

# What were the causes of the first world war?

[War](#), [World War 1](#)



The First World War broke out in 1914, originally involving Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. There were many reasons why the war started; some were long term causes related with the tensions between the countries of Europe, such as the conflicts between Britain and Germany and Russia and Austria-Hungary. However there was one short term cause which invoked all the existing tensions to break out in war, the assassination of the Archduke and Prince of Austria, Franz Ferdinand. There were five Great Powers in Europe in 1914, Britain, France, Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary. There were many existing conflicts and tensions between these countries. Britain, for one, was becoming increasingly powerful and Germany was determined to catch up with her power by building more factories and having a bigger navy and was also aiming to have a worldwide empire. Both countries were also competing to control the European sea-trade. Furthermore, Germany was not only afraid of Britain's gain in power but also that she was becoming encircled by enemy alliances, such as France, Britain and Russia. France had recently lost a war against Germany, resulting in losing some land to the Germans. France wanted her land back as well as revenge but she were afraid that she would lose another war if she didn't have strong enough allies. To resolve this problem, France united with Russia, both countries agreeing to help each other at their time of need. This was beneficial for Russia too, because Russia was in conflict with Austria-Hungary over who controlled the Balkans and additionally wanted to have a higher influence over South-East Europe. Austria-Hungary wanted to stop Russia from gaining control over South-East Europe and the Balkans, and was equally anxious that their large empire would break up into

smaller countries. The Balkans was a region residing between the Mediterranean and Black Seas, consisting of several small countries; Serbia, Bosnia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and Montenegro. Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary all wanted to control the Balkans for many different reasons. Russia had many ports along its coast but they could not be used all year round because they were iced over in the colder seasons. To overcome this problem, Russia wanted to have ports situated in the Mediterranean where it was considerably warmer, which meant going through the Balkans to reach them. This was her key motive for becoming allies with the Balkans, but she also wanted to help the Slavs who live there from being mistreated by the Austrians, as the Russians were Slavic themselves. However, Germany also had plans to build a railway line leading all the way from Berlin to Baghdad so that she could have a constant supply of oil for her factories, which would mean having to pass through the Balkans. In addition to this, Germany was allies with Austria—Hungary, who also wanted to control the Balkans and Germany wanted to help her allies. Austria-Hungary's main objective for her to control the Balkans were that she wanted to stop movements like the 'Black Hand' and that she already controlled some areas in the Balkans and wanted to keep her large empire. The great powers were divided into two alliances according to their current relationships with each other. First of all, Britain joined with France because they were both enemies with Germany; France sought revenge and Britain wanted to stay the most powerful country in Europe. Russia united with them to make the Triple Entente because Russia wanted more help on becoming allies with Serbia. Germany coupled with Austria-Hungary to Germany could

prevent herself from becoming surrounded by an enemy alliance and Austria-Hungary required help in becoming allies with the Balkans, Serbia in particular. Italy joined them to create the Triple Alliance because although she wasn't considered a Great Power, she thought that Germany and Austria-Hungary were more powerful than the Triple Entente. In 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by Gavrillo Princip, the leader of a gang of Serbians, whilst on a visit to Sarajevo, Bosnia. Bosnia belonged to the Austria-Hungary Empire, however a lot of the Bosnians didn't want to be a part of Austria-Hungary, but instead wanted to be joined with their neighbours, Serbia. The Serbians too wanted to unite with their adjoining country, so Gavrillo Princip and his gang of Serbians decided to assassinate the future king of Austria-Hungary, Franz Ferdinand, to make the country they hated realise what was wrong. All the countries were ready for war, in fact some countries were eager to go to war and try out their new weapons. All the long-term affiliations had accumulated over time, and all that was needed was a spark to set the war off. On the morning of 28th of June 1914, the 'spark' arrived at Sarajevo train station. The Archduke and his wife Sophie were on a visit to Sarajevo on behalf of his uncle, King Franz Joseph. On their way to the town hall, a gang of Serbians, including the leader, Gavrillo Princip, was waiting for their car to pass by. They cast a bomb towards the Archduke but he caught it and threw it on the road behind. Unfortunately it blew up underneath the car behind them and injured several people. The bomb thrower swallowed poison and jumped into the river so that he wouldn't get caught. The couple arrived at the town hall unharmed, and on their journey to the hospital to visit the injured victims of the bomb

afterwards they travelled at a much faster speed so as to prevent another attack. In spite of this extra precaution, when their driver took the wrong turning and he slowed to turn round, Gavrillo Princip, who had been walked along the same road at that time by mere coincidence, turned round and shot both the Archduke and his wife. They died almost instantly and Gavrillo Princip tried to kill himself with poison but it failed to work. He was arrested for his crime and beaten up. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand led to the outbreak of the war through a series of events. On the day after the assassination, Austria-Hungary blamed the killing of the Archduke on Serbia. The next day Russia got ready its army to fight Austria-Hungary in order to aid Serbia in their fight against their enemies. On the 31st of July Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia because they were responsible for killing the Archduke. A few days after, Germany heard about the Russians getting ready for war, and as an act of support for Austria-Hungary, the Germans declared war on Russia. The day after, the 3rd of August, France prepared their army for battle as Germany planned to fight France before Russia. The Germans declared war on France the same day. The Germans also invaded Belgium, but the Britain's ordered them to leave because Belgium was a neutral country and they therefore had no right to be there. However the Germans didn't leave and Britain declared war on Germany. Then finally, on the 12th of August 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia. There were many different causes of the First World War, some from previous tensions and conflicts, others from events closer to the start of the war. The most significant cause was the assassination of the Archduke Franz

Ferdinand, as it set the war into motion and finalised the alliances and fighting sides.