

Were the great
powers ready for war
in 1914?



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To be ready for war the Great Powers would need a great military, both in army and navy, great agriculture and they would also need to be financially capable of supporting the expenses caused by the war. Further more the Powers should be economically successful nations and have good infrastructure to enable them to produce necessary weapons to fight the war. The politics of the nation and the moral of its people should also be taken into account when entering the Great War.

Being ready for war involves a large culmination of different aspects. The country's military is a very important aspect to consider. The military of the nation is an imperative aspect since a military involves a permanent, professional force of soldiers or guerrillas trained exclusively for the purpose of warfare. The size of the military depends on the number of men, the cavalry and the artillery the nation possess. Usually, the larger the military the more chance there is of winning the battle against the other nation(s) since more men equals more power or force. However the motivation and the determination of the military also plays an important part in the plausible outcome.

Another important factor in deciding if the Powers were ready for war is their agriculture. If the nations external food sources from foreign countries were blocked the country would starve unless the agriculture is sufficient enough to feed its people. To be ready for war the country should have the capability to survive for a period during the war by growing its own food. However the Powers should have land available to grow the food. Money also plays a significant part in deciding whether the Powers are ready for war. To be

ready, the Powers should be financially capable to support their nation and its people. Also the cost of the war should not lead to nation bankruptcy.

Prior to 1914, Wilhelm the second rejected Bismarck's careful foreign policy and underwent a period of military expansion both in army and navy. The military expansion can be shown as Germany being 'warlike and aggressive' however a great military is needed to be ready for war. In 1906 the French army was a more sophisticated army than the Germans despite the fact that Germany had 10,000 more men. This did not go unnoticed and by 1914 Germany's army was estimated to be around 2 million. Germany believed that the navy also plays an important part and Tirpitz, the head of the German navy, believed that Germany couldn't be seen as a world power without a strong navy. He wanted to make his navy two-thirds the size of Britain's so that he could challenge them. This also shows Germany being warlike and aggressive. By 1906, he had 18 battleships (first class), 13 battleships (other class), 6 cruisers (first class), 24 cruisers (other class), 103 destroyers, submarines and 35,500 officers and men.

Having a superior army is not enough to be ready for war, the soldiers should be motivated and determined to fight. To improve soldier and citizen morale the German army was described as: 'There was no such thing as the German army but rather the 4 armies of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Wurttemberg'¹. This statement boosted the soldier's confidence since it gave an effect that Germany had a colossal army. The sheer size of the German army implies Germany was in fact ready for war in the military aspect.

The military aspect, despite being an imperative part of being ready for war, is not enough. The industry of the nation also plays an important part. By 1914 Germany was one of the most economically successful nations in, not just Europe but the world. In 1909 there were 4579 commercial companies in Germany with a combined capital of 15, 860 million marks and with annual dividends of c. 1 billion marks. 'In the first two decades of the Empire, Germany had been transformed from a mainly agrarian to a predominantly industrial state' 2. Also Germany's high and sustained rate of industrial growth was the dominant feature of the European economic landscape. It was more persistent than that of either France or Britain, and was rivaled only by that of Russia and, outside Europe, by the USA. 3 Also in the new industries of chemicals and electrics, German industry led the way. 4 The booming German industry makes Germany ready for war in the industrial aspect as well.

Agriculturally, Germany was excellent. By 1914 German agriculture, in terms of yield per hectare, was the most productive in the world. 5 In 1912, Germany was producing 2, 260 kg/hectare of wheat and 15, 030 kg/hectare of potatoes. Their agricultural superiority shows that Germany would have the capability to survive for a period during a war by growing its own food since it had the most productive agricultural land in the world. Germany's thriving agriculture makes the nation ready for war in a agricultural aspect. However, despite the continued industrial growth, German society appeared to have become increasingly fractured during the period. There was a much greater disparity between the upper and working classes. The politics of the nation and the moral of the people should also be sound if the nation is

considered to be completely ready to fight a war. Despite being superior in a military sense, an industry sense and agricultural sense, Germany was not great in a political sense.

From 1870-1914, Britain was the leading world power; its position was sustained by the royal navy. The British navy was larger than any other powers though it was widely distributed throughout the empire in small groups. Britain required a strong navy since the nation relied heavily on imports and its need for a market meant that free sea passage was important. However Britain's army was not as strong as their navy. The army was spread throughout the empire in defense and has been mostly successful. However the army was very small only equipped in fighting small easy wars. A small army doesn't mean it's not a strong army. The British army was small unlike the other larger European armies but it was professional and well trained. The moral and the determination of the army to succeed is also very important in winning wars not just the size.

The army was polarised by class and small reaching a sum of 733, 514, which was tiny compared to the standards of the European rivals. The BEF was the army Britain had available for the possible outbreak of war. The BEF was small with 1 permanent Corp, 1 Cavalry division, 6 infantry divisions (20, 000) however most was spread throughout empire with over half of the BEF at home being reservists which would be the army unofficially sent to France on the western wing of the army in the event of the outbreak of the war. Because Britain's army lacked size its ability of reinforcement was limited. However, in 1914 there was parliament approval to increase the army by 500, 000 men. This quote summarises the British army well: The British army <https://assignbuster.com/were-the-great-powers-ready-for-war-in-1914/>

was historically little more than a colonial police force trained and equipped to fight small wars against inferior opposition. 6 The British were not as strong as the German's in a military and this suggests they were not ready for war in military aspect.

Austria's army was not much better than the Britain's one. Compared with the German army the size of the military was quite small. The size was not only the problem but language was another major one. When the outbreak of war appeared there were 2. 25 million men that were immobilized for Austro-Hungary and they were trained for around 4 weeks before they were sent. There were many languages spoke in the army so they had to try and make sure the same language served together. Most of the time different nationalities had to mix though and the officers were mainly Hungarian or German speaking Austrians with the enlisted from the Slavic population. This meant many Slavic men had to be taught a different language. In 1914 Austria had 40, 000 soldiers and Hungary had 30, 000. There was also the Imperial and Royal Army that was drawn from all parts of the Empire. The 350, 000 men in this army gave their allegiance direct to Emperor Franz Josef. 7

In 8th April 1904 the Anglo-French Entente was consummated after long years of negotiation with a complete settlement of all outstanding colonial differences. This opened the door to Anglo-French military conversations, which continued up to the outbreak of war in August 1914. In 17th January 1906, Anglo-French military conversations about cooperation in the event of a European war began at the Algeciras Conference.

France was not prepared for war as well as the other great Powers. This was because France had no war aim in the build up to the First World War and therefore they did not feel the need to prepare for war much. However they did make a vital preparation in the political aspect of getting ready for war. France made a strong alliance with Russia. This meant that if France had to go to war with Germany, Germany would be forced into war on two fronts. France's government being not very organized caused the lack of interest of starting the war.

France however was a wealthy country and they were financially capable of starting a war but however its executive power was weak compared to Britain and Germany. They also had frequent changes of government, which can cause disagreement with the nations policies. France was not in a good situation to enter a war and their minimal preparation shows their naivety. It is suggested that France had no intention of entering World War One, and they were literally forced into it.

The Russian army was the largest in Europe, but despite having many men, they were not financially capable of paying the soldiers so the Russian government could only call up a fraction of those eligible each year to serve in the army. The Russian army was corrupt and under equipped. The army was backward, short of modern equipment and officers were appointed on the ground off family connections rather than ability. Their battle success was not great either since they were badly defeated by the Japanese army in 1904-1905.

Despite having a poor army Russia's economy was booming. Savings accounts grew from 4, 988, 000 to 8, 992, 000 between 1905 and 1913. The national debt also significantly dropped. The average annual growth rate between 1907 and 1914 was over 6 per cent, which was higher than that of any other Western European country. However, to continue this development Russia needed both domestic harmonies, which was under threat and even more importantly peace with her neighbors. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the events which followed were to shatter both. There was some political instability before the war because the classes were beginning to reveal their grievances.

In conclusion none of the Great Powers were completely ready for war. Germany had a strong army which means the nation was ready in a military aspect but however they were not ready politically. Britain's army was minute however their navy was successful and Austria's army was also small. Russia had a large army but they were not financially capable of paying all the soldiers. Agriculturally Germany was excellent and politically Britain was good. However to be ready for war the nation must possess a culmination of several aspects such as a good military, good agriculture and industry and they should also be financially capable. None of the powers possessed this culmination and were strong in one aspect but not in the other.