

UNIT 01: CAUSES OF WORLD WAR I: MODULE: ASSIGNMENT 02: IMPERIAL RIVALRIES

TASK 01: READ AND HIGHLIGHT

Imperial rivalries

One of the main causes of tension between the European powers after 1880 was colonial rivalry. Over the course of the 19th Century, the Europeans had increased their domination of countries in Africa and the Far East and competed to build vast empires. These ventures were initially driven by economic motives but over the course of the century territorial acquisition increasingly occurred due to a mixture of the Social Darwinian belief that the spread of Western civilization was 'God's work' and also nationalistic competition with the other European powers.

Germany's desire to make its influence felt outside Europe was to bring it into conflict with the most established colonial powers, particularly Britain. An example of this effect occurred in 1896, when the German Kaiser caused great offence in Britain over his response to the so-called Jameson Raid of December 1895. This was a failed attempt by Britain to incite a rising against the Boer Republic of the Transvaal in southern Africa. Following the failure of this raid, Germany sent a telegram to the Boer leader congratulating him on resisting the attack and 'restoring peace ..in the face of armed bands which have broken into your country as disturbers of the peace'

The telegram caused public outrage in Britain

Germany's policy of Weltpolitik brought it into conflict with Britain which responded to the threat to its naval supremacy by abandoning its policy of 'splendid isolation'. In 1902 it made an alliance with Japan giving it an ally in the Far East which allowed it to bring back warships from this area. This alliance was followed by an entente with France. Although this entente was not a formal alliance, it settled rivalry between the two nations over colonial issues, and set a new direction for Anglo-French relations

In 1907, Britain and Russia reached agreement over their relationship with Persia, Tibet and Afghanistan, again reducing British concern over security in India and the Far East; France had already secured Russia as an ally following Germany's failure to renew the Reinsurance Treaty of 1887. Now Russia, France, and Britain joined together in the Triple Entente. German naval expansion had thus forced Britain into seeking an agreement with its former colonial rivals, leaving Germany concerned that it was becoming 'encircled'.

The other impact of the Kaiser's actions in creating a navy was that it started a naval arms race. Two Navy Laws of 1898 and 1900 laid the basis for a powerful German battle fleet. Britain responded by launching a super-battleship, the

Dreadnought in 1906 and ordering the construction of eight battle ships in 1909. The naval race also impacted on British attitudes; the British public now saw Germany as the new enemy threatening Britain.

TASK 02: VIDEO AND QUESTIONS

Watch this [video](#) (1914 - 1918 A BBC History of the Great War, Episode 1: Explosion) from 6 minutes to 15 minutes. Questions 3 and 5 are the ones you should focus on. 1,2 and 4 are optional.

What image is created here of Wilhelm II's character?

What was Wilhelm's style of ruling?

What were his aims and why were these likely to cause tensions in Europe?

Why was Wilhelm supported by many Germans?

What was the diplomatic impact of building a new navy?

Task 03: Sourcework:

According to historian Gordon Craig what was the Kaiser's aim in creating a powerful navy?

Why did this plan prove to be totally misconceived?

The new naval programme was, in short, from its very inception directed against Great Britain...the Risk theory...envisaged a German fleet stationed in home waters that was so strong that in the event of a war with Great Britain it could take offensive action against the British home fleet...As the German navy grew in size, the British would...be inclined to avoid conflict with Germany or...seek an accommodation with it on terms that would strengthen Germany's continental position..'

- Craig, Germany, 1866-1945 (1981)

