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Why and How Did War Break Out in Summer 1914?

Figure 1.1 The war began with an assassination in Sarajevo, but the first fighting of the war occurred in Belgrade, Serbia. In this photo Serb children "play soldier" in their wartime nation. *Source*: Imperial War Museum.

World War I: A Short History, First Edition. Tammy M. Proctor.

Who Started the War?

This question is at the heart of one of the biggest debates in modern history, one which has been raging almost since World War I began more than 100 years ago. The question of war blame sparks emotion, nationalism, and shame, but it is not the most important way to understand the war. Instead, scholars and students of history should focus on a different question about the war's origins, namely: How and why was a global, total, modern war possible in 1914? Rather than considering who is responsible for the war's outbreak, students must think about *how* a local assassination turned into a global conflict, and they must imagine "the journeys travelled by the key decision-makers."

Perhaps the single most important thing to remember about the world in 1914 is that it was full of nation-states and nations seeking to become states. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution gave rise to understandings of a "nation" as an entity composed of people who belonged together and who shared a sense of identity. In turn, these ideas helped create radical notions that power belonged to the people and that political decision-making should reflect the common good. Of course this raised a central question, namely what makes a group of people belong to each other? In response to that question, men and women sought to understand their lives in relationship to the markers of their identities: language, culture, religion, ethnicity. People differentiated between the *state* where they were official subjects and the *nation* to which they truly belonged. For instance, a Czech speaker might live in the Habsburg Empire but secretly dream of a Czech nation-state. In other words, nationalism arose to challenge the authorities of states and empires, and by 1914, nationalism was undermining many of the traditional powers in Europe and around the world.

This new understanding of a nation defined citizens as people with responsibilities to those who shared their "nation," which meant that the privileges of political participation came with the need for defense of those principles. By 1914, true nation-states had citizen armies to fight wars, and most early twentieth-century states conscripted or drafted these citizens to fight when the need arose. Multinational empires understood the simmering tensions of nationalism within their midst, and sometimes these states only called up citizens they thought might be loyal. Other states relied on voluntary enlistment but still framed their call to arms as a national duty and stigmatized those men who refused to fight.

Nationalism was not the only defining factor for the political powers of 1914, most of whom were empires of either land or sea. Identities transformed through such imperial conquest as well. A nationalist leader such as Mohandis Gandhi (1869–1948) built his ideology through contact not only with his place of birth in India, but through his imperial education in Britain and his early work experience in South Africa. In other imperial settings, people faced the creation of

new national or ethnic identities based on the classification and boundaries designed by imperialist officials. In South Africa, for instance, officials created legislation that marginalized leaders, expropriated land, and renamed societies such as the Zulu or the Basotho, lumping them together despite historic enmity. Even those states that were not directly under imperial control, such as China or Mexico, often saw their choices regarding trade and foreign policy severely limited by the intrusions of great powers.

From the British Empire's control of a quarter of the globe by 1914 to the Russian Empire's massive contiguous land empire, a few states controlled the destinies of many of the world's people. Imperialism created unequal relationships that helped shape not only the Great War but especially its aftermath. Map 1.1 shows a snapshot of the world in 1914 as a guide. When colonies and dependencies form part of the figures, small European states such as Britain counted massive populations and land areas in their total numbers. Appendix 1.1 at the end of this chapter provides a brief comparison of the main empires of 1914 and sets the stage for discussion of the war.

As a way of understanding the powerful states, their allies, their enemies, and those marginalized by these imperial politics, let's embark on a grand tour of the world in 1914.

A Grand Tour of 1914

A traveler wanting to circumnavigate the world in spring 1914 would probably use many of the same conveyances that the fictional character Phileas Fogg utilized forty years earlier in Jules Verne's popular novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873). Horse-drawn vehicles, steamships, coal-fueled steam railways, and small boats still featured prominently in the lives of travelers in the early twentieth century. However, newer contraptions had also made an appearance on the scene—streetcars, subways, and automobiles, as well as airplanes and zeppelins. To traverse the empires of the world, a traveler moved between the conveyances of the past and the machines of the future, from hiking in rugged terrain with animal pack trains to whizzing through urban streets in an automobile. A traveler had to be prepared for extremes of heat and cold and for long delays. This global journey might begin with a boat ride down the Thames River.

United Kingdom

London in 1914 was a metropole that served as a shipping, insurance, and banking capital for the largest overseas empire in the world. From a dock at Westminster pier near the Houses of Parliament, political hub and legislature of

one of the world's most successful constitutional monarchies, our traveler (imagine that it is Phileas Fogg repeating his journey) would float past teeming wharves full of imperial commerce toward the maritime center of Greenwich, a sleepy suburb just east of the City of London. The British metropolis marked time for the globe in 1914. Since 1884 Greenwich had served as the divider between east and west, the home of the Prime Meridian, the standard for Greenwich Mean Time, and the location of 0° longitude. Shipping charts, international time standards, rail timetables, and astronomical calculations revolved around this suburb of London and its Royal Observatory perched on a hill above the river. The observant traveler might also spend a little time walking under the River Thames in the state-of-the-art foot tunnel that opened in 1902, little imagining that this space would serve as a bomb shelter for civilians during the war to come.

Embarking again downriver, passengers might glimpse the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, which would employ nearly 40 000 munitions works by 1917. As the riverboat headed toward the English coast, Fogg might take note of volunteers training in military maneuvers in a nearby field, as part of their service in the Territorial Force. With no widespread system of conscription, Britain's small professional army relied upon the idea that if a war came, lightly trained volunteers would step up to contribute. The last major town the passengers might notice before heading into the marshy expanse leading to the English Channel would be Tilbury on the north shore, a fort town that became a gathering place for horses destined for war service in Europe. Fogg and his companions could have still traveled further down the river in the spring of 1914, but during the war a bridge of boats blocked access at Tilbury and allowed for passage of troops across the river.

Travelers had a decision to make at this point about their next destination. For those people wanting to cross the Channel to Europe in 1914, boats left from several smaller ports on Britain's east coast. Britain was a nation of ports, with a rich naval and shipbuilding history. If Fogg had instead sought passage across the Atlantic, he might have traveled by train to the larger ports such as Liverpool, Glasgow, Hull, Bristol, Plymouth, Southampton, or Newcastle to board a large liner, such as the RMS *Lusitania*, one of the Cunard line's most luxurious and speedy passenger ships that had been sailing the Atlantic for seven years. Ireland's ports, which not only served as conduits for passengers and goods arriving from around the world, were also a possible point of embarkation. In fact some of the newest and best liners were assembled in shipbuilding centers such as Belfast. With a successful test of Marconi's wireless in 1898 on the northern Irish coast, ship-to-shore and ship-to-ship communication became a reality as well. The ships docking in Belfast and Liverpool came from ports all over the globe, carrying beef from Argentina, gold from South Africa, grain from the United States, coffee from Brazil, tea from Ceylon, and more. These ports truly demonstrated

the global nature of commerce by 1914 and the emphasis the United Kingdom put on overseas commerce, the Royal Navy, and maritime matters.

French Republic

However, in 1914, our traveler's intent is to cross the Channel to France because as an adventurer and innovator, he plans to travel to Calais using a new-fangled device, the airplane. Several pilots are training for an upcoming cross-Channel race in July 1914, so Fogg convinces one to take him along on a flight from Dover to Calais. Manned flight in flimsy planes with sputtering small engines was just over a decade old, and few could have predicted the need that war would produce for pilots. The Channel looked calm to Fogg from his perch above the water, and there was as yet no sign of the bombers (both airplanes and zeppelins) that soon would be crossing the Channel. Once on solid ground again, Fogg considers a trip to Bruges, Belgium, to buy some of its famous lace or to Ypres, which housed a beautiful medieval Cloth Hall. Both cities soon will figure prominently in the war, Bruges as a German seaport and Ypres, as one of the bloodiest and most active sectors on the Western Front. Fogg, however, decides to forego the pleasures of Flanders (such as beer and waffles) in the interest of time.

Fogg opts to take a train to Paris, the capital of the French Empire. France, the only republic in Europe at the time, prospered from its imperial trade and its industrial expansion. In the French capital, Fogg rides the Paris Métro, a sparkling and efficient new subway system with ten lines and the capacity to carry millions of travelers each month. Fogg's destination, Paris's Gare de l'Est rail station, served as the entry point for his next journey—on the Orient Express, a long-distance train. Reading newspapers and journals while he waits, Fogg observed that modernism had taken over the French capital. From the scandalous and exotic dance routines by Mata Hari to Igor Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring* ballet, which seemed to break all the rules of classical music, Parisians lived in the midst of cultural regeneration and change. Artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's collaboration had created a whole new form of painting and sculpture known as Cubism, which had solidified into a cultural movement by 1914. The streets of Paris thronged with workers and students from all over France and from its imperial holdings in Algeria, Indochina, and West Africa. Artists, radicals, and entrepreneurs from around the world sought success in the French capital.

While waiting for the train, Fogg also witnessed a labor demonstration outside the station in Paris. France's labor unions actively sought improved conditions for workers, and many French people felt an affinity for the socialist politicians clamoring for a more equal society. One of these socialists, Jean Jaurès, was internationally renowned as an orator, a member of the Chamber

of Deputies, and a reasonable voice for socialism's demands for workplace protections, unemployment insurance, and an equitable nation. One of his most ardent causes was pacifism. Jaurès was adamantly opposed to war and militarism in French society, and he had spent much of 1913 and 1914 protesting the mandatory draft of French young men. Like other socialists, he worried that war would derail the international movement of workers' rights and create a storm of nationalism. Although Fogg did not know it, this demonstration foreshadowed the tragic murder of Jaurès in August 1914 by a pro-war assassin.

German Empire

As he boarded the Orient Express for Strassburg (today Strasbourg), Fogg heard a mix of languages on the train. Strassburg itself, formally a French city in Alsace, had been under Germany's control since France's humiliating defeat by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871. The town contained pro-German and pro-French families, and both nations viewed Alsatian loyalty as questionable. The region had featured prominently in one of France's most important political divides in recent history, the Dreyfus Affair, when a Jewish French army officer from Alsace was accused of espionage. The decade-long dispute and legal proceedings exposed a nation struggling with antisemitism and the separation of state from religion. While Dreyfus was eventually pardoned, the "Affair" activated ultra-nationalism and xenophobia while also motivating both the political Right and Left. Ultimately the Dreyfus Affair led to international pressure on France from its friends and allies alike.

With the few hours he had in Strassburg, Fogg stopped for a nice meal and some famous wine from the region. In the distance he could see both the Vosges Mountains, a rugged expanse that became a significant part of the Franco-German battles of 1914 and 1915, and in the opposite direction, the Rhine River, a major artery for commerce. After his brief stay, he reboarded the train toward Munich, the southernmost city in Germany and capital of Bavaria, once independent state but now a state in the German Empire reigned over by the Kaiser, Wilhelm II.

Of all the countries in western Europe, Germany had transformed itself the most in the 40 or 50 years before 1914. As a new nation in 1871, the German Empire turned its attention to building colonies outside of Europe while also expanding its industrial capacity, especially in the chemical and steel industries. Fogg's view from the train would have reflected much of this change—the new consumer goods and prosperity from German economic and overseas development, the factory complexes, and the new infrastructure in transport and communications. This industrial might was soon put to the test by an unprecedented war. Germany also maintained an agricultural

heartland, but the boundaries of these two worlds of agriculture and industry had created tensions in the social and political fabric. With the largest mainstream socialist political party in Europe, the SPD, Germany had a politically astute working-class that was organized and active. Fogg no doubt would have observed the urbanization of the Rhineland areas amid the fairytale castles of Germany's past, but his trip took him nowhere near the real heart of the new German state, Berlin, which was capital of both Prussia and the German Empire.

Habsburg Empire

Munich's location near the Austrian border meant that Fogg was soon able to reach Vienna, the Austrian imperial capital of the Habsburg (Austro-Hungarian) Empire, and then to its counterpart, Budapest, in the Hungarian part of the dual monarchy. The splendor of these towns struck Fogg immediately, especially the Baroque beauty of Vienna and the commercial bustle of Buda and Pest, twin cities separated only by the Danube River. Unlike Germany, Austria-Hungary had not sought overseas expansion in the late nineteenth century. Instead, it fought to hold its empire together in the face of burgeoning nationalist challenges from its multiple ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. The peculiar political system that governed the empire included an aging emperor who was fearfully ill in spring 1914, Franz Josef, and an unusual power-sharing arrangement, with two prime ministers, one for Austria and one for Hungary. Despite political tensions and conflict in its Balkan border regions, the empire flourished, and Vienna served as a cultural capital for Europe. Home of Sigmund Freud, whose exciting breakthroughs had revitalized the field of psychology, and Gustav Klimt, who was part of a different modernist art impulse than the one that Fogg saw in Paris, Vienna buzzed with activity.

Fogg had a decision to make in Hungary about whether to continue toward the Ottoman capital of Constantinople or take one of the spurs to another destination. Serbia was an enticing prospect because of its relatively new status as a kingdom and its rugged natural beauty. Serbia and its neighbors had just emerged from two wars over territory in the region, and there was an optimism and vitality to its public life, especially in the capital city of Belgrade. Another reason Fogg was drawn to Serbia was his curiosity about the place to which he had contributed through a war relief fund to help victims of the recently concluded Balkan Wars. He wanted to see the people behind the charitable appeals. But, despite his interest, Fogg decided to continue on his regular journey with a stop in Romania's capital, Bucharest, on his way to the Ottoman center of Constantinople (Istanbul). He was grateful that the train went directly to the city; thirty years earlier passengers had had to go to the Black Sea port of Varna and take a steamer to reach Constantinople.

Ottoman Empire

Stepping off the train in Ottoman territory, Fogg was struck first by the beauty of the great mosque and former church, the Hagia Sophia, which dominated the skyline. The year 1914 was a pivotal one in Ottoman history because it initially marked a year of peace after a revolt and two Balkan wars, and it also was a time when the Young Turk faction had consolidated power under a constitutional monarchy and begun efforts to modernize the city and its empire. From railway construction to naval purchases, the Ottoman authorities hoped to compete with western empires in industrial and geopolitical strength. The Ottoman capital city was a diverse multiethnic, multireligious metropolis that served as a crossroads for goods moving from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The city, and indeed the empire, housed significant minority communities including Jews, Armenian Christians, and Kurdish nomads. These groups had been clamoring for more autonomy and had been challenging imperial authority. Had Fogg taken a cruise of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, he might have noticed how the Ottomans had fortified and improved their maritime defenses, with such changes as antisubmarine nets and enlarged gun emplacements. A military observer would certainly have noted that Ottoman preparedness had improved substantially as a result of the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913.

Other Empires

At this point in his journey, Fogg left the train that had been his home for the last few days. He prepared to set off to India, on a steamship—one of a number of British merchant ships headed through the Suez Canal for points east. The Suez Canal, which opened in 1869, had become a key strategic and commercial site by 1914, and it had proved profitable in the early twentieth century because of the thriving imperial trade flowing through its 120-mile length. Also, given its location near major oil reserves and its importance for shortening the journey between European and Asian ports (especially in India), Britain took responsibility for protecting the canal and its neutrality by guarding the canal with troops stationed in Egypt. Britain's commercial interests also played a role, since in May 1914, the British government bought a controlling share (51%) of the wealthy Anglo-Persian Oil Company, thereby strengthening its ties to the area. In 1914 alone, "oil output … reached 273,000 tons." From a British point of view, the canal had to remain in its hands, especially in time of war.

As the ship exited the canal zone, Fogg reflected on the changed political boundaries of the African continent as they steamed past Sudan and Eritrea. While the British had maintained a longer presence in the region, especially in their control of the port of Aden (in modern Yemen), the Italians were newcomers in colonization of northeast Africa, taking control of Libya, part of Somalia,

and Eritrea in the late 1880s. Like Germany, Italy sought to join the quest for overseas colonies and hoped to build a reputation as a major European power in the twentieth century. Unlike Germany, by 1914 Italy had not industrialized to the extent that its neighboring European countries had, and it remained a highly divided country in terms of wealth, language, literacy, and political loyalties. Even the building of an empire could not erase its north–south divide nor its serious population drain as workers left for opportunities in other nations.

Fogg's ship did not dock in the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, one of only two African states that remained independent of European rule in 1914. (The other, Liberia, had been established in the 1820s by the United States as a home for freed slaves, so it had a unique status and protection.) Throughout the rest of the continent, European control was the norm, and the rest of the territories had formal or informal colonial status. European officials drew new boundaries, built railways, and established settlements, but they also brought missionaries, teachers, and soldiers, disrupting established norms of family life, agriculture, and politics. Empires also empowered certain local elites, rewarding individuals for collaboration with the new foreign regimes. When war did come, these leaders gained in importance as they led their peoples into foreign conflicts.

Following the route of centuries of merchants, Fogg's ship traversed the Indian Ocean and had a choice of one of three main urban port centers in British India—Madras, Bombay, or Calcutta. Fogg's ship stopped in Calcutta, on the east coast, which in many ways was the heart of British India. The area had hosted British traders from the East India Company for nearly 300 years, and the resulting Anglo-Indian community there was unlike much of the rest of the subcontinent. Fogg recognized the importance of India's commercial ports, and its vast markets for imperial goods, to Britain's sense of itself as a world power. The Indian army, numbering nearly 150,000 men, played an important role in Britain's imperial defense. Certainly, the outbreak of war a few months later would plunge India into the global conflict.

From India, Fogg chose to visit another industrializing and modernizing nation-state, Japan. Of all the powers in the world, Japan was in some ways the most surprising, having defeated both China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905) in short wars. East Asian power had focused for most of world history around China and its dynasties, but Japan's rapid modernization in the 1870s had led it to challenge European powers in industrial and imperial might. As a small island nation, Japan needed raw materials, and its search for those resources had led to annexation of Taiwan and Korea. China, Japan's near neighbor, had little ability to intervene in Japanese imperialism as it had been carved up into a series of spheres of influence by Europe and the United States. At the port of Nagasaki, Fogg remembered that this had been the single gateway for trade between Europe and Japan for more than 200 years; today it hosted ships from around the world.

In 1914, Fogg now had the option of leaving Japan's west coast port of Tsuruga, traveling by fast boat to Vladivostok, and then taking the Trans-Siberian railway back to London, a trip that took only two weeks under the best conditions.

Russian Empire

While a trip across the vast expanse of the Russian Empire appealed to Fogg, he chose merely to stop in Vladivostok and see the fortress under construction there near the bustling commercial port. Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese war and its subsequent revolution in 1905 had led to limited political reforms and to a new focus by Russian officials on securing its borders and improving its army and navy. Still, social and political unrest persisted. Russia's leader, Tsar Nicholas II, latest representative of the Romanov ruling dynasty, knew that his empire had an advantage in terms of population, and that Russia had experienced more than half a century of economic and industrial growth. However, despite impressive growth and change, it was also apparent in 1914 that Russia still lagged behind modernized and modernizing states in industrial might, income per capita, and literacy. Russia was primarily a rural, agricultural empire. It was also the largest contiguous multiethnic empire in the world, and it was capable of raising an enormous army. As such, it was a force in world politics. Fogg knew that a long train journey through Russia would demonstrate the vast land and resources of the Romanov Empire, and that he could observe the variety of peoples now under Russian imperial control. However, he wanted to circumnavigate the entire world, so he turned east, to the Pacific.

United States and Canada

Fogg departed from Vladivostok on a sea route to San Francisco in order to spend some time in the United States, the leading industrial nation by 1914. Having survived a bloody civil war in the 1860s and built its own empire by 1898, the United States was booming. Migrants from around the world came seeking work, and a westward migration had created new states. The United States in 1914 was in the midst of an era of regulation and progressive social causes, making cities and workers the objects of intense reform efforts. US officials, meanwhile, sought to continue economic growth in the western hemisphere and to replace European predominance in important parts of South America's export trade. The United States was also warily watching the revolution raging in Mexico on its southern border, and stepping up its naval program to better connect the mainland with colonies in Hawaii and the Philippines. The United States was a nation on the move, with working-class immigrants seeking new lives in the industrial centers on the coasts and in the Great Lakes region,

agricultural laborers looking to California and the Midwest, and Americans of all backgrounds relocating to the land-rich western reaches of the nation. Fogg's stop in San Francisco was so brief that he only got a glimpse of this dynamism before traveling up the coast to Vancouver Island, Canada, where he boarded a train headed to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

As he crossed Canada, Fogg witnessed many similar trends to those in the United States and unbeknownst to him, traveled the route that hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilian contract workers would take on their way to the Western Front in just a few years. In the years before the war, European immigrants, enticed by generous incentive programs, flocked to Canada for work in industry and agriculture. Many of these guest workers would soon face imprisonment as enemy aliens because they hailed from empires at war with Britain and its dominions. In fact, despite a sizable and vocal French-speaking population, signs of Canada's loyalty to the British Empire abounded, making it clear what role Canada would play in a British war.

From Halifax, Fogg completed his last leg of his world tour with a transatlantic voyage over much of the ocean recently crossed by the ill-fated *Titanic*, which had sunk just two years earlier. Little could he know how dangerous Atlantic waters were about to become. With the outbreak of war, German U-boat submarines began patrolling Atlantic shipping lanes, seeking to damage the British blockade that was slowly strangling German supplies.

As he made his way home from Southampton to London, Fogg reflected on this brief survey of the world, marveling at the signs of global interconnectedness that had not been present in the same way just a few decades earlier. The world he saw in 1914 was one of massive inequities—in wealth, political power, social mobility—but it was also a world that seemed to have created balances to control conflict. All that changed in the summer of 1914.

Tensions in 1914

What Fogg's tour of the world failed to uncover were the simmering tensions that lurked between and within the nations he visited. War in summer 1914 was not merely the result of a single poor decision, nor was it an inevitable reaction to a political assassination. Instead it was a culmination of specific political actions in 1914 and a whole string of decisions in the years leading up to the war. As most historians will agree, World War I is an excellent example of the concept of historical *contingency*. This concept means that war might occur, but it might not; it was not foreordained in any way. War happened in 1914 because real people assessed their choices, made calculations about consequences and possible outcomes, and then acted on those decisions. This contingency is what makes studying World War I so fascinating because

the questions of "What if" and "Why?" abound. The rest of this chapter will list some of the probable underlying causes for war and the certain actions and decisions that led to the outbreak of a local war that transformed into a world war in 1914.

Nationalism

One of the most significant underlying factors in the outbreak of war was the growth of nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The concept of nationalism arose as a result of the revolutions of the eighteenth century in the United States, France, and Haiti. By overthrowing monarchies and establishing new institutions, revolutionaries proposed an idea of citizenship that relied on people to participate in the politics and defense of the nation. Benedict Anderson famously explained this concept as an "imagined community" in which human societies define belonging by concepts such as language, ethnicity, religion, and shared history, rather than mere personal acquaintance. This notion of nationalism had gained strength by the early twentieth century and had become a vital feature of modern life.

Nationalism contributed to the war in a number of ways. First, cultural nationalism exploded as a force in the nineteenth century. Common people found identities in the traditions of the past—folklore, language, music, art, dance, poetry, and other cultural forms. In Scotland, folklorists collected songs and ballads for a new generation, while in Bohemia, political leaders began to talk of a Czech identity based on language and history. Languages that had been nearly lost to time were revived to help link people to their heritage, and schools began to encourage children to learn "folk" languages such as Irish, Welsh, and Flemish. Cultural nationalism created a strong bond and sense of group identity, but it also served to divide groups and to emphasize differences. Second, by 1914, many men and women had achieved a certain level of literacy through religious or state-sponsored educational initiatives. In elementary schools, children learned a national or imperial history that shaped their understandings of citizenship, duty, and rights. Curricula utilized historical events and "national" literature to teach the basics of reading, writing, math, and civics. Even in imperial contexts, mission schools taught a version of the European national story as an explanation for the growth of empire and for the place of its citizens. Nationalism became an important tool for governments seeking to motivate or mobilize populations. In 1914 men who were called to war largely answered that call, many out of a sense of obligation and duty to the nation-state. The lines between Germans and French and Turks and Britons hardened through the hatred and bloodshed of war, but these divisions had already been established well before hostilities commenced.

Eastern Question

Another significant factor in the war was a long-term and lingering conflict that historians know as the "Eastern Question." Certain areas of the world were diplomatic hot-spots because of their histories or their strategic importance to multiple nations. One such hot-spot in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the Ottoman Empire, whose territories and the surrounding borderlands faced upheaval. From an empire that had once reigned supreme in the eastern Mediterranean, the Ottomans had suffered loss of territory, financial bankruptcy, and internal revolt, making it vulnerable to interference from other powers. The problem was that these outside powers had competing interests in the region, which created conflict. The British had clear economic and strategic goals to protect their empire in India, to create markets for their goods and investments (such as railways), and to maintain open international waterways for their shipping. The Russians also knew what they wanted, which included protected access through the Dardanelles for their grain shipments from the Black Sea. The French, who invested heavily in infrastructure and business in the region, also sought markets, access, and political support. In similar ways to what was happening in China with the slow crumbling of Qing dynasty power and the escalation of outside interference, the Ottomans contended with an onslaught of advice, funds, and threats from other world powers. One of the areas where this battle for survival occurred was in the Balkans, which had long been the location for contending Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman control and which was now experiencing a nationalist revival. In short, the Eastern Question led to instability in southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf, and increased vulnerability of minority populations. The presence of significant oil reserves in the area only complicated the picture.

Industrialization

Industrialization and the competition for resources and markets that accompanied it also played a role in the war. As nations experienced industrial growth, they underwent urbanization, population increases, and labor militancy in addition to changes in families and workplaces. Regions that achieved only sluggish industrial growth saw themselves falling behind other nations in infrastructure, national wealth, and social indicators such as literacy. Throughout Europe, grinding poverty, high rates of infant mortality, and poor wages still plagued vast numbers of people. In other parts of the world, the impact of globalizing and industrializing European and North American states led to disappearance of local industries, exploitative labor systems, and disruption of the social fabric of lives. European urban workers, in particular, organized to meet the challenges

of industrialization, creating effective trade unions to lobby for better wages and conditions and eventually founding major political parties to make the case for laws protecting workers. By 1914 organized labor made a compelling case for peace across national borders, but when war came, few were able to withstand the claims of nationalism and patriotic duty that silenced much of the protest. Additionally, the insatiable industrial needs of the wartime state would push up wages and create jobs for those who were not fighting, opening the doors of factories to increasing numbers of women, youth, and immigrants.

Militarization

Many historians speak of the long nineteenth century as a time of peace between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the outbreak of the world war in 1914. Yet, this century was built on warfare. From national wars of liberation in Greece and Serbia to revolutions in France to the Crimean War to the American Civil War to imperial wars around the globe to the Russo-Japanese War to the Balkan Wars, this was far from a century of peace. Europeans, however, did get used to a version of war that could be celebrated in heroic fashion. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, for instance, was short and had clear goals, and it led to the creation of a modern French Republic and a new German Empire. Individual stories of heroism circulated in the new popular press to bolster national understandings of the war. Likewise, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902 served as a wake-up call to the British nation about its lack of preparedness, but it, too, was short and distant, making it the stuff of heroic tales. Robert Baden-Powell, the hero of the siege of Mafeking, used his fame from the war to launch a new organization in 1907, the Boy Scouts, which institutionalized militarism for the masses. War was present, but it did not touch the majority of European populations in a personal and immediate way until World War I.

War had lodged itself in the imaginations of many people by 1914, however. The creation of mandatory periods of military service for young men in every major European country (except Britain, which had a robust voluntary training system) meant that whole generations of young men had some stake and experience in the waging of war. In addition, many amateur societies trained men for war or warlike activities (e.g., shooting), and irregular militias of volunteers emerged in areas where nationalist unrest was prevalent (e.g., Ireland). Women, men, and children across generations learned about a romanticized version of war through popular novels, stories, and songs. Espionage stories, tales of imperial adventures, and shock stories about future invasions all sold briskly at the turn of the century. The shadowy enemies of these tales invariably changed, but the notion that defense of nation in time of war was an important duty of all who lived in that nation became a truism. War and its accompanying values of sacrifice, duty, heroism, and glory took on a transcendent form in political treatises, poetry,

and art. Laurence Binyon was only able to publish a poem such as his "For the Fallen" in the London *Times* on September 21, 1914, because of a half-century of cultural messages that glorified war as a pure sacrifice for patriotism and nation:

> They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
> Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
> They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
> They fell with their faces to the foe.
>
> They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
> Age shall not weary them, nor the years contemn.
> At the going down of the sun and in the morning
> We will remember them.

This sentiment that dying for one's country was an honor accompanied a whole generation of people to war in 1914.

Technology

Finally, it is important to remember that technological innovation had led by 1914 to a revolution in the means of waging war. Not only did nations amass weapons that were designed to be used in air, on land, and at sea, but they also now had the capacity to feed, clothe, transport, and communicate with armies that would have been unimaginable even 50 years earlier. Therefore, when considering the technology of war, it is also important to remember the invention of refrigeration, canning, radio, telephones, electricity, vulcanized rubber, and other processes that made war on the scale of World War I even possible. In terms of the actual weaponry of war, military expenditure soared. Among the six so-called "great" powers (Germany, Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Italy), money spent on defense more than quadrupled between 1870 and 1914. Germany's spending on defense and armament saw a particularly massive increase in the early twentieth century, from a per capita expenditure of $1.28 in 1870 to $8.19 in 1914.

Some of this spending focused on research and development of war materials. Although all major countries spent money on building navies prior to the war, both Germany and Britain invested considerable amounts on naval innovation, with the creation of massive modern battleships with big guns, quicker high-speed destroyers, and torpedo-laden submarines. Russia and Austria-Hungary built railroads in the lead-up to the war, understanding that rail lines would be crucial for mobilization in the event of a European war. Other innovations that became important in 1914 included breech-loading rifles, machine guns, high explosive shells, field guns and mortars, poison gas shells, and airplanes, just to name a few. The most destructive, expensive and frightening weapon of the war

in 1914 was artillery. In fact, the majority of wounds in the war were inflicted by shell or mortar, making artillery the most feared machine for front-line soldiers. These new weapons required a transformation in treatment of the wounded, but the medical profession only slowly adjusted to the devastating injuries that modern weaponry inflicted on bodies. As they did innovate, new surgical strategies, drugs, wound regimens, and triage procedures appeared at the fronts.

Alliances

Many histories of World War I emphasize a system of alliances as the driving mechanism that, once activated, drew Europe inevitably into war. Although it is true that the great powers of Europe organized themselves into two camps in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through a series of treaties, mutual assistance pacts, and alliances, these agreements had an informality that left them less binding than many states had hoped. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy joined together in the Triple Alliance in 1882, but the weaknesses of that agreement became clear when Italy not only declined to join the war with its allies in 1914, but actually fought against them after 1915. Russia, France, and Britain's Triple Entente of 1904 was not a mutual defense alliance—rather, it was a loose agreement; without the German violation of Belgian neutrality, Britain's ability to appease popular opinion in order to aid its allies by joining the war would have been in doubt.

In fact, it was not the strength of alliances that led countries to fall like dominoes into war, but instead it was the fear that promises might be broken and the uncertainties of support that made government officials willing to act. The alliances and agreements allowed for small states to play on the fears of great powers. The powerful states, in turn, imagined complex scenarios that sometimes led to reckless or poor decisions. In other words, the alliance system was important but not necessarily for the reasons that many think it was. Alliances were weak and uncertain, or merely imagined, leading decision makers to take calculated chances after guessing what other nations might do. This created an unstable and volatile diplomatic environment in 1914.

Prior Conflicts

The world in 1914 was certainly a complicated place, but it was not a place where a global war seemed probable or even that possible. In the decade leading up to 1914, several major conflicts and wars had been successfully contained to local regions or had been solved with diplomatic negotiation. The two Balkan wars, while terribly destructive and painful for those involved, each lasted less than a year and seemed to have concrete goals. The Italian campaign to annex

Libya in 1911 was likewise a quick expedition. Showdowns between major powers in Bosnia, in Morocco, in China, in Sudan, and in Rhodesia all ended with treaties or negotiated settlements. There was no reason to think that war might break out between even a few powers, let alone all the major world empires. War occurred because in the summer of 1914 leaders made decisions based on three concepts: past knowledge of conflict, questions of national security, and assumptions about their futures. The catalyst and later the justification for these decisions was a terrorist act on June 28, 1914.

The Journey to War in 1914

Students with little knowledge of World War I often have heard of the assassination of June 28, 1914, and today visitors to Sarajevo can stand in the (bronzed) footsteps of the assassin and imagine the events of that day. In reality, the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophie, in the streets of Sarajevo barely registered in the world news reports except as a terrible tragedy. Other political leaders had been assassinated by terrorist groups or individuals seeking vengeance, so while it was a tragedy, it need not have sparked a world war. For example, Tsar Alexander II of Russia died from an assassin's bomb in 1881, and US President William McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist in 1901. Reports, then, of Franz Ferdinand's death initially described it as a terrible act of violence and a blow to the Habsburg monarchy. What turned an act of violence into a catalyst for war were the reactions by diplomats and political leaders in the month that followed. Each used the event for purposes beyond the scope of the actual assassination. This series of actions and decisions is usually called the "July Crisis," which in turn activated the "Guns of August." How did it happen?

The background context of the Eastern Question is significant here. As Ottoman control of the Balkan peninsula continued to crumble in the nineteenth century in the face of popular revolutions and resistance, Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania all gained independence from the Ottomans, followed by recognition from the great powers. Bulgaria sought a similar independence in 1908, sparking Austria-Hungary to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina at the same time. Crisis was averted only because of intervention from the major powers, who recognized this annexation as a legitimate one under rules established years earlier at the Treaty of Berlin (1878). Bosnia and Herzegovina became part of the Habsburg Empire, but many Serb nationalists lived and worked in Bosnia and saw Bosnia's natural and national future as part of a greater Serbia. Therefore, when the heir to the Habsburg throne visited the capital of Bosnia on the most important Serbian national holiday of the year, it was not entirely surprising that he was the target of violence.

The shooter, Gavrilo Princip, was 19 years old and one of seven conspirators who set out to murder the heir. The first assassination attempt of the day wounded members of Franz Ferdinand's party, but the Archduke chose to continue with his itinerary at least through a planned speech at City Hall. After this speech, the archduke wanted to visit the wounded from the first assassination attempt, but the change in itinerary confused the drivers who went down the wrong street. When told to reverse, the drivers had to push the car back because cars did not yet have a reverse gear. At this moment, Princip was in the right place at the right time to make his move. He stepped up on the running board of the car and, with two shots at point-blank range, he hit both Franz Ferdinand and his wife. By lunchtime that day, both were dead, and Princip, "who was trying to shoot himself," was in custody.

What was unknown at the time, though suspected, was that Serbian government officials had aided and armed these conspirators, who were part of a secret organization known as the Black Hand. It was this suspicion of Serbian culpability along with a deep sense of insecurity that led Austria-Hungary to move toward punishing Serbia for this crime. Another way to perceive this event is as a spark for another Balkan war, fought locally over the boundaries that had been at stake since the Bosnian annexation crisis and the creation of Bulgaria in 1908. Each Balkan conflict, in 1912, 1913, and 1914, sought to deal with the tensions over boundaries and political power in the region. What is important to understand is how this Third Balkan War turned into World War I. The answer to that is complicated and has been the subject of heated debate among historians for a century. This is where the issue of contingency reappears and becomes important to the analysis. The move from local conflict to global war occurred because of choices made by political leaders in a number of states and because of a "shared political culture." By examining each of these states separately, it is easier to see the pattern that emerges by late July 1914 and to construct a timeline that expanded war in the Balkans to war around the world (see Timeline in Appendix 1.2, at the end of this chapter).

First, Austria-Hungary, reeling from the shock of the assassination and angry at what appeared to be Serb complicity, appealed to its allies for support and aid should it challenge Serbia. Austria-Hungarian officials wanted reassurance because they feared retaliation from the Russian Empire, which had appointed itself protector of Slavic peoples and friend to Serbia in a grand gesture years earlier. Russia was also wary of any attempt by Austria-Hungary to expand its boundaries into former Ottoman territory. The Habsburg foreign minister, Leopold Count Berchtold, was an experienced diplomat who had served in Britain, France, and Russia prior to the war. The assassination had been a personal tragedy for him because he and his spouse had been close friends with the archduke and his wife. Berchtold and other Austro-Hungarian leaders agreed

that some action had to be taken to respond to this provocation, but without solid proof of Serb involvement, and without the backing of allies, they were reluctant to act too rashly. Berchtold, therefore, sought German assurances of support should the Habsburgs challenge Serbia. He sent a messenger to Germany on July 5.

Meanwhile in Germany, many political leaders felt sympathy for the Habsburgs and quite quickly saw the need for some response. By the time the Austrian messenger left Berlin on July 7, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, and Under-Secretary of State Arthur Zimmermann had agreed upon support for their ally. Basically, the Emperor and his officials saw Austrian action against Serbia as justified, and German leaders had faith that the war would be localized, as the earlier Balkan Wars had been. Some historians have argued as well that Germany might have had a preventive war in mind. Certainly German leaders looked uneasily at growing Russian military and industrial expansion, and they spoke among themselves in bellicose terms. Some saw war coming to Europe in the near future and perhaps viewed this as an opportunity to fight while Germany was still relatively strong. In any case, the Germans did promise support in vague terms to the Habsburgs in what has become known in the historical literature as the "blank check," implying support in any eventuality. In hindsight, it looks like both Austria-Hungary and Germany were engaging in very risky behavior, especially given the possible Russian reaction. The Central Powers gambled on the idea that Russia would not intervene.

The Russian Empire watched events in early July 1914 very carefully while also hastily making contact with its own allies, particularly France. Raymond Poincaré, president, and René Viviani, prime minister, who had already been scheduled to make a state visit to St. Petersburg, arrived on July 20 in the Russian capital city. Given events in the Balkans, the meeting turned into a much more pointed conversation between the French leaders and the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Sazonov, and his sovereign, Tsar Nicholas II. Both Russia and France agreed on two main concepts, namely that Serbia could not be held responsible for the terrorism of individuals and that the two must stand firm as allies in the face of possible aggression by the Central Powers. As the French leaders sailed home, Austria-Hungary delivered an ultimatum to Serbia.

Serbia, the small state at the center of this crisis, proclaimed its innocence in the assassination plot. In fact, major officials in the Serb government had secretly directed, funded, armed, trained, and supported the assassins of the Black Hand, which other nations suspected but could not prove at the time. In early July, Serb leaders appealed to Russia for support in case of Austrian retaliation. When the ultimatum arrived at 6 p.m. on July 23, it was immediately clear to Serb officials that it was designed to fail. Serbia would have to agree to a violation of its

sovereign status and allow Habsburg investigators to work in Serbia itself. Anyone in Serbia who had thought the Germans would restrain their ally now faced an imminent war with the Habsburgs. However, the Serbs also had received assurance from Russia on July 25 that assistance was guaranteed, and the Russians had begun a partial mobilization. The Serbs delivered their answer that same night, accepting all but two of the Habsburg terms unconditionally. They balked at demands that would allow Austria-Hungary to participate in police inquiries and prosecutions within Serbia, calling these a violation of sovereignty and the Serb constitution. By midnight, the Austro-Hungarian army had received orders to mobilize.

In Britain, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey had tried to stay out of the growing crisis in Europe in the early days of July. July 24 was one of the first documented Cabinet discussions of the problem, and even at this time, the discussion focused on a proposed mediation by Britain, Italy, France, and Germany. Britain had guaranteed Belgian neutrality and promised to safeguard it by treaty in 1839, but popular opinion showed little support for British intervention on the continent in 1914. Kaiser Wilhelm II saw British action as improbable, especially because he had heard a rumor from his brother that their cousin, George V (monarch of Britain), had promised to stay clear of a continental war. These mixed messages and lack of clear direction from London meant that not only did Germany calculate on Britain's neutrality, but France and Russia looked nervously at their ally.

Once leaders realized what was happening, it became harder to stop the logic of their own decisions from dictating actions. Kaiser Wilhelm II even sought a last-ditch escape from war by telegramming his other royal cousin, Tsar Nicholas II. These notes between kings on July 29, known subsequently as the Willy–Nicky telegrams, failed to avert crisis and served as evidence of how far the statesmanship of an earlier era between elites had changed by 1914. Things escalated quickly between July 28 and August 5, by which time all the major players were involved in the war. It is important to remember that during this week the conflict might have been contained had any of the main powers backed down or developed serious mediation strategies, but none did. Each remained steeped in its own political calculations, its fear of the others, and a sense of invulnerability that is hard to fathom by the modern student of history.

Historians have argued about what tipped the balance in July 1914, and several candidates have emerged—Germany's blank check, Austria-Hungary's ultimatum, Serbia's answer, Russia's mobilization, Britain's ambiguity, France's fatalistic approach to war. All of these contributed to the crisis, but the main trigger was fear. Britain feared Russia's expansion in the eastern Mediterranean and Afghanistan, Germany feared Russian invasion, France feared German

invasion, Austria-Hungary feared internal revolt and loss of territory, Belgium feared violation of its neutrality, Serbia feared Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire feared all the great powers. This was a situation in which small actions were magnified by the atmosphere of fear.

Conclusion

By the time the first shots were fired by Austria-Hungary in Serbia's capital city of Belgrade in late July 1914, war preparations had begun in a number of countries. Ultimately, the Austrian attack on Serbia on July 28 made a German decision necessary. Additionally, the Russian general mobilization of July 30 also pressured Germany to act. Germany issued ultimatums to Russia and France on July 31, and then declared war on Russia on August 1 and France on August 3. As soon as news broke of the German invasion of Belgium on August 4, Britain declared war as well. What seems peculiar in all this is the fact that Austria-Hungary and Russia, who in many ways had precipitated the crisis over Serbia, did not go to war with each other formally until August 6. For the remaining global powers, 1914 became an opportunity to advance foreign policy objectives or a chance to remain outside the fray. Japan, for instance, saw an opportunity in the war to expand its power in the Pacific vis-à-vis China and Russia, while the United States declared its official neutrality. Fence-sitters such as the Ottoman Empire and Italy eventually chose a side, the Ottomans joining the war in November 1914 on the side of the Central Powers, and Italy rejecting its alliance with the Habsburgs and the Germans in order to join the British and French in May 1915.

Amidst all this diplomatic maneuvering and posturing, the people of the states involved got drawn into the fray, whether they wanted to be or not. Some historians have claimed that an almost universal popular enthusiasm reigned in the streets of the nations declaring war, but recent scholarship has demonstrated a much more varied response. While some did welcome war as an exciting event that would transform societies, many others dreaded leaving livelihoods and families.

To return to the question of the chapter—How and why did this war happen? The answer is not that common people demanded it, but instead, high-stakes decision-making among a small group of political and military elites led to war. It is true that these elites depend upon the loyalty of their populations, and every decision made in July 1914 was predicated on the idea that the people of their nations would answer a call to arms. Those citizens did answer the call, with the result that millions around the world found themselves caught up in a global, modern, total war that would reshape their nations' futures.

Citations

Page	*Source*
2	"the journeys travelled …." quoted in Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), xxviii.
4	Figures drawn from Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 29.
8	"Oil output," quoted in Hew Strachan, *The First World War. Volume I: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 774.
12	"imagined community," concept drawn from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
15	"they went with songs …." Laurence Binyon, "For the Fallen," *The Times*, September 21, 1914.
15	Figures drawn from Joachim Remak, *The Origins of World War I, 1871–1914,* 2nd Edition (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 86.
18	"who was trying to shoot himself," quoted in Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York: Random House, 2013), 552.
18	"shared political culture," quoted in Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 561.

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Appendix 1.1: Important States in 1914

State	*Political Picture in 1914*	*Land area*	*Population*
Austria-Hungary	Habsburg Empire (1556–1918) Franz Josef	0.6 million km^2	50.6 million
Belgium (+ colonies)	Monarchy (1831–present) King Albert I	2.4 million km^2	23.0 million
France (+ colonies)	Republic (1870–1940) President Raymond Poincaré	11.2 million km^2	88.1 million
Germany (+ colonies)	Wilhelmine Empire (1871–1918) Kaiser Wilhelm II	3.5 million km^2	77.7 million
Italy (+ colonies)	Constitutional Monarchy (1861–1946) King Victor Emmanuel III	2.3 million km^2	37.6 million
Japan (+ colonies)	Empire (1868–1947) Emperor Taishō	0.7 million km^2	74.2 million
Ottoman Empire	Sultanate (1453–1918) Sultan Mehmed V	1.8 million km^2	23.0 million
Russian Empire	Romanov Empire (1613–1917) Tsar Nicholas II	22.1 million km^2	176.4 million
Serbia	Kingdom (1882–1918) King Peter I	48 500 km^2	2.9 million
United Kingdom (+ colonies/ dominions)	Kingdom (1801–present) King George V	33.3 million km^2	446.1 million
United States (+ colonies/ dependencies)	Republic (1783–present) President Woodrow Wilson	9.6 million km^2	106.3 milllion

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Appendix 1.2: Timeline from June to August 1914

June 28, 1914	Assassination in Sarajevo of Franz Ferdinand, heir to Habsburg throne
July 5, 1914	Austria-Hungary sends a messenger to Germany to seek support
July 7, 1914	Messenger conveys German "blank check" of support for its ally
July 20, 1914	French President Poincaré arrives in St. Petersburg for a state visit
July 23, 1914	Austria-Hungary presents Serbia with a 10-point ultimatum
July 25, 1914	Serbia replies to ultimatum, accepting all but two provisions
	Russia assures Serbia of its support
	Austria-Hungary orders a targeted mobilization against Serbia
July 26, 1914	Russia begins a partial mobilization
July 28, 1914	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia and invades
July 29, 1914	Willy–Nicky telegram exchange begins
	Russia declares a general mobilization
July 31, 1914	Austria-Hungary expands to a general mobilization
	Germany declares a "state preparatory to war"
	Germany issues ultimatums to Russia and France
	Britain asks Germany and France for assurances about Belgian neutrality
August 1, 1914	France orders a general mobilization
	Germany orders a general mobilization
	German troops invade Luxembourg
	Germany declares war on Russia
August 2, 1914	Germany issues ultimatum to Belgium asking for free passage
August 3, 1914	Germany declares war on France
August 4, 1914	Germany declares war on Belgium and invades
	Britain declares war on Germany
August 6, 1914	Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia
August 12, 1914	Britain and France declare war on Austria-Hungary
August 17, 1914	Russia invades Germany
August 23, 1914	Japan declares war on Germany