

# What were the causes of world war 1? essay sample

[War](#)



In 1914, Europe was divided into two, the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. A catastrophic war broke out between these two European powers due to many factors which resulted in great amounts of tension. It proved to be one of the most brutal and horrific wars the world will ever fight, with an estimated thirteen million deaths. The four main reasons why WW1 broke out were The Alliance System, Imperialism, The Arms Race and the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Overall, the most important cause was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. One cause of WW1 was the alliance system, which involved two main forces: The Triple Entente, consisting of Britain, France and Russia and The Triple Alliance consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Each member of an alliance promised to help its allies if they were attacked by another country. Each nation supported the others in its alliance to create a more balanced and powerful force. For example if one nation had a weak navy but a strong army then it could ally with a nation that had a strong navy but a weak army; the two would balance out. This led to the outbreak of war because it created an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and mistrust. Many secret arrangements were made between allies, which resulted in small-scale crises.

The Moroccan Crisis in 1904 is an example where Germany, in fear of secret arrangements being made by Britain and France, made a secret alliance with Morocco, promising to defend them if France invaded. In this instance, Germany was pushing for conflict to test out the loyalties of France. The result was great amounts of friction between the two alliances. Germany was very afraid of the hostile countries surrounding it on its eastern and western borders, even though the Kaiser desired Germany to become a worldwide

power. Austria-Hungary, a nation struggling to contain rebellions was bordering with Russia, who supported these rebels. By doing this the relations between Russia and Austria-Hungary were fragile. Countries had no way of knowing what their rival alliance was planning which increased levels of mistrust and suspicion. Furthermore, the Alliance system made countries feel much safer and confident than they had any right to be. This led to war because countries felt encouraged to start a fight when they had two powerful allies supporting them, whereas they would never have contemplated attacking if they stood alone.

Austria-Hungary is a good example who irrationally attacked Serbia after the Assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Austria-Hungary had Germany and Italy as allies and did not think that Russia would bother to defend Serbia, risking a war. The Alliance system also led to the outbreak of a world war because it was more likely that a local dispute would become an international issue. Each of the six dominant countries in Europe belonged to an alliance if war was to break out. It meant that if just two of those countries were having a dispute, then the world was on the edge of a world war. This would cause a chain-reaction or domino effect. The Bosnian crisis is an example where Austria-Hungary and Russia were at a disagreement and were in conflict with each other. Without the Alliance system, the war would have been contained to two countries fighting. Instead Germany, compelled by necessity, had to get involved, declaring war on Russia. This plunged both alliances into a war, soon to be known as the 'The Great War. Another cause of WW1 was the arms race. This was competition between nations to build the biggest armed forces through both quality and quantity.

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Each nation began to recruit soldiers and build warships and submarines just for the sake of looking powerful. An example of the arms race is the Anglo-German naval race, where Britain and Germany were in competition for naval domination. This created an intense atmosphere of tension that pressured other nations to do the same because they would be left very vulnerable if an enemy had twice the number of soldiers or warships than them. It meant that every country part of an Alliance was building up their military strength in the build-up to WW1. Not only did nations feel threatened but their motives were often backed by jealousy. Take Germany, for example, a nation who was jealous of Britain's powerful navy. They worked furiously hard attempting to produce a better naval force than Britain, introducing warships similar to the British ' Dreadnought'. In some ways this cause links to the alliance system because nations wanted to be part of the most powerful alliance.

Also, it led to war because some countries sought revenge over enemies for past grievances. France, for example, wanted to get back at Germany for stealing two of France's regions Alsace and Lorraine. This caused France to build up its armed forces so the nation could regain control of Alsace-Lorraine. Germany was put on edge by France's sudden determination and felt the need to build up its military might as well to keep the balance of power. It also led to the outbreak of WW1 because it made it likely that countries would settle disputes with war. This happened in the Bosnian crisis when Austria recklessly attacked Serbia after the dispute over the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Austria decided to shell Belgrade instead of attempting to sort out the problem at hand. The consequences of

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this were fatal. Another reason this led to the outbreak of war was because it made the takeover of land much more possible for all nations that were part of the arms race, due to the fact that countries had a much greater armed forces than usual. It was particularly easy to take over land against those that were not involved in the arms race.

In this sense, the arms race is linked to Imperialism because more countries had a desire to build up an empire and own colonies, and to do that, a country needed a powerful military force. Imperialism was another major factor that caused WW1. Imperialism is the desire to take over land and build up an empire. All of the great powers in Europe were competing for most valuable colonies and the most territory. This caused a lot of tension and rivalry between the dominant countries in Europe. Germany, for example, was jealous of Britain's unmatched empire and dominance, an empire which expanded over five continents. It was commonly said that 'The sun never sets on the British Empire'. This point is linked to the Alliance system because Italy's aim was to get land through its allies after the war, in its own attempt to expand its territories. There were many arguments concerning territory in Africa, over who should own what. The Moroccan crisis is a good example of a dispute over territory in Africa. France captured Morocco after a disagreement with Germany who thought that it should be part of the German empire because France already had large empires in Africa.

However, Germany were beaten and forced to retreat, humiliated. The Kaiser vowed to get revenge on Britain and France in the future. Both France and Germany wanted to have control of Morocco because it was abundant with

natural resources and would be a valuable addition to a country's empire. This point links with the Alliance System because it's an example of where Britain and France are working together against Germany and where an atmosphere of tension had been created due to the fear of secret agreements and plans made by an opposing alliance. The result of these small-scale conflicts, was even more friction and hatred being created as one nation lost out to another nation. Germany had entered the colonisation race too late and most of the beneficial territories had already been conquered by other countries. Germany was determined to expand its empire however, even if it meant war. The trigger, and final cause, of WW1 was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. It took place on the 28th June 1914, when the Archduke was visiting Sarajevo in Bosnia.

A gang called 'The Black Hand' were Serbian freedom fighters, ordered to assassinate Franz Ferdinand. Gavrilo Princip was the man who fired the two shots that would result in a catastrophic world war. In ways, this cause links to The Alliance system because Serbia would never have had the confidence to assassinate such an important figure unless they were supported by powerful allies; Russia. The Serbians wanted Franz Ferdinand dead because he stopped the movement in which Serbia and Bosnia would become one country. Both Serbia and Bosnia wanted this due to their similarities but the Archduke refused because it meant losing vital resources and a colony. In some ways, this cause links to Imperialism because Serbia and Bosnia wanted to unite, but Austria-Hungary did not allow it because they desired to have as many colonies as possible. In reaction to the assassination, Austria-

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Hungary sent Serbia a list of demands they knew were unacceptable. Serbia sent back the Ultimatum, refusing just one of the demands.

Austria-Hungary jumped on the opportunity to attack, and did so, declaring war on Serbia. This started the chain-reaction or domino effect. Some countries that had been humiliated, like Russia and Germany, were waiting for a chance to get revenge, and the assassination was the perfect excuse to do so. Russia mobilized its armed forces to defend Serbia. Germany demanded that Russia stop mobilizing its army, which was refused. Consequently, Germany declared war on Russia, to protect its allies Austria-Hungary. Two days later, Germany, fearing war on two fronts, takes The Schlieffen Plan to action. The idea was to defeat France quicker than it took Russia to mobilise its disarrayed army.

After Germany declared war on France, Britain entered the war, ready to defend its Entente allies. Evidently, it is clear that WW1 was not solely caused by any one factor, but a combination of factors including: The Alliance System, The Arms Race, Imperialism and The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. However, the main reason was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, due to it being the trigger to the war which gave Austria-Hungary the chance to attack Serbia. This set off the domino effect or chain-reaction, where countries had to join the war to protect their allies. Without the assassination, the tensions and hostilities between countries may have died down to a less aggressive state, preventing the need for any war. The assassination would never have happened however, if the other causes of

war had not taken place. This is why it was the combination of each factor that led to the assassination and to WW1.