

Were nationalistic beliefs ultimately responsible for the outbreak of the first W...



Were nationalistic beliefs ultimately responsible for the outbreak of the First World War? Can nationalism be held solely responsible for starting what is usually regarded as the most destructive war, at least in terms of human lives, the world had ever seen? The answer to this question is a solid no. Though nationalism played an important role in the outbreak of the war there are many other contributing factors which must be taken into account. Imperialism, militarism, the arms race and the balance of power in Europe were all important factors that lead to WW1. The conflict commenced when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the capital of Serbia. This act, however, was merely the spark which lit the flame of war. Though there are many cause of the war arguably the most significant of these was the widespread feeling of nationalism in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. Though nationalistic beliefs cannot be held solely accountable for the war it still played a large part in causing WW1.

Nationalism is a strong feeling of support for ones nation, best expressed in the concept of patriotism. Nationalists believed that “ the needs of their nations were more important than the needs of other nations. Nationalists were so proud of their country that they wanted to be the richest and most important country – and recognized as such”. Nationalism often created tension among the nations of Europe. For example, at the settlement of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the principle of nationalism was ignored in favour of preserving the peace. Germany and Italy were left as divided states, but, subsequently, strong nationalist movements and revolutions led to the unification of Italy in 1861 and that of Germany in 1871. Similarly, as a

result of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, France was left seething over the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany, and revenge became a major goal of the French.

Nationalism also posed a problem for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, particularly in the Balkans, an area comprised of many conflicting national groups, where Russia, because of ethnic Slavic ties, supported Serbia's desire to become a stronger nation. Perhaps the most important manifestation of nationalism which can be directly linked to the opening of WW1 was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Ferdinand was murdered by Gavrilo Princip, a member of the 'Black Hand' organization, a Serbian nationalist group aiming to increase Serbian power.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire had long wanted to crush the growing power of Serbia and now had the perfect opportunity to do so. Under threat of war, it sent Serbia a list of ultimatums but deliberately made these conditions impossible for the Serbians to accept fully. Consequently, it declared war on the 28th of July 1914. This act of aggression summarily brought the rest of the key European powers into the war. Over the succeeding few weeks, the Triple Alliance, Britain, France and Russia, entered the war against Austria-Hungary while Germany supported its Central Power ally, Austria-Hungary. The great powers of Europe, due to one supreme act of nationalism, mobilized for the bloodiest war in history.

Without a shadow of a doubt Nationalism figured heavily in the events preceding and therefore causing the war. Another key component for the outbreak of war was militarism and the arms race caused by it. Militarism

means that the army and military forces are given a high profile and levels of support by the government. Military expansionist policies, and the related arms race, helped facilitate the commencement of the war and also helped make the war a continent-wide event. Acknowledging that Germany was the leader in military organization and efficiency, the great powers of Europe copied the universal conscription, large reserves and detailed planning of the German system.

Armies and navies were greatly expanded during the late 19th century. For example, the standing armies of France and Germany doubled in size between 1870 and 1914 while naval expansion was also extremely competitive, particularly between Germany and Great Britain. By 1889, the British had established the principle that in order to maintain naval superiority in the event of war they would have to have the largest navy. As Britain increased their output of battleships, Germany correspondingly stepped up their naval production. Ultimately militarism, which was spawned from nationalism, created the arms race which greatly heightened tension among the European powers and was a significant contributor to the outbreak of WW1. Perhaps the other inter-related key cause of WW1 was imperialism which contributed to the increase of rivalry in Europe.

Imperialism “ was the desire of nations to own colonies and form an empire”. By 1900 the British Empire extended over five continents while France had control of large areas of Africa. The amount of lands ‘ owned’ by Britain and France increased the rivalry with Germany who had entered the scramble to acquire colonies late and only had small areas of Africa. Accordingly, it

embarked aggressively on colonial expansion under Emperor Wilhelm II, <https://assignbuster.com/were-nationalistic-beliefs-ultimately-responsible-for-the-outbreak-of-the-first-world-war-essay/>

came into conflict with France over Morocco, and seemed to threaten Great Britain by its rapid naval expansion. Several crises prior to World War 1 foreshadowed the war, for example, the clash of Germany against Britain and France in North Africa in the early 1900s. In the Middle East, the crumbling Ottoman Empire encouraged Austria-Hungary and Russia to attempt to increase their power.

Ultimately heightened tension due to militarism, nationalism and imperialism led to the carving up of Europe between the two opposing factions: the Triple Entente (Russia, France and Britain) and the Triple Alliance (Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary). While not as important as nationalism in terms of causing the outbreak of World War 1, imperialism certainly heightened tensions, and laid the foundations for war between the British and the Germans. Arguably, therefore, a number of factors, including Imperialism, Nationalism and Military Expansion, were the fundamental causes of World War I.

Nationalistic beliefs cannot be hold solely responsible for causing the outbreak of WW1. It played an important role in causing the war, particularly the spark that set off the war, but it was assisted by imperialism and militarism which greatly intensified the tensions between the two alliances. Overall, there is little doubt that nationalistic beliefs were a key factor explaining the outbreak of World War One. <http://www.essortment.com/causes-world-war-1-21550.html><http://www.firstworldwar.com/origins/causes.html><http://www.thecorner.org/hist/wwi/national.html><http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/index.html><http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW1/causes.htm>[#Nationalism https://assignbuster.com/were-nationalistic-beliefs-ultimately-responsible-for-the-outbreak-of-the-first-world-war-essay/](https://assignbuster.com/were-nationalistic-beliefs-ultimately-responsible-for-the-outbreak-of-the-first-world-war-essay/)