

Document A: French-Russian Alliance

Context: Created in 1892 at the Franco-Russian Alliance Military Convention. This Convention was not made public until 1918.

France and Russia, moved by a common desire to preserve peace, and having no other object than to meet the necessities of a defensive war, provoked by an attack of the forces of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy) against either of them, have agreed upon the following provisions:

1. If France is attacked by Germany, or by Italy supported by Germany, Russia shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany. If Russia is attacked by Germany, or by Austria supported by Germany, France shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany.
2. In case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or of any one of the Powers belonging to it, should be mobilized, France and Russia, at the first news of this event and without previous agreement transport them as far as possible to their frontiers.
3. The available forces to be employed against Germany shall be, on the part of France, 1,300,000 men, on the part of Russia, 700,000 or 800,000 men.

These forces shall engage to the full with such speed that Germany will have to fight simultaneously on the East and on the West.

Source: Franco-Russian Military Convention, 1892.

Document B: German Nationalism

Context: Bernhard von Billow was the German Secretary of State from 1897-1909. He believed in adopting an aggressive foreign policy. The following is part of a speech he gave before the Reichstag, the German parliament.

We don't want to step on the toes of any foreign power, but at the same time we don't want our own feet tramped by any foreign power and we don't intend to be shoved aside by any foreign power, not in political nor in economic terms.

If the English speak of a 'Greater Britain;' if the French speak of a 'Nouvelle France;' if the Russians open up Asia; then we, too, have the right to a greater Germany.

We'll only be able to keep ourselves at the fore if we realize that there is no welfare for us without power, without a strong army and a strong fleet. The means, gentlemen, for a people of almost 60 million – dwelling in the middle of Europe – to battle its way through in the struggle for existence without strong armaments on the land and at the sea, have not yet been found. In the coming century the German people will be a hammer or an anvil.

Source: Bernhard von Billow, December 11, 1899, speech.

Document C: The Planning of the War

Ever since Germany had inflicted defeat upon France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the major nations of Europe had busied themselves with plans for the *next* war, seen by many as inevitable given the conflicting ambitions of the major powers; which, in the case of France, included the repossession of Alsace and Lorraine, both lost to Germany as a consequence of the Franco-Prussian War.

Much is made of the German *Schlieffen Plan* and, to a lesser extent, the French *Plan XVII*. This article details the primary aims of each of these plans, and discusses the rationale behind them.

France: Plan XVII

The chief aim of Plan XVII in the wake of the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War was the recapture of Alsace and Lorraine. Entirely offensive in nature, Plan XVII made extensive use of the belief in the mystical *élan vital* assumed to be instilled within every Frenchman – a fighting spirit capable of turning back any enemy by its sheer power. It assumed the average French soldier to be more than a match for its German counterpart.

More technically, Plan XVII called for an advance by four French Armies into Alsace-Lorraine on either side of the Metz-Thionville fortresses, occupied by the Germans since 1871. The southern wing of the invasion forces would first capture Alsace and Lorraine in that order while the northern wing would – depending upon German movements – advance into Germany.

The architects of Plan XVII, which included Joseph Joffre, took little account of a possible German invasion of France through Belgium. Before war broke out Joffre and his advisers were convinced that the threat of British involvement would keep Germany from invading through Belgium with whom Britain had a treaty; Germany regarded this treaty as a mere “scrap of paper”.

Germany: Schlieffen Plan

Schlieffen took as his starting assumption a war on two fronts, against France in the west and Russia in the east. The nature of the alliance system ensured that Russia was allied with France and later Britain, set against Germany's alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy.

Notwithstanding the potentially enormous size of the Russian army, with its never-ending supply of men, Schlieffen assumed – largely correctly, as it turned out – that it would take six weeks or longer for the Russians to effectively mobilize their forces, poorly led and equipped as they were. Banking on this assumption, Schlieffen devised a strategy for knocking France out of the war within those six weeks. In order to do so he would commit the vast majority of German forces in the west to form an overwhelming assault with Paris as its aim, leaving just sufficient forces in eastern Germany to hold off the Russians during the mobilization process. Once France had been dealt with the armies in the west would be redeployed to the east to face the Russian menace. In striking against France von Schlieffen determined to invade through Belgium, passage through the flat Flanders plains would offer the fastest route to France and victory.

Working to a tight deadline, five German armies would advance through Belgium and France in a grand wheel motion, turning through the Flanders plains north – east of France. Schlieffen's often-quoted

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remark “when you march into France, let the last man on the right brush the channel with his sleeve” was based upon this turning wheel like advance.

By outflanking the French armies von Schlieffen aimed to attack from the rear, where the French were likely to be most vulnerable. A small German force would guard the Franco German border, enticing the French the move forward, upon which they would be attacked from the rear by the main bulk of the German army, assuring encirclement and destruction.

Source: FirstWorldWar.com

Document D: Armies and Navies – January 1914

Nation	Army Size	Naval tonnage
Great Britain	350,000	2,400,000
France	765,000	700,000
Russia	1,700,000	270,800
United States	104,560	714,353
Italy	305,038	285,460
Serbia	363,747	No information
Germany	866,020	951,713
Austria Hungary	424,258	221,526

After 1870 Europe lived in a repressed fear of itself. One, two, or even three years of compulsory military service of all young men became the rule in each country. In 1914, each of the Continental Great Powers had not only a huge standing army but millions of trained reserves among the civilian population. Few people wanted war but many took it for granted that war was bound to break out sooner or later.

Source: College history textbook, History of the Modern World, R.R Palmer and Joel Colton.

Document E: The State of Europe – 1914

Austria-Hungary

- Mix of ethnicities, languages, and cultures weakens nation: Austria and Hungary joined together to be more powerful
- Heir to throne Franz Ferdinand killed in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914
- Austria took Bosnia from Ottoman Empire; still conflicts over this land
- Joined Triple Alliance with Italy and Germany in 1882

Balkans

- Includes the countries of Greece, Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Bosnia
- Mix of many religions (various Christian and Muslim) and nationalities (see above)
- Russia shares ethnic ties with people in this area and wanted to gain authority here to gain access to Mediterranean Sea ports

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- Two wars in the Balkans in 1912 and 1913 gave the Balkans the name the “Powder Keg of Europe”
- Man who assassinated Ferdinand was a Serbian nationalist; many Serbs lived in Austria-Hungary; Serbian nationalists wanted to control Serb areas in Austria-Hungary

Britain

- Britain was stronger and richer than other countries because of the Industrial Revolution
- All people spoke English and were proud of the government, history, rights, and empire
- Felt it needed a large navy to protect its colonies
- Felt threatened by Germany; in 1910 Germany had passed Britain in production of coal, iron, and steel
- Was nervous about competition from Germany’s navy and built many battleships

France

- Was defeated by Germany in Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and wanted revenge
- Doubled the size of its military and made military service compulsory for males, invested in new technologies and weapons
- Population was about half that of Germany
- Built a large colonial empire that sometimes had conflicts with Britain’s colonies
- In 1904 signed Triple Entente with Britain and Russia because it was afraid of Germany’s power

Germany

- Used to be many separate countries; after it beat France in Franco-Prussian War (1870), Otto von Bismarck united all the countries into one country
- Took land from France (Alsace-Lorraine) as a prize for winning war
- Became powerful over time and many Germans were proud of their country
- As industrial production increased and population grew, Germany tried to get more colonies
- Military had the newest weapons, doubled in size from 1870 to 1914; military service compulsory for males
- Emperor (Kaiser Wilhelm II) was related to British king and jealous of his cousin’s power

Italy

- Made of many smaller states and unified in 1870; wanted more colonies
- Wanted to prove it was an important country and joined Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary – defensive alliance that required Italy to defend either country if attacked

Russia

- Far behind the rest of Europe in technology, science, and wealth and wanted to catch up
- Very different government from other European governments and ruled by Czar and military
- Took over smaller countries on its borders; had largest population in Europe and many different cultures; “Russification” made people speak Russian and adopt Russian culture
- Formed Triple Entente with Britain and France in 1904
- Wanted respect from other European countries after it was defeated by Japan in 1905

Source: Numerous secondary sources were used to compile this list.