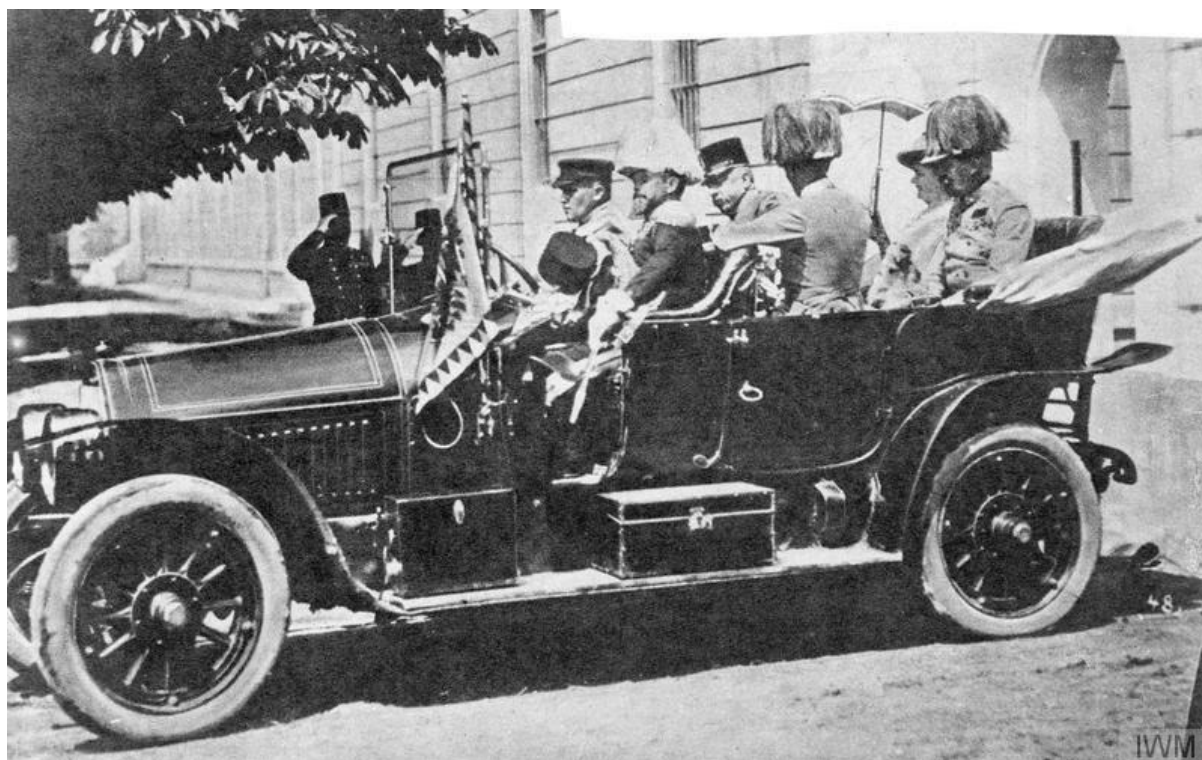
Sunday 28 June. 1914. Close to 11:00. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire was visiting Sarajevo, the capital of one of the Empire's most restless provinces. He was accompanied by his wife Sophie – it was their 14th wedding anniversary.

By 10:30 am Franz and Sophie had already survived one assassination attempt. But at 10:45 am they decided to leave the safety of Sarajevo City Hall to visit Franz' comrades – injured from the attack – at the Sarajevo hospital. They never made it, assassinated en-route by 19 year old Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip.

The murder of Franz Ferdinand 106 years ago this week proved one of the seminal moments of 20th century European history, sparking the July Crisis that ultimately led to the outbreak of the First World War.

This eBook explores the complex causes of the First World War. Detailed articles explain key topics, edited from various History Hit resources. Included in this eBook are articles written for History Hit by leading World War One historian Margaret MacMillan. Features written by History Hit staff past and present are also included.

You can access all these articles on [historyhit.com](http://historyhit.com). *Sarajevo 1914: The Catalyst for WWI* was compiled by Tristan Hughes.



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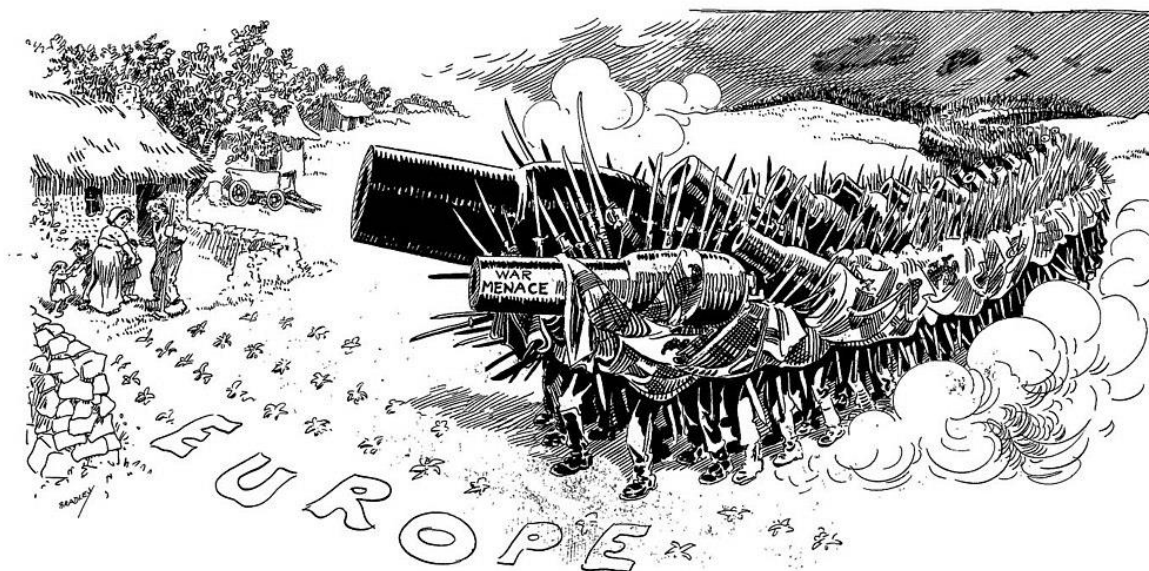
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THE ARMY WORM.



*Cartoon titled "The Army Worm" in the U.S. newspaper Chicago Daily News depicting "War Menace" threatening the people of Europe, 1914*

## The Assassination



*A painting of the assassination.*

## Who Was Franz Ferdinand and How Did He Die?

*By Peter Curry*

Franz Ferdinand was born 18 December 1863. He was one of 70 archdukes in the Austrian Empire (Austro-Hungary would come into existence during his lifetime).

Due to a series of deaths in the Imperial family, including the mysterious death of Crown Prince Rudolf at Mayerling in 1889, Franz Ferdinand rose to the position of heir to the throne.

## Politics and personality

Franz Ferdinand was not a popular man. He had married Sophie, a Bohemian countess of relatively low status. This marriage meant his children could not inherit the Austrian throne, a cause of tension among the Austrian elite.

He was a deeply conservative figure, as well as piously catholic. He was one of the most vocal opponents of war because he didn't believe it was in the interests of the Empire. He was also an advocate for granting greater autonomy to ethnic groups within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

He wanted to address the grievances of different groups, especially the Czechs in Bohemia and the south Slavic peoples in Croatia and Bosnia, who had been left out of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867.

He had a tense relationship with the Emperor Franz Josef. One of Franz Josef's personal servants recalled in his memoirs that 'thunder and lightning always raged when they had their discussions.'

Michael Freund, a German historian describes Franz Ferdinand as

*'a man of uninspired energy, dark in appearance and emotion, who radiated an aura of strangeness and cast a shadow of violence and recklessness ... a true personality amidst the amiable inanity that characterised Austrian society at this time.'*

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*Once emperor, Franz intended to create a triple monarchy consisting of the Slavs, the Germans and the Magyars. This would give Slavs a voice in government which upset the political elite.*

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## How the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand unfolded

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated during a visit to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia.

The day was already a significant one. For the archduke, it marked his wedding anniversary and a rare time that the emperor would allow him to be seen in public

with his commoner wife, Sophie. But for many Bosnian Serbs, the archduke's visit to their country – which had been formally annexed by Austria-Hungary in 1908 – was a far less happy occasion.

## The plotters

Opposition to the Austro-Hungarian annexation had given rise to the formation of Young Bosnia, a predominantly student revolutionary movement made up mostly of Bosnian Serbs, but also Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats. It was a cohort within this group who plotted the assassination of the archduke.

As Franz and his wife drove through Sarajevo in an open-top car, the plotters were waiting for him. The first two would-be assassins failed to act, but the third, a man named Nedeljko Čabrinović, threw a bomb at the car. The bomb missed its target, however, bouncing off the hood of the archduke's car and exploding behind it, injuring 20 bystanders.

Afterwards, Čabrinović attempted suicide, first taking a cyanide tablet that proved a dud and then throwing himself into a river only to find it was just four inches deep. He was then caught by an angry mob and almost beaten to death before being taken into custody.

---

*Dr Leon von Bilinski. the Austrian minister of finance, had been warned of a plot to assassinate Franz by the Prime Minister of Serbia, Nikola Pašić. But no one took the warning seriously.*

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## The second assassination attempt

The outraged archduke proceeded to a town hall meeting before setting off to visit the hospitalised victims of Čabrinović's attack. En route to the hospital, his driver took a wrong turn into Franz Josef Street where another of the plotters, Gavrilo Princip, happened to be sitting in a café.

Princip, a 19-year-old Croat previously rejected from joining Serbian guerrilla bands in the First Balkan War due to his small stature, was determined to prove himself. As the archduke's car backed out of the street, he seized his chance and opened fire.

Sophie, who was shot first, was struck in the abdomen, while Franz was hit in the neck. As his crying wife lay dying, the archduke cried out to her, “Don’t die darling, live for our children” – but shortly after they were both dead.

### **The aftermath**

Too young to face the death penalty, Princip was tried for the murders and sentenced to 20 years in prison. He died in 1918 from a combination of malnutrition and tuberculosis.

Meanwhile, although the 19-year-old and his fellow conspirators attempted to deflect blame for the killings away from Serbia, the assassination of the archduke was viewed as a provocation by the Austro-Hungarians. Exactly one month later, the empire declared war on Serbia.



*Gavrilo Princip outside the courthouse. December 1914.*

# What Was the Significance of Franz Ferdinand's Assassination?

*By Gabrielle Kramer*

## 1. Austria-Hungary lost yet another heir

Franz Ferdinand was only the nephew of Emperor Franz Joseph, and had not been his first choice as heir. But after Franz Joseph's only son, Rudolf, committed suicide in 1889 and his brother – Franz Ferdinand's father – died from typhoid fever in 1896, Franz Ferdinand was next in line.

When Franz Ferdinand himself was then killed in 1914, his own children were not liable to inherit. Sophie had been of nobility but not of dynastic rank, and so Franz had had to agree to a morganatic marriage in order to receive permission from the emperor to marry her.

This meant that the couple's children forfeited their rights to inherit the empire.

The empire was already suffering from internal political conflict and the loss of three heirs apparent in only 25 years quickened its demise.

## 2. Ethnic conflicts in the empire were further fuelled

Stretching across modern-day Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia and parts of Poland and northern Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was made up of many territories which were in turn home to many different ethnic groups.

In 1908, the dual-monarchy empire had annexed Bosnia, giving rise to Slavic nationalist movements that wanted Austria-Hungary out. Franz Ferdinand, however, intended on creating a triple-monarchy, with a third state comprised of Slavic lands that would be seen as equal to Austria and Hungary.

This goal was viewed as a threat by the Slavic nationalists who wanted to secede from the empire and either join with independent Serbia or form part of a new independent state.



The day of Franz's assassination was also Serbia's National Day, which only served to heighten tensions between the visiting future leader of the empire and Bosnian Serbs.

Ultimately, it was members of a predominantly Bosnian Serb student revolutionary group called Young Bosnia who plotted and carried out the killing of Franz and Sophie. But another group was implicated in the assassinations too: Unification or Death, or, as it is more popularly known, the "Black Hand".

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*Serbia's pan-Slavic intentions ran counter to Austro-Hungary's imperial ambitions. Any conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary threatened to at least involve Russia, a country that was sympathetic to Serbian nationalism.*

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This group, which was formed by Serbian army officers, was responsible for radicalising the Young Bosnian assassins in the cafes of Belgrade and providing them with the weapons to kill the archduke.

### **3. It served as the catalyst for World War One**

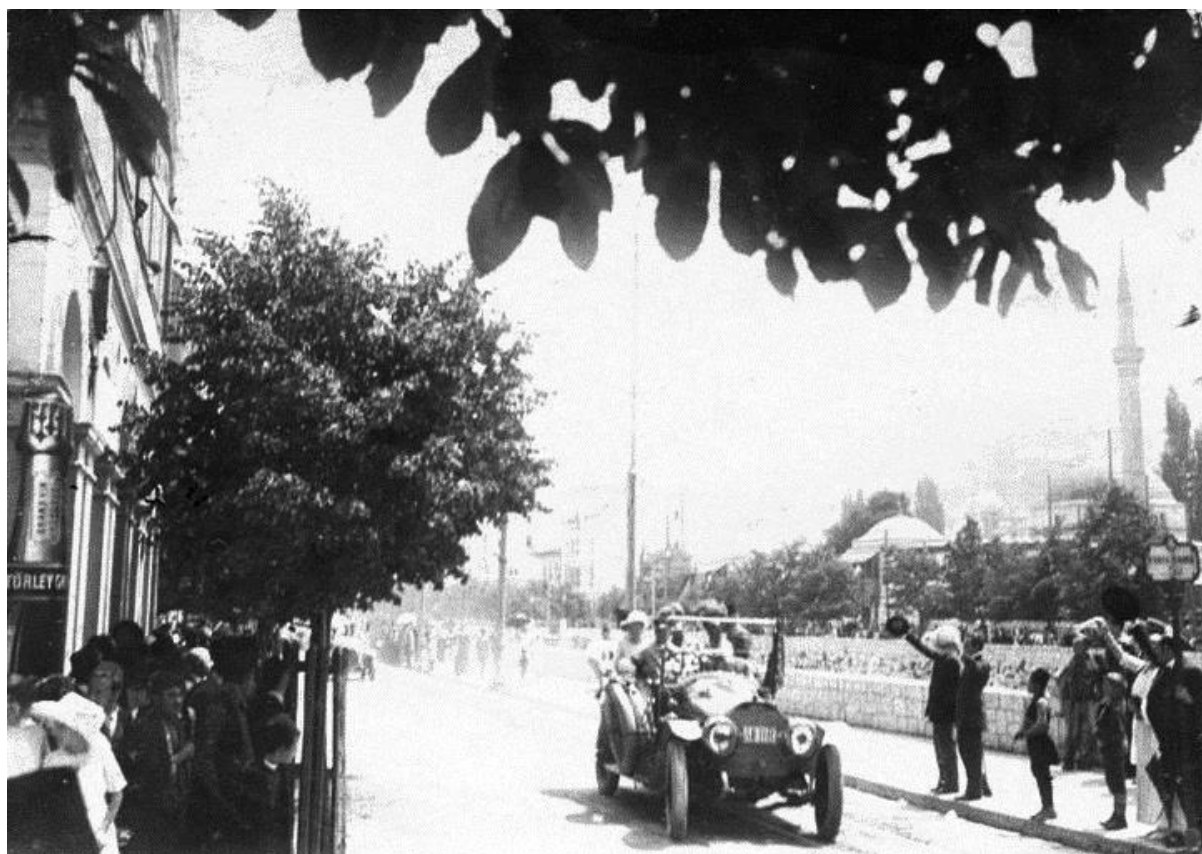
Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia for the assassination of Franz, with the month that followed his killing becoming known as the July Crisis. On 23 July, the empire offered Serbia an ultimatum that contained six articles, one of which would have allowed Austrian police into Serbia.

That article was refused by Serbia, leading Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia on 28 July, exactly a month after Franz's assassination.

Two days later, Russia began to mobilise troops against Austria-Hungary to defend Serbia. In response, Austria-Hungary's ally Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August. Germany then went on to attack Luxembourg on 2 August and declare war on France on 3 August.

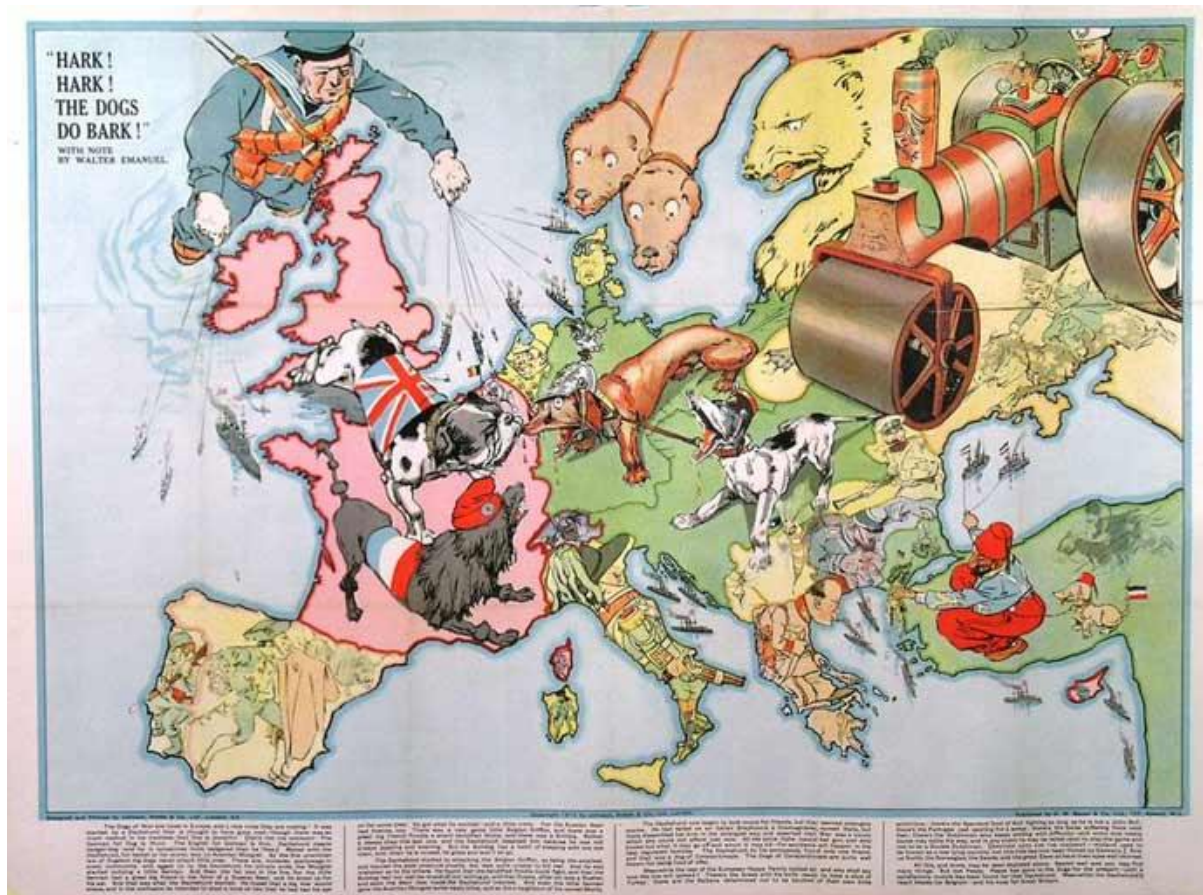
A day later, Germany declared war on Belgium and Britain responded by declaring war on Germany.

The beginning of World War One, which caused 37 million casualties and scarred the world forever, didn't only begin because of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. But his death was certainly the catalyst that sparked the conflict.



*Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie are driven in an open car along the streets of Sarajevo, not long before their assassination.*

# The Road to War



*A British cartoon of Europe in 1914.*

## Europe in 1914: First World War Alliances Explained

*By Alex Browne*

The European alliance systems are often seen as a major cause of World War One. On one side, you had the dual alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary, and on the other you had the Triple Entente between France, Russia and Great Britain.

But it wasn't a simple case of one side declaring war on the other; indeed the Triple Entente wasn't really an 'alliance' at all, and the picture was further complicated by countries on the periphery of these two major systems.

## **The Treaty of London – 1839**

Belgium had broken away from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1830. In 1839, the new nation was officially recognised by the Treaty of London. Great Britain, Austria, France, the German Confederation, Russia and the Netherlands all officially recognised the new independent Kingdom, and at Britain's insistence agreed to its neutrality.

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*Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August after Germany had invaded Belgium. Britain was obliged by the Treaty of London (1839) to protect Belgium's sovereignty.*

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## **Dual Alliance – 1879**

An alliance was signed by Germany and Austria Hungary on 7th October 1879. The two nations pledged to aid each other in the event of attack by Russia. Also, each state promised neutrality to the other if one of them was attacked by another European power (which was more than likely going to be France).

Italy joined in the Triple Alliance in 1882, but later reneged on their commitment upon the outbreak of the war in 1914.

## **Reinsurance Treaty – 1887**

In June 1887 Germany also signed The Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. With the competition between Russia and Austria Hungary in the Balkans, the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck felt that this was essential to prevent a Russian agreement with France. After all, this could lead to Germany faced with a possible war on two fronts.

The secret treaty agreed that the two countries would observe neutrality should one or the other be involved in a war with a third country – although this would be waved should Germany attack France or Russia attack Austria Hungary. It also agreed that Germany would declare herself neutral in the event of a Russian intervention in the Bosphorous and the Dardanelles.

The new German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II believed the treaty could enrage both the British and Ottoman Empires, so when it came to renewal in 1890, Germany refused to sign it.

### **Franco – Russian Alliance – 1894**

The Triple Alliance and the failure to renew a treaty with Germany had left Russia vulnerable, while France had been isolated in Europe since its defeat 1870 – 1871 Franco Prussian War. France began to invest in Russian infrastructure from 1888, and the two formed The Franco-Russian Alliance on January 4th 1894.

It was to remain in place for as long as the Triple Alliance existed, and stipulated that if one of the countries of the Triple Alliance attacked France or Russia, its ally would attack the aggressor in question, and that if a Triple Alliance country mobilized its army, France and Russia would mobilize.

### **Entente Cordiale – 1904**

The next major agreement in Europe came about with the Entente Cordiale in April 1904. Having been involved in three rounds of British German talks between 1898 and 1901, Britain decided not to join the Triple Alliance. When the Russo-Japanese War was about to erupt, France and Britain found themselves being dragged into the conflict on the side of their respective allies.

France was allied with Russia, while Britain had recently signed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. In order to avoid war, the sides negotiated a treaty that settled many long standing issues – particularly their differences in Africa over British control of Egypt and French control of Morocco.

The agreement marked the end of nearly a thousand years of intermittent conflict between the two countries.

### **“The Triple Entente” – 1907**

Another agreement was reached in August 1907, this time including Britain and Russia, thereby firming their stance against The Triple Alliance. But in reality, there was no Triple Entente – the 1907 treaty was specifically between Britain and Russia

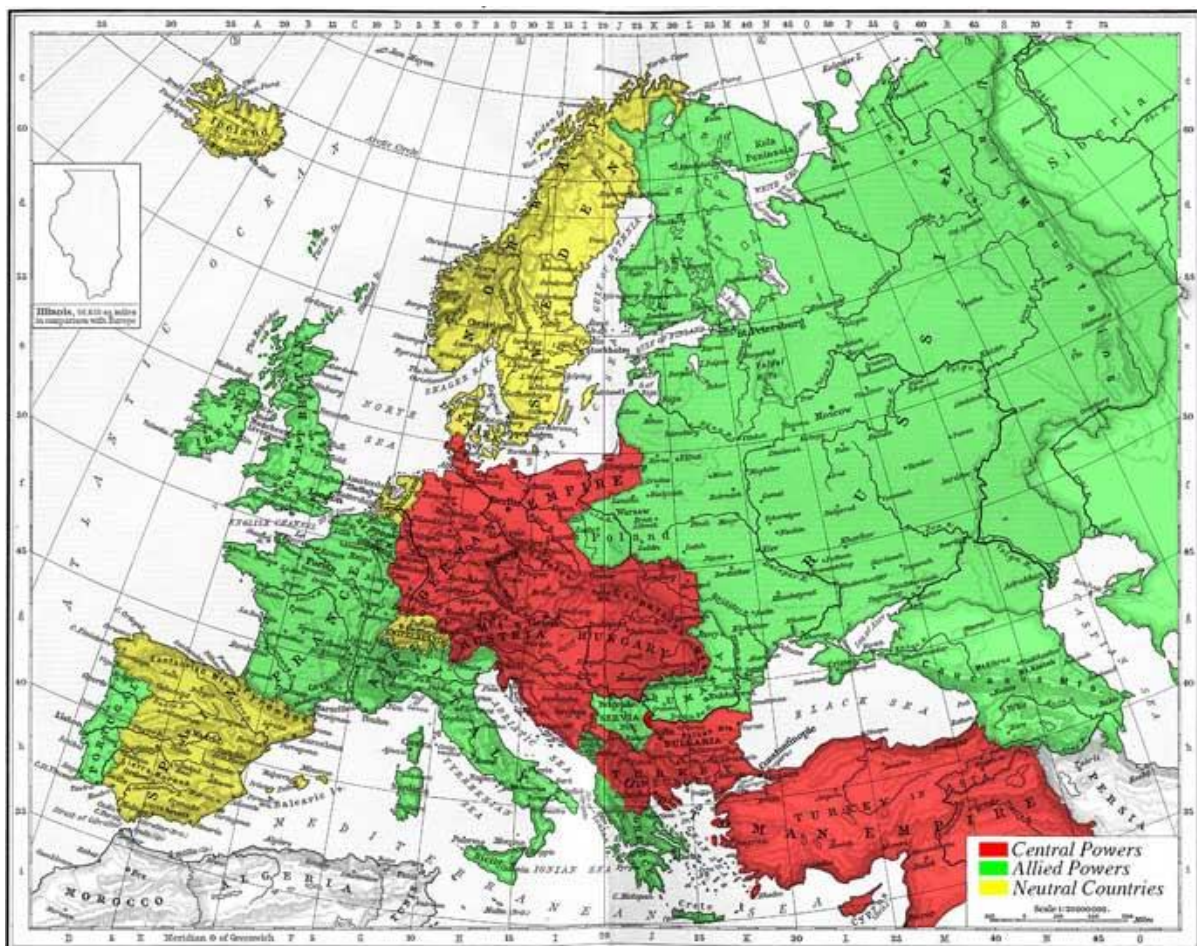
to stop their rivalry in Central Asia, and there was no three way agreement as there was with the Triple Alliance.

Even after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and the July crisis, neither of Britain's agreements with France or Russia guaranteed that she would ally with the countries in the event of a European war. However, when Germany executed the Schlieffen Plan on August 3rd 1914 and crossed the Belgian border, Britain decided to act upon the violation of Belgium's neutrality.

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*The Triple Entente consisted of France, Russia and Great Britain, while the Triple Alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. However, once war broke out Italy reneged on its commitment.*

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*This map shows the surrounding of the Central Powers by the Allies.*

## The 4 M-A-I-N Causes Of World War One

*By Alex Browne*

It's possibly the single most pondered question in history – what caused the unbound, senseless slaughter that was World War One? It wasn't, like in World War Two, a case of a single belligerent pushing others to take a military stand. It didn't have the moral vindication of resisting a tyrant.

Rather, a delicate but toxic balance of structural forces created a dry tinder that was lit by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. That event precipitated the July Crisis, which saw the major European powers hurtle toward open conflict.

### **M-A-I-N**

The M-A-I-N acronym is often used to analyse the war – militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism. It's simplistic but provides a useful framework.

### **Militarism**

The late nineteenth century was an era of military competition, particularly between the major European powers. The policy of building a stronger military was judged relative to neighbours, creating a culture of paranoia that heightened the search for alliances. It was fed by the cultural belief that war is good for nations.

Germany in particular looked to expand its navy. However, the 'naval race' was never a real contest – the British always maintained naval superiority. But the British obsession with naval dominance was strong. Government rhetoric exaggerated military expansionism. A simple naivety in the potential scale and bloodshed of a European war prevented several governments from checking their aggression.

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*By 1914 Britain had 38 dreadnoughts and dreadnought battle  
cruisers to Germany's 24.*

---

## Alliances

A web of alliances developed in Europe between 1870 and 1914, effectively creating two camps bound by commitments to maintain sovereignty or intervene militarily – the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance.

- The Triple Alliance of 1882 linked Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.
- The Triple Entente of 1907 linked France, Britain and Russia.

A historic point of conflict between Austria Hungary and Russia was over their incompatible Balkan interests, and France had a deep suspicion of Germany rooted in their defeat in the 1870 war.

After 1870 Germany, under Bismarck, set a precedent by playing its neighbours' imperial endeavours off one another, in order to maintain a balance of power within Europe.

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*The combined Russian & French peacetime armies in 1913-14 had 928,000 more troops than Germany & Austria Hungary*

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## Imperialism

Imperial competition also pushed the countries towards adopting alliances. Colonies were units of exchange that could be bargained without significantly affecting the metro-pole. They also brought nations who would otherwise not interact into conflict and agreement. For example, the Russo-Japanese War (1905) over aspirations in China, helped bring the Triple Entente into being.

It has been suggested that Germany was motivated by imperial ambitions to invade Belgium and France. Certainly the expansion of the British and French empires, fired by the rise of industrialism and the pursuit of new markets, caused some resentment in Germany, and the pursuit of a short aborted imperial policy in the late 19th century.

However the suggestion that Germany wanted to create a European empire in 1914 is not supported by the pre-war rhetoric and strategy.



## **Nationalism**

Nationalism was also a new and powerful source of tension in Europe. It was tied to militarism, and clashed with the interests of the imperial powers in Europe.

Nationalism created new areas of interest over which nations could compete.

For example, The Habsburg empire was tottering agglomeration of 11 different nationalities, with large slavic populations in Galicia and the Balkans whose nationalist aspirations ran counter to imperial cohesion. Nationalism in the Balkan's also piqued Russia's historic interest in the region.

Indeed, Serbian nationalism created the trigger cause of the conflict – the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

## **The spark: the assassination**

Ferdinand and his wife were murdered in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip, a member of the Bosnian Serbian nationalist terrorist organization the 'Black Hand Gang.'

Ferdinand's death, which was interpreted as a product of official Serbian policy, created the July Crisis – a month of diplomatic and governmental miscalculations that saw a domino effect of war declarations initiated.

The historical dialogue on this issue is vast and distorted by substantial biases. Vague and undefined schemes of reckless expansion were imputed to the German leadership in the immediate aftermath of the war with the 'war-guilt' clause. The notion that Germany was bursting with newfound strength, proud of her abilities and eager to showcase them, was overplayed.

The almost laughable rationalization of British imperial power as 'necessary' or 'civilizing' didn't translate to German imperialism, which was 'aggressive' and 'expansionist.' There is an on-going historical discussion on who if anyone was most culpable.

Blame has been directed at every single combatant at one point or another, and some have said that all the major governments considered war a golden opportunity for increasing popularity at home.

The Schlieffen plan could be blamed for bringing Britain into the war, the scale of the war could be blamed on Russia as the first big country to mobilise, inherent rivalries between imperialism and capitalism could be blamed for polarising the combatants. AJP Taylor's 'timetable theory' emphasises the delicate, highly complex plans involved in mobilization which prompted ostensibly aggressive military preparations.

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*The German war plans were called the Schlieffen Plan, and required Germany to defeat France in 6 weeks to avoid a two front war. The Plan was, however, fundamentally flawed: 8 of the divisions planned for use did not exist. It did fail after the German army was outmanoeuvred on The Marne.*

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Every point has some merit, but in the end what proved most devastating was the combination of an alliance network with the widespread, misguided belief that war is good for nations, and that the best way to fight a modern war was to attack. That the war was inevitable is questionable, but certainly the notion of glorious war, of war as a good for nation-building, was strong pre-1914. By the end of the war, it was dead.

**LORD KITCHENER SAYS:-**

**'MEN, MATERIALS & MONEY ARE THE IMMEDIATE NECESSITIES. ....**

**DOES THE CALL OF DUTY FIND NO RESPONSE IN YOU UNTIL REINFORCED — LET US RATHER SAY SUPERSEDED — BY THE CALL OF COMPULSION?'**

*Lord Kitchener, Speaking at Guildhall, July 9th 1915*

**ENLIST TO-DAY.**

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## Why Nationalism Played a Bigger Part in Sparking the First World War Than Imperialism

*History Hit Podcast with Margaret MacMillan*

Imperialism led to a lot of conflicts in the decades leading up to the First World War, not least the Fashoda Crisis between Britain and France in 1898, and the threat of war between Russia and Britain that simmered throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The great irony was that Britain ended up on the side of the same two nations in the First World War.

Imperialism had caused tremors throughout Europe, but most imperial rivalry, with the exception of the coming conflict over the demise of the Ottoman Empire, had been settled. Africa had been carved up and longstanding differences had been settled.

### **The rise of nationalism**

However, strong nationalistic feelings, no doubt fuelled by imperialism, began to creep into Europe in the years leading up to the First World War.

This emergent nationalism can be linked to the application of Darwinian ideas to human society. Social Darwinism argued that the human race could be divided up into species and that, in their natural state, species tend to have natural predators and struggle for survival. These ideas began to be applied to societies, with dangerous consequences.

Such thinking encouraged the notion that the French were the hereditary enemies of the Germans, and that the Germans were the hereditary enemies of the French and the Russians. These are dangerous ideas because they can lead to a sense that conflict is inevitable. The “struggle for survival” acquires a moral connotation. If you don’t struggle for survival as a people, you don’t deserve to survive.

### **The dangers of nationalism**

In terms of human history, nationalism is a very recent creation. For instance, before the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, very few people thought of themselves as French,

instead considering themselves as Breton, Basque or Alsatian. Many didn't even speak French.

Nationalism is a created sense and, more often than not, it's created by communicators and historians, and by poets and painters. In many ways, national mythologies are like cults of great heroes.

Notably, the decades preceding the First World War saw a great surge in commemorative activities across Europe, typically paying tribute to great national victories in the Napoleonic Wars.

In Germany, the Battle of Leipzig was commemorated with the erection of huge statues and monuments, the British commemorated the Battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar while the French commemorated Austerlitz. Arguably, such commemorations stoked the fires of nationalism ahead of the Great War.

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*Almost as many men joined the army voluntarily as joined after the introduction of conscription (1916) in Britain*

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*Inspection of the Liverpool 'Pals' volunteers, 1915.*

## Why Insecurity Among Europe's Aristocracies Played a Part in the Outbreak of War in 1914

*History Hit Podcast with Margaret MacMillan*

Going into World War One, so many of the people in key positions within the foreign ministries and militaries of Austria-Hungary, Germany and Britain, came from an aristocratic background, which is why class cannot be ignored when considering the factors that led to World War One.

### **Did upper class values lead the world to war?**

Anyone who emerged from the upper classes in those countries grew up with a certain set of values. Of course, one can rebel against such principles and end up being very different, but that doesn't change the fact that they grew up with them. Things like being brave, being prepared to fight and having a strong sense of honour and national identity were all valued by the upper classes at the time.

The importance of honour was central to so much of the thinking that led to World War One.

In Russia, Nicholas II was weak but determined to hang on to the Romanov power. He saw any concession to the new democratic and constitutional forces in Russia as weakness – after having been forced to grant a constitution, he had spent the next 10 years trying to claw back his powers.

Nicholas II was weak but feared that if he didn't look tough in 1914 then people would stop supporting him.

*The Tsar decided on war partly because he was afraid of being weak, a criticism that might also be levelled at Kaiser Wilhelm.*

Powerful aristocratic figures like Nicholas II and Kaiser Wilhelm were part of an upper class establishment that was beginning to fear for its place at the top of society.

The world was changing around them; the value of agricultural land across Europe was falling and many of the big aristocratic and upper class fortunes were based on land. A huge amount of land was being sold off and transferred while families were going bankrupt because they were no longer as rich as they used to be.

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*Tsar Nicholas II agreed to a full mobilisation of the Russian Army on 30 July 1914. He was able to call upon approximately 5 million men*

---

### **A vanishing class**

There was a fear among the upper classes that they were vanishing, an insecurity that is perfectly expressed in Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, a play about dispossession and an old family losing its place. The play ends with the sound of axes cutting down the cherry trees, because a new man has bought the estate and he's going to turn it into a commercial property.

There was also a sense that the values of the old upper classes no longer had a place in the modern world.

*The period preceding World War One was a time of tremendous growth and experimentation and change; amid such destabilising change there was perhaps a feeling that a "good war" might bring nations together.*

This was certainly the case in Germany where, in certain circles around the Kaiser, war was regarded as an excuse to suspend the constitution, get rid of the Reichstag, close down the troublesome unions and dispose of the Social Democratic Party.

War represented a way back to some sort of idealised past where the aristocrats ruled with an iron fist and the lower classes knew their place.

## Was World War One Inevitable Without Franz Ferdinand's Assassination?

*By Dan Snow*

Nothing is inevitable. Nothing is immutable. The First World War was a cataclysm that blew apart the world order, wrecked the first great age of globalisation, destroyed or mortally wounded nearly all of the giant empires that governed most of the earth's population.

It left unstable, illegitimate or even criminal regimes which provoked further wars and instability. 100 years later violence in the Middle East and the Ukraine, and deep divisions across the Balkans, have important roots in what happened during and just after the conflict.

There is a tendency to assume that an event this influential, this earth shatteringly destructive, must have been the product of deep structural forces which forced politicians and society into a war and which mere individual decision makers were powerless to resist. Huge events, so the thinking goes, cannot just be the product of bad luck, a miscommunication, lost order, or individual judgement.

### **Bad luck can lead to cataclysm**

Sadly, history shows us they can. The Cuban Missile Crisis is a good example of when choices mattered. The world was spared a catastrophic nuclear war because Khrushchev backed down, and the Kennedy brothers were clever enough to ignore some of the advice coming their way and conceded on deployment of some of their ballistic missiles.

In 1983 Stanislav Petrov disobeyed strict protocols when he was on duty in the Soviet early warning command centre when the equipment told him the USA had just launched a nuclear strike and he rightly assumed it was a malfunction, so did not pass that information up the chain of command. He is known as 'the man who saved humanity.'

Had the USA and the Soviet Union gone to war in the second half of the 20th century future historians, if there were any, would have wisely pointed out that war between these two super powers, with multiple points of friction, armed as never before with giant arsenals with dodgy command and control mechanisms, and deeply antagonistic world views was absolutely inevitable. Yet it did not happen.

### **A militaristic high society**

There were lots of forces driving Europe to war in 1914. Traditional elites still saw themselves as a warrior caste. Child princes and grand dukes, strutted around in military uniforms, sons of the aristocracy read militaristic books like G.

A. Henty before joining Guards Regiments from St Petersburg to London.

Emperors and Kings often appeared in military uniforms. War was regarded as a legitimate tool of statecraft. It was also regarded as natural and inevitable. Every state in Europe had been forged and sustained on the battlefield.

---

*Lord Kitchener called for 200,000 men to sign up for the British army  
in the 1st month of the war – 300,000 men enlisted*

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Military conquest had delivered vast empires to the European powers. By 1914 no corner of the globe was free from formal control or heavy influence from Europe or her former colonies like Argentina or the USA. Control over other peoples was normalised. It was even regarded as hugely positive.

Misreading Darwin had convinced many that the strong and powerful should swallow the weak and disorganised. It was the fastest way to spread the benefits of Christian civilisation. Periodic wars would clean out the dead wood and even revitalise societies.

Domestically, elites found themselves confronted with new challenges. Socialism, feminism, modern art and music all shook traditional structures. Many old politicians thought that war was a purgative that would scour away these degenerate influences and force the people to return to old certainties: God, Emperor, tradition.



## **The assassination and 1914 'July crisis'**

None of this however made war inevitable. It was the decisions taken by the individuals in response to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo that ignited the war, triggering a chain of alliances, which like NATO's Clause V, were actually designed to prevent it. Some decision makers had deeply personal reasons for going to war.

Austrian Chief of Staff Conrad von Hotzendorf dreamed that victory on the battlefield would allow him to win the hand of the married woman he had become utterly infatuated with. Tsar Nicholas of Russia was so worried about prestige that he thought he had to back Serbia, even if it meant war, because otherwise his own position would be under threat.

The German Kaiser, Wilhelm, was deeply insecure, he panicked just before German troops rolled into France and tried to stop the invasion and send them east towards the Russians instead. His generals told him this was impossible, and the Kaiser backed down, believing himself to be a victim of events rather than their master.

The First World War was not inevitable. Weirdly, it was the belief by too many of Europe's decision makers that war was inevitable, that made it so.