

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Why did a diplomatic dispute become a general European war in 1914?

A Question Three Puzzle

Background

In 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in France. He used the power of revolutionary nationalism to build an army and an empire, dominating the continent of Europe for over a decade. For a time only Great Britain, protected by its island geography, stood against Napoleon's forces. After his final defeat in 1815, the "Great Powers" of Europe created a new diplomatic system at the Congress of Vienna. The architects of this new system, led by Great Britain, set out to use "balance of power" politics to keep the peace and prevent the rise of another Napoleon.

The system managed to prevent continent-wide conflagration in Europe for nearly a century. Over the course of the 19th century there were many diplomatic disputes between the European powers, and several wars. But in every case the conflict was contained, with only a few countries involved, and peace restored relatively quickly. For the most part, Europeans managed to work together to lower diplomatic tensions. One example of this was the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. Hosted by Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of the new nation of Germany, the conference was called in order to head off armed conflicts between the European imperial powers in Africa. No Africans were in attendance, and the Europeans successfully established rules to govern their division of the continent.

This century old pattern of European cooperation to keep the peace was broken in the summer of 1914. The ongoing conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary was intensified with the June assassination of Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. But this time the European diplomatic system failed to contain the crisis. Instead, this dispute between two central European countries quickly spiraled into a general European war, and eventually became a World War. What explains this new failure?

Some Key Dates

- 1870 - Unification of Italy
- 1871 - Unification of Germany after Germans defeat France in the Franco-Prussian War.
- 1882 - Formation of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary)
- 1890 - Kaiser Wilhelm II fires Bismarck and launches *weltpolitik*: a policy to gain more colonies and world trade for Germany.
- 1905-6 - The First Morocco Crisis: Germany threatens French colonial influence in Morocco.
- 1907 - Formation of the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, Russia)
- 1911 - Second Morocco Crisis: Germany threatens French colonial influence in Morocco.

Outcome To Explain: In 1914, a dispute between Austria and Serbia became a general European War.

Step 1: Identify Correlating Factors

Before 1914	1914	Category
Germany does not exist as a nation-state (1815) [A]	Germany is a nation-state in the middle of Europe. [A]	Geo-Political
There are only a few European colonies in Africa; owned by Portugal, Spain, France, Britain (1850) [B]	Lots of European colonies in Africa. Germany is next to Britain; blocks them in the East. [B]	Geo-Political
Britain leads the world in manufacturing with 31.8% of total output. Germany has 15.8%. (1870) [C]	Britain is #3; Germany is #2; U.S.A. is #1. [C]	Economic
In 1880 Britain controls 22.4% of World Trade; Germany is far behind. [D]	Britain Controls 14.2% of World Trade; Germany is right behind at 12.3%[D]	Economic
Germany has no imperial policy and a small navy, with only 36 battleships and cruisers (1890) [E, F]	Germany has an imperial policy and a much larger navy, with 104 battleships and cruisers. [E, F]	- Political - Military

Step 2: Make Explanatory Claims

<i>Claim: In 1914 a dispute between Austria and Serbia became a general European war because,</i>	<i>Mechanism: This meant that...</i>
1. Germany had become a strong nation-state. The balance of power in Europe was shifting in favor of Germany, and German possessions in Africa blocked British ambitions. 2. The German industrial and commercial economy had become more powerful than Britain's, and had increased its lead over France. 3. The German navy was much larger than it had been.	1. Great Britain's dominance of European and world politics was being threatened. Britain was willing to go to war to contain German power, because Britain felt threatened by Germany. France felt the same way. 2. Great Britain was afraid of losing its top economic position to Germany. France was also feeling threatened by German economic growth. These feelings would have encouraged Britain and France to go to war against Germany. 3. Great Britain, which relied on its navy to maintain its military dominance, was now being directly threatened by Germany. This would make Britain more likely to go to war against Germany.

Sum Up: Why did a diplomatic dispute become a general European war in 1914?

Write your response in a complete and correct paragraph

A 1914 dispute between Austria and Serbia led to a general European war because of the underlying political, economic, and military tensions between Germany and Great Britain. The diplomatic system that had kept the peace since 1815 was built when Germany did not exist, but in 1914 Germany was a strong imperial nation-state with an aggressive foreign policy. This meant that Britain's political dominance in Europe and in the imperial competition around the globe was threatened by Germany. A second factor was that through most of the 19th century, Britain had dominated the new industrial economy that was born on its shores, but by 1914 Britain's manufacturing output was exceeded by Germany's and Germany's share of world trade was approaching Britain's. This meant that Britain's economic position was being threatened by Germany, which was another reason to fight a war against her. And by 1914 Germany had made its military rivalry with Britain explicit, by building up its navy. This meant that Britain felt threatened in this area as well, giving one more reason for war against Germany. So by 1914 Britain and her allies, France and Russia, were feeling directly threatened by Germany politically, economically, and militarily. It was this underlying situation -- not any real concern about the "Serbian question" -- that led Europe to war in 1914.

Step 3: Present Evidence and Reasoning

Generalized Explanatory Claim: When a rising power threatens a dominant power politically, economically, and militarily, war becomes very likely.

Comparative case to test explanation:

16 Cases of dominant powers threatened by rising powers:

<https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/case-file>

Reasoning to say how comparative case tests explanation:

In each case, a dominant power is threatened with displacement by a rising power, just as Britain was threatened by Germany. 12 of the 16 Cases resulted in war.

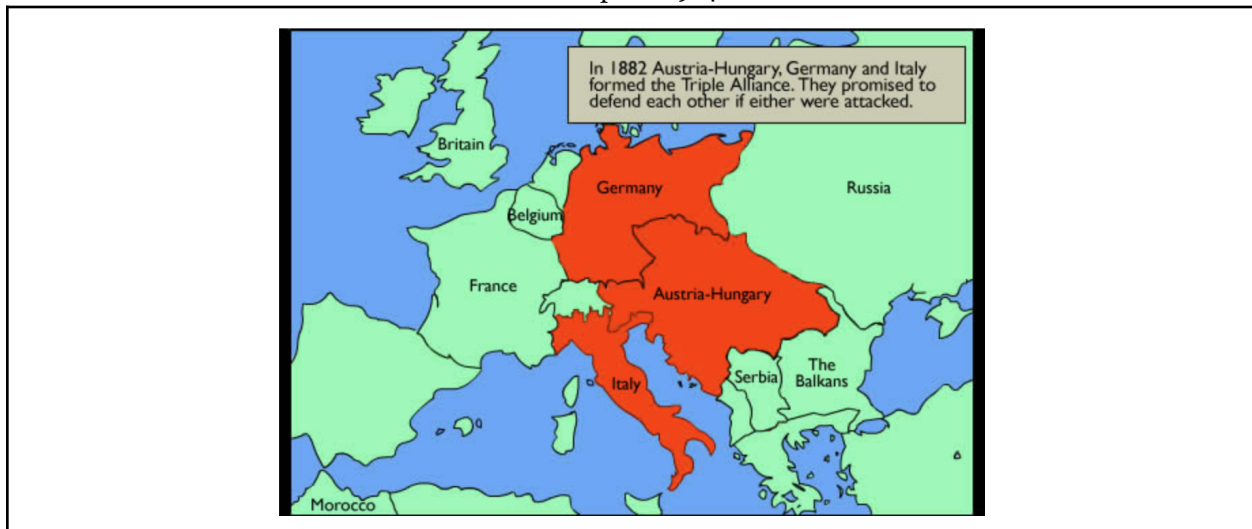
Document A (Both Maps)

Europe in 1815



Source: Wikimedia Commons

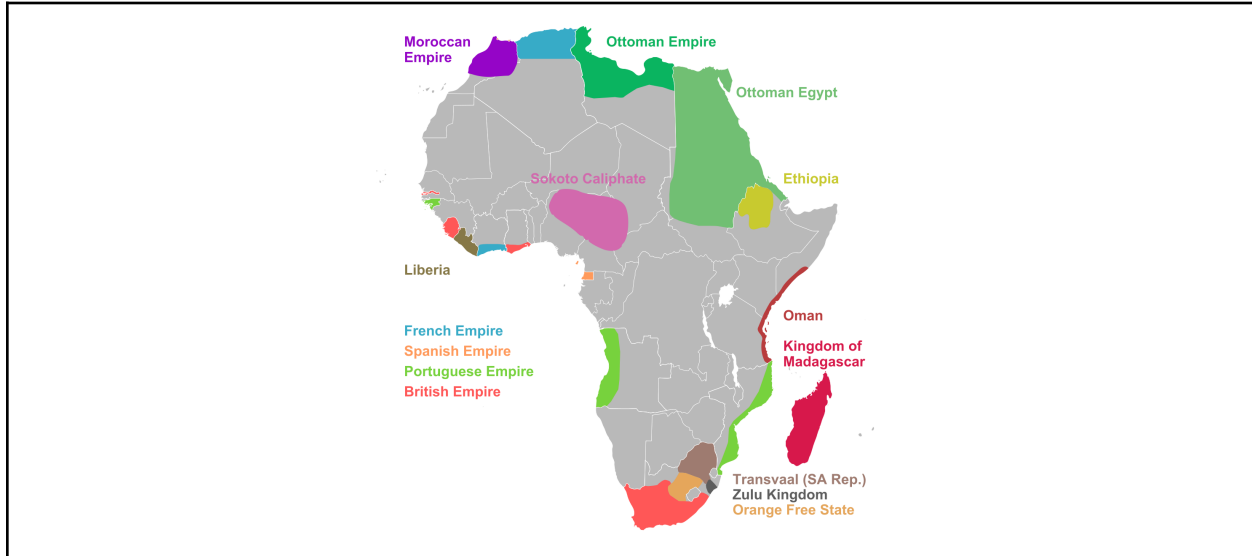
Europe in 1914



Source: UK National Archives Online

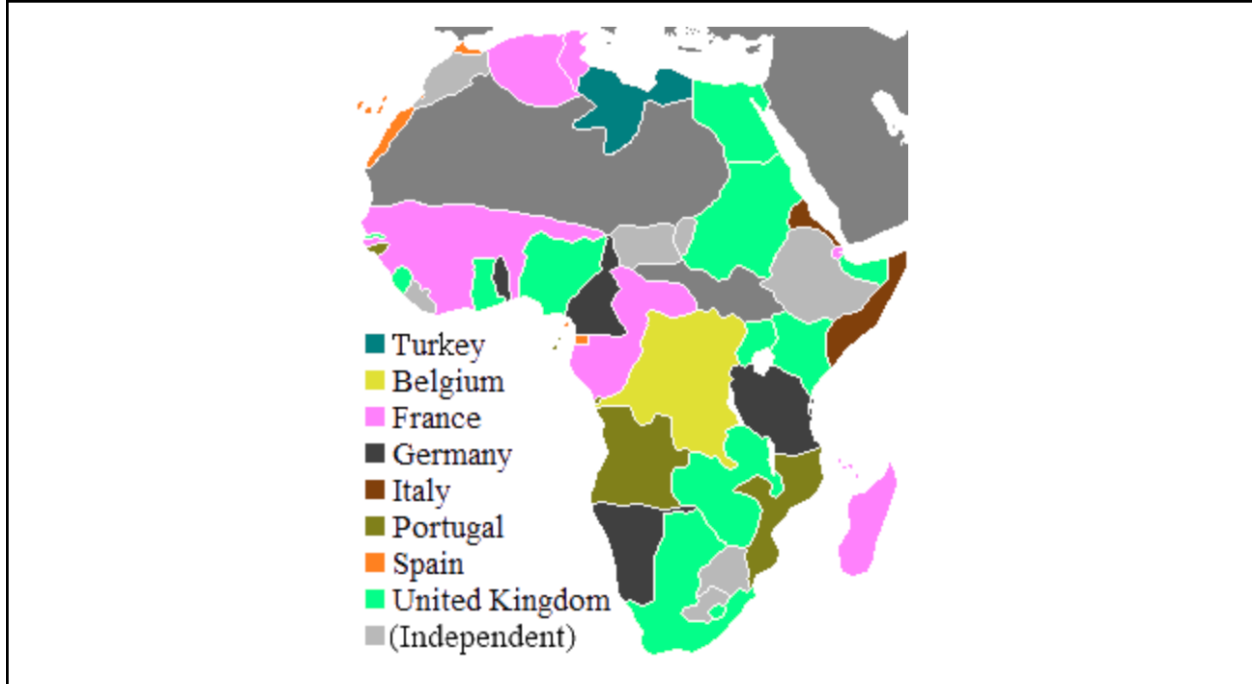
Document B

Colonial Possessions in Africa, 1850



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Colonial Possessions in Africa, 1900



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Document C

Percentage of the World's Manufacturing Production (percentage of world total)

Country	1870	1913
U.S.A.	23.3%	35.8%
Germany	13.2 %	15.7%
Britain	31.8%	14%
France	10.3%	6.4%
Russia	3.7%	5.5%

Source: Fordham University World History Sourcebook

Document D

Percentage Control of World Trade (percentage of world total)

Country	1880	1913
Britain	22.4% (first place)	14.2% (first place)
Germany	10.3% (second place)	12.3% (second place)

Source: Christopher Clark, *Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went To War in 1914*. p. 165.

Document E

Until the adoption of a *weltpolitik* [in 1890], the functions of the navy were limited to the protection of Germany's commercial interests abroad, of her coasts at home, and to raids of the enemy's mercantile marine. These purposes, requiring only a comparatively small number of cruisers and destroyers, became inadequate with the adoption of an imperialist policy. If Germany was determined henceforth to make her voice heard in world politics, she needed a large fleet.

Source: E. Malcolm Carroll, *Germany and the Great Powers, 1866 - 1914*, Prentice -Hall (1938), p. 384

Document F

German Naval Strength, 1890 & 1914

	1890	1914
Total # Battleships & Cruisers	36	104

Source: Naval-encyclopedia.com