

A. Introduction

The present consideration is the prosecution of the First World War, a conflict with hazy origins and deadly consequences. This war, together with the later discovery and use of nuclear weaponry and the development of the population-environmental crisis continues to cause anguish for the best thinkers of our age.¹ The course goal is **to evaluate expanding our personal, historical identities into a global setting, all the while reflecting on ethnocentrism.**

B. Bismarck Out

Although Bismarck was dismissed by Kaiser William II in 1890, it was not the collapse of the Bismarckian policy which beat Germany. It was the failure to stay allied with Russia. Bismarck worked to diffuse Austrian and Russian hostility. Between 1872 and 1887, the Bismarckian policy promoted the Three Emperors' League of Austria, Germany, and Russia.

In 1890, William said friendship with Russia was unnecessary. He put Bismarck out as Chancellor. If England and France were against Russia, the Kaiser could not see why Germany should support her. When the Kaiser made trouble for Russia in matters of tariff and money loans, others such as France gave Russia off-setting business. While France was opposed to Russia, her opposition was incomplete. The French opposition to Russia blinded the Kaiser to the fact that Germany could not afford worsening relationships with Russia. The period from 1891 to 1895 begot the French-Russian military alliance.

Many obstacles stood in the way of a Russian-French agreement. To begin with, the Russian government had no outstanding arguments with Germany. The Third Republic in France appeared weak and unworthy as an ally. On the other hand, France, in her weakness, did need Russia. The Russian military liked the idea of a Franco-Russian alliance. The problem with the alliance which developed was a lack of stated positive objectives. This left the military free to proceed on the assumption that war, sooner or later, was inevitable. And the war came.²

In 1895, France and Russia (and in 1904, France and England) came to an understanding. In 1907, France promoted an English-Russian alliance. By 1907 there was a system of three non-German powers and Germany cried out that she was encircled. The Kaiser had effectively voided the policy of Bismarck.

C. Instigation

Abandoning Bismarck and his policies was fundamental to the rise of the First World War. The short-term transition from peace to war lay outside Germany. Europe turned on the Balkans, as was pointed out in Topic 23, "The Crimean War." Germany, Austria, and Turkey were politically together and if Serbia fell to the Central Powers, Rumania would follow. France, England, and Russia could not let Serbia down. A formal German-Austrian-Turkish alliance would have been too much for Russia and England, who wanted Turkey on their side.

Scholarship is re-examining intelligence misinformation as a contributing cause of both World Wars. On the one hand, the British miscalculated what would happen in a conflict between the British and German fleets. On the other hand, political and military leaders of the Second Reich were prepared to risk war in 1914 because of their own autocratic predetermined mind-set. During the Third Reich, intelligence was debased into a commodity to obtain influence under the Fuhrer.³ The point of it all is that self-reflection was required to avoid ethnocentric pitfalls.

The assassination of the Austrian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand, was done for the greatness of Serbia, although it was actually performed by a Bosnian in Bosnia.⁴ The painting appearing on page 1079.[1] dramatizes the assassination. Austrians thought the Serbs were in on it and took the occasion for a showdown. From 1908 to 1913, Austria had been making things difficult for Serbia and had kept her from the sea. Serbs had reason for the assassination. Austria was now determined to punish Serbia and this was the cause of war. It became a world war because Austria was backed up by promises from Germany. Austria saw that the Russians would not stand by without exerting strong pressures. Germany's blank check (support without qualification) given to Austria at the beginning of July 1914 did not necessarily mean armed conflict. It could have been paid by diplomatic help. Austria nevertheless would not have gone to war without the approval of Germany.

On July 28, 1914, Austria declared war. Serbia would have been crushed and the other Balkan states would have gravitated to the German-Austrian side. This would have meant that Russia would have lost all the Balkans

which she had influenced for over two hundred years. On July 30, Russia declared general mobilization which, many say, did not necessarily mean World War. The Russian army was so far behind that it either needed a general mobilization or else abandonment. In fact, the Tsar sent the Kaiser a telegram saying that the general mobilization did not mean war. In point of fact, Austria declared war but did not order mobilization until one week after Russia.

D. Fighting

Many nations were contributing factors to cause the war. Austria was primarily responsible because Russia could not accept being reduced from a first class power, and Germany would not allow Russia to win such a war. Germany hoped to knock out France and then turn against Russia. Russia mobilized faster than expected. A stalemate resulted. Consult the pictures on page 1089[2] for the horror involved. Consult the maps on pages 978, 998, and 1089[3] respectively. On page 981 pay particular attention to: Ghent, Calais, Amiens, Paris, Chateau Thierry, Reims, Marne R., Verdun, Switzerland, Basel, Alsace, Lorraine, Sedan, St. Quentin, Belgium, Brussels, Antwerp, Netherlands, Cologne. On page 998[4] pay particular attention to: Norway, Sweden, Finland, St. Petersburg, Denmark, Moscow, Berlin, Germany, Brest Litovsk, Poland, Kiev, Dnieper R., Don R., Crimea, Danube R., Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, Rumania. On page 1109[5] note: Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Constantinople, and Estonia.

E. Conclusion

This topic considered the prosecution of the First World War with the course goal to evaluate expanding our personal, historical identities into a global setting, all the while reflecting on ethnocentrism.

Supplement

F. Kaiser William II

At least one scholar has suggested that "narcissistic psychopathology is at the heart of his [the Kaiser's] historical significance." The problem with the Kaiser was that his leadership was at the same time "dynamically compelling, yet weak and ineffective." The flaw in his character was a compelling need to overcome self-doubt and to act out the role of a mighty, infallible leader. The picture in the text illustrates his compensatory exhibitionism, brilliantly staged public displays, and grandiose affirmations of power. Germany welcomed the man and his show. The political problem rested in the fact that the Kaiser had no clear sense of political purpose.⁵

G. U.S. Participation

The U. S. entered the First World War because of unrestricted submarine warfare against U. S. arms heading toward the enemies of Germany. U. S. ire was also raised because of the Zimmerman note which promised Mexico the U. S. southwest if the Germans won the war and Mexico had attacked the U. S. The U. S. entered the war with a vengeance. By the time the war was over, the U. S. had acquired a new international prestige. The Yanks had come and the war was over, over there, to paraphrase Irving Berlin, who celebrated his hundredth birthday in 1988 and died in 1990.

Footnotes

[1] Page 977 in the fifth edition of Chambers.

[2]Pages 981, 982, and 1006 in the fifth edition of Chambers.

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[4]Page 983 ?? in the fifth edition of Chambers.

[5] Page 982 in the fifth edition of Chambers.

[6] Page 1006 in the fifth edition of Chambers.

- ¹ See Barbara Jelavich, review of George F. Kennan, The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the Coming of the First World War, The American Historical Review, 90 (June 1985): 671.
- ² Barbara Jelavich, review of George F. Kennan, The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the Coming of the First World War, The American Historical Review, 90 (June 1985): 671-2.
- ³ Wesley K. Wark, review of Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars, Ernest R. May (ed.) in The American Historical Review, 91 (October 1986): 883-884.
- ⁴ Bosnia is shown in the Fourth Edition on "Map 10.3. The Ottoman Empire 1300-1566," on page 373 and on "Map 24.3. The Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1683-1914," on page 906.
- ⁵ Thomas Kohut, "Mirror Image of a Nation: An Investigation of Kaiser Wilhelm II's Leadership of the Germans," in Charles B. Strozier and Daniel Offer, editors, The Leader: Psychohistorical Essays, pages 186 and 180 as cited in Robert G. L. Waite, review, The American Historical Review, 91 (April 1986): 355-356.