

America and the great war



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World War 1 was fought between 1914 and 1919 and is also referred to as the Great War. It began in the form of a conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. The conflict spread rapidly, drawing most countries in Europe into the war. Several reasons are given relating to the cause of the war and what eventually brought it to an end. This paper will discuss several aspects of the war, especially America's involvement and contribution to the war.

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand is believed to have been the immediate cause of the war. Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the Austria-Hungarian throne. He was later shot dead together with the wife during a visit to Sarajevo in June 1914. A Serbian nationalist group commonly referred to as the Black Hand was blamed for the assassination. This led to Austria-Hungary declaring war on Serbia, which marked the beginning of the First World War (Heyman, 1997). Some World War 1 analysts believe that no single reason can be attributed as the main cause of World War 1. These analysts claim that the war started as a result of a buildup of several factors. These factors included nationalism, imperialism, and the development of militarism. All these factors combined to create the conflicts that led to World War 1 (Willmott, 2009).

Nationalism is one of the causes of the First World War. It is referred to as loyalty and devotion to one's country and a strong desire to protect its interests against other countries. Nationalism was widespread in Europe leading to the Great War. The Slavic people wanted to break away from Austria-Hungary and unite with other Slavic people. Russia backed up this union causing tension with Austria-Hungary. Nationalism also led to France being involved in a conflict against Germany due to the fact that France had

been defeated in the Franco Prussian war of 1870 (Heyman, 1997).

Imperialism refers to a country extending its area of administration to control foreign countries or regions. Imperialism also had a great contribution to World War 1. It increased the rivalry in Europe making it easier for the countries to initiate wars against each other. Britain, Germany and France were in need of foreign markets and fertile lands for settlement and cultivation. This quest for more resources and assets led to competition among these three countries to control African countries and called them colonies or oversea provinces. Britain and Germany resolved differences on their colonies in Africa but Germany clashed with Britain and France over control of northern Africa. Russia on the other hand put pressure on the Balkans and Austria-Hungary in pursuit of Pan Slavism (Willmott, 2009).

Militarism also contributed to the Great War. Countries were competing against each other to prove their military power. Britain had a great and well established navy. This made Germany to start building and establishing a greater army. Germany and France also competed for greater armies. When one nation improved their armed forces, the other nations felt that they had to outdo that army and build a greater one.

The term Pan-Slavism refers to a movement started in the 19th century that recognized a common background in ethnicity among the various people of Slav origin in east and central Europe. The movement sought to unite these Slav people for cultural and political goals. Pan Slavism sought to unite all Slavic people who had been oppressed by the Austria-Hungarians for a long time. Most Slavic people felt a sense of patriotism to the Slavic movement. The desire by the Slavic nationalists to liberate the Slavic people contributed

to the onset of the World War 1. The Pan Slavic movement contributed to World War 1 as it tried to unite the Slavic people causing tension between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Austria Hungary had a high population of Slavic people, and therefore the other countries with Slavic populations felt that Austria Hungary should not control the Slavic people. Russia supported the Pan Slavic movement as it was a Slavic nation (First World War. com). This meant that Russia would join Serbia in fighting Austria Hungary to redeem the Slavic people from Austria-Hungary's rule. Serbia was advocating for the unification of all the Slavic people. The tension caused by the spread of the Pan Slavic movement reached its breaking point following the assassination of Franz Ferdinand (Heyman, 1997).

After the assassination of the heir to the throne, Austria-Hungary had issued an ultimatum to Serbia, demanding that the assassins of Franz Ferdinand and his wife be brought to justice. This ultimatum was issued as an excuse to wage war against Serbia as they knew that Serbia would not heed to its demands. The two conflicting countries started mobilizing their allies in readiness for the war that was being foreseen. Following the Napoleonic wars, the German nationalists had sought to unify all ethnic German speaking people. This unification led to the formation of the great German in 1871 consisting of German speaking states. Germany therefore allied itself with Austria as Austria was a German speaking country. Many Germans disliked the Slavic people and this introduced an ethnic aspect to World War 1.

The alliance system had a great contribution to the ultimate outbreak of the war. Countries signed treaties that aligned them to favorable powers making

it obligatory to join the war. Russia was bound by the treaty to Serbia and announced that it would mobilize its army and resources to the defense of Serbia. Germany on the other hand was allied to Austria Hungary. Germany therefore viewed the mobilization of resources by Russia as an act of war against Austria-Hungary and declared war against Russia (Ross, 1998).

France got involved in the war as a result of its interrelation to Russia. It was bound by a treaty to Russia hence got involved in the war against Germany, and therefore allied to Austria Hungary. Germany on its way to fighting France invaded Belgium to ease access to Paris. This meant that Belgium was drawn to the war despite the fact that Belgium did not have any allies in the participating countries and was therefore neutral.

Britain on the other hand was bound to France by a treaty that though loosely worded, placed a moral obligation to Britain to defend France. This meant that Britain was also drawn to the war. Britain therefore declared war against Germany. Britain was also obligated to defend Belgium following a treaty with Belgium. The Belgian king appealed for help during the attack by Germany and Britain readily came to Belgium's defense therefore joining the war. Britain mobilized its colonies abroad to send aid in form of military personnel and financial aid. Britain got this aid from Canada, India, South Africa and Australia. Japan was also drawn to the war. This was because Japan had a military agreement with Britain and was therefore forced to declare war on Germany. This alliance system in the war that was initially between two countries grew to a great magnitude and in-cooperated other countries. If the war had remained between Serbia and Austria-Hungary, it

would have been short lived (First World War. com). The entry of all the other countries prolonged the war and heightened the conflict.

America had initially remained neutral in the World War 1. The nation had an isolation policy and preferred not to engage in war. Governor Woodrow Wilson on election as president had asserted that it was not necessary for the country to get involved in the war. America had avoided going to war when the war began for various reasons: One reason was that the country's military was not prepared for war, The country had a small army and a small navy, which would not allow them to join the war, The country had also felt that its interests were not threatened by the war, and it was therefore unnecessary for the country to involve itself. America did not have any ethnic affiliation either to the Slavic people or to the German speaking people. The country therefore felt it was unnecessary to get involved in such an ethnic war (First World War. com). The fact that the war was taking part in Europe meant that America found it unnecessary to get involved. This was after America experienced civil war and it was not eager to engage in war again. The turning point to America's policy of being neutral was the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915 by German u boats. When the ship sank, more than 120 Americans on board were killed. President Wilson tried to reason with the Germans to stop sinking passenger ships but the talks were unsuccessful. There were also unauthorized German submarines along the US East Coast. The Germans were using marine warfare to sink ships headed to Britain in order to stop food and supplies from reaching Britain and therefore weaken it. It was this submarine warfare by German that eventually saw America take part in the war (Dolan, 1997).

The interception of the Zimmerman telegram in which Berlin was urging its foreign minister in Mexico to persuade the Mexican government to join in a war against America pushed America to the limit and made it necessary for America to join the war. President Wilson then went to congress and asked for a declaration of war. The entry of America to the war gave new life to the war as they had strong and large supply of men and weapons. This gave advantage to America and its allies (Triple Entente) to defeat Germany in the war. The end of the World War 1 was marked by the signing of the treaty of Versailles (Dolan, 1997). The treaty of Versailles was developed by President Woodrow Wilson who came up with 14 points to which Germany should submit. His intention was for the war never to happen again as many believed Germany was responsible for starting the war. The treaty also proposed the setting up of the League of Nations that would serve to arbitrate between countries to avoid the eventuality of war. Germany's dissatisfaction with the terms of this treaty is believed to have led to the rise of the Nazi movement. The treaty led to the redrawing of Germany's boundaries based on the languages spoken.

America's participation in the World War 1 led to the emergence of America as a super power and gave it immense authority in world affairs. Congress however declined to ratify the Versailles treaty meaning that America could not join the League of Nations. The treaty led to relative stability between 1924 and 1930s. The treaty is however blamed for creating the conditions that led to World War 2. The World War 1 had many casualties, and the peace that followed the signing of the Versailles treaty did not last long before the Second World War broke out.

Webliography

First World War. com

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/origins/causes.htm>

This is a very resourceful website for anyone seeking timeline information on the history of the First World War. The First World War. com website contains a comprehensive recollection of the players in the conflict, the weapons used in the war, but more significantly, the cause of the war. The site attempts to offer a vivid simulation of the World War I events by availing DVD of the war, offering narratives on the conflict and link a to an informative encyclopedia. With its variety of vintage war footage in both audio and video, its collection of classic photographs and war propaganda posters and resourceful maps of the battlefields, it is a very wealthy online source of World War I material.

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