



Introduction

“Thank God, it is the Great War!” General Viktor Dankl, commander designate of the Austro-Hungarian First Army, penned these words on July 31, 1914, the day it became clear that the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, stemming from the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand a month earlier, would not be resolved peacefully or limited to a Balkan war. Forty-three years had passed since the last war that matched European powers against each other and, like many European military officers of his generation, Dankl, then fifty-nine, feared he would serve his entire career without experiencing such a conflict. On August 2, when Dankl in another diary entry referred to the rapidly escalating conflict as “the World War,” he could not have imagined just how accurate the label would become: that the action would extend to the Far East, the South Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa, that over a million men from the British and French empires would see action on European battlefields, that the United States would have an army of over 2 million men in France just four years later, or that European countries would account for a minority of the states participating in the postwar peace conference.¹

World War I as global revolution

The central thesis of this book is that World War I and the peace settlement that ended it constituted a global revolution. Like Dankl and the generals, the statesmen who led Europe to war in the summer of 1914 did not envisage the worldwide revolutionary consequences of the conflict whose onset they welcomed (or, at least, did so little to discourage). Though the emergence of the Bolshevik government in Russia would serve as a reminder that the world was not yet safe for democracy, old-fashioned authoritarian governments, Hohenzollern and Habsburg as well as Romanov, had no

place in a postwar Europe that featured no less than eleven republics on a map redrawn from the Franco-German border deep into Russia, featuring a net increase of six independent states and the elimination of one traditional great power, Dankl's own Austria-Hungary. Beyond Europe, the redistribution of former German colonies affected the map of Africa, East Asia, and the Pacific, while the demise of the Ottoman Empire brought the wholesale redrawing of boundaries in the Middle East and, in Palestine, the roots of the modern-day Arab-Israeli conflict, stemming from Britain's conflicting wartime promises to the Zionist movement and Arab nationalists.

Beyond questions of boundaries and territory, the war would also revolutionize power relationships within European societies. In the Europe of 1914, most adult males lacked truly meaningful voting rights; aside from Portugal, which had just overthrown its king, France had Europe's only republic, and among the other five European powers only Britain and Italy had fully functioning parliamentary governments. Only in Britain, and only recently, had there been a serious movement calling for the extension of women's rights to include the vote. While the war strengthened the position of organized labor and provided unprecedented employment opportunities for women, most of the latter proved to be only temporary. Nevertheless, postwar Europe west of Soviet Russia consisted of democratic republics and constitutional monarchies, few if any restrictions on adult male suffrage still existed, and in their first postwar national elections, Germany and Austria joined Britain in conceding women the right to vote (with the United States following shortly thereafter). In postwar Russia the Soviet government went so far as to grant women the right to abortion on demand.

The war had an equally dramatic impact on Europe's position in the world. White Europeans had enjoyed an unquestioned domination of the world of 1914, a world in which 40 percent of the human race was of European stock. Yet in 1919, the thorniest moral issue facing the peace conference concerned whether to include in the Covenant of the League of Nations a statement of global racial equality. Though proposed (somewhat disingenuously) by Japan, the debate reflected Europe's loss of stature, both symbolically and demographically, in the world as a whole. Indeed, as an example of European fallibility, World War I sowed the seeds of the anti-colonial movement that erupted after World War II, by which time the population explosion in the non-Western world further reduced the relative weight of a Europe that had never recovered from the demographic shock of World War I, a war in which the overwhelming majority of the millions killed had been Europeans or of European stock.

Conceptualizing the "first" world war

By the first days of August 1914 many observers and participants joined Viktor Dankl in acknowledging the onset of a "Great War" or "World War," the likes of which

Europe had not seen since the end of the age of Napoleon a century earlier. The Napoleonic wars, and the wars for empire in early modern Europe, had featured worldwide action on the high seas and in the colonies, as well as on European battlefields, but by the end of August the scope and intensity of the unfolding conflict, in which most of the belligerents already had lost more men in a single battle or even a single day than in entire wars fought during the nineteenth century or earlier, led most to recognize that they were witnessing something unprecedented. In September 1914, in remarks quoted in the American press, German biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel made the first recorded reference to the conflict as the “First World War,” in his prediction that the emerging struggle “will become the first world war in the full sense of the word.”² The label “First World War” or “World War I” did not gain currency until after September 1939, when *Time* magazine and a host of other publications popularized its use as a corollary of the term “Second World War” or “World War II,” but as early as 1920 British officer and peacetime journalist Charles à Court Repington published his war memoirs under the title *The First World War, 1914–1918*.³ In the interwar years a handful of cynics and pessimists used “First World War” rather than the more common “Great War” or “World War,” to reflect their dismay that it had not been, as Woodrow Wilson had hoped, “the war to end all wars.”

The use of the term, since 1939, reflects our conceptualization of World War I as the precursor to World War II, a belief universal enough to accommodate not only polar opposite views of the nature of the causation (e.g., that World War II occurred because Germany had not been completely crushed during World War I, or that it occurred because Germany had been needlessly antagonized at the peace table afterward), but, more so, the remarkable diversity of lessons learned and applied by the countries, leaders, and peoples involved. Whereas in Germany and Russia the Nazi and Soviet regimes proved to be far more efficient and ruthless than their predecessors of 1914 in mobilizing their countries for war and seeing it through to the bitter end, regardless of the cost in human lives, the Western European democracies, the British Dominions, and Italy showed little desire to repeat the blood sacrifice of World War I, and in various ways tailored their strategies accordingly, disastrously so for France and Italy. The United States, whose people were not yet ready to embrace the mantle of global leadership at the end of World War I, a generation later rallied to the cause with great fervor after the shock of Pearl Harbor, while their leaders benefited from the experience of 1917–18 in mobilizing American resources to fight World War II. Of the considerable resources of the United States only its manpower made a difference in World War I, as the fighting ended before American industrial might could be brought to bear; thus, both Germany and Japan fatefully underestimated the war-making capacity and national resolve of the United States in World War II.

World War I and modern total war

No less than in the public and political realm, World War I produced radically different responses to the same lessons learned in military strategy, tactics, and operations. The bloody stalemate of the trenches on the Western front led Germany to develop the Blitzkrieg in order to eliminate static positional warfare, while France built the Maginot Line in an attempt to perfect static positional warfare. Thanks to the German example, which built upon the British example of the late summer of 1918, it became the norm in World War II for offensives by infantry to be supported by sufficient numbers of tanks and aircraft to avoid bogging down as they had in World War I, except in cases where the fighting was in or near a major city, or in the confined space of a Pacific island. World War II featured more lethal iterations of every weapon and battlefield tactic that had revolutionized warfare during World War I, with the notable exception of the use of poison gas.

The magnitude of death and destruction wrought by World War II far surpassed that of World War I, especially for civilian populations, yet from August 1914 onward World War I featured acts of brutality against non-combatants that presaged what would happen on a far greater scale a quarter of a century later. From the summary executions of Belgian civilians by German troops and Serbs by Austro-Hungarians, to the persecution and, ultimately, genocidal slaughter of the Ottoman Empire's Armenians, to the aerial bombing of London and other cities by German Zeppelins, civilian populations endured atrocities the likes of which Europe and its periphery had not seen since the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) marked the end of the Catholic–Protestant wars of religion. Meanwhile, at sea the indiscriminate sinking of millions of tons of Allied shipping by German submarines cost thousands of lives and foreshadowed the unrestricted submarine warfare campaigns of both sides in World War II, while the Allied (primarily British) naval blockade of the Central Powers brought malnutrition to the home fronts of Germany and Austria and, ultimately, illness and premature death to hundreds of thousands of their most vulnerable civilians. Remarkably, the home front populations not only endured these unprecedented hardships but, in most cases, became firmer in their resolve as the war dragged on. Indeed, while war weariness ultimately triggered the revolutionary collapses in Russia in 1917 and Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1918, for most of World War I their civilians persevered just as their counterparts in the Western Allied countries did, rejecting the notion of a compromise peace that would render meaningless not just their personal privations but, more important, the deaths of their sons, brothers, fathers, and other loved ones. Such perseverance served notice to political leaders of the risk as well as the reward in mobilizing a country for a total war effort in the era of modern nationalism: a war could not be

won without such support, but once governments received it, war became an all-or-nothing proposition, for their own people would not accept compromise as the reward for such sacrifices. The infamous remark attributed to Joseph Stalin during his great purges of the 1930s, that one death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic, could just as easily have been applied to the bloodletting of World War I and, indeed, would have been unthinkable if that bloodletting had not come first. World War I, in so many ways a global revolution, above all else redefined what people could accept, endure, or justify, and thus stands as a milepost in the human experience for the extent to which it desensitized so much of humanity to the inhumanity of modern warfare.

NOTES

1. Dankl quoted in Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria* (London: Arnold, 1997), 55.
2. Fred R. Shapiro, *The Yale Book of Quotations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 329.
3. Charles à Court Repington, *The First World War, 1914–1918* (London: Constable, 1920).



Wedding of Archduke Charles, 1911

Among Europe's great powers of 1914 only Austria-Hungary had no dominant nationality, making the Habsburg dynasty the focal point of state unity. In this photograph, taken in 1911 at the last prewar Habsburg wedding, Emperor Francis Joseph (1830–1916), center, congratulates his great-nephew Archduke Charles (1887–1922) and his bride Princess Zita of Bourbon-Parma (1892–1989), as the bride's mother, Maria Antonia of Parma (1862–1959), looks on. Charles became Francis Joseph's successor after the emperor's nephew and heir, Archduke Francis Ferdinand (1863–1914), pictured left, looking out of frame, was assassinated on June 28, 1914, touching off the crisis that led to World War I.

CHAPTER

1 The world in 1914 and the origins of the war

timeline

- 1878** Congress of Berlin alters Balkan borders; Ottoman Empire weakened.
- 1882** Triple Alliance formed (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy).
- 1889–1914** Second Socialist International provides leading forum against militarism.
- 1892–94** France and Russia conclude military convention and treaty of alliance.
- 1898** German Reichstag approves "Tirpitz Plan" for naval expansion.
- 1898** Spanish–American War signals emergence of the United States as an imperial power.
- 1899–1902** Anglo-Boer War exposes Britain's isolation; Anglo-Japanese alliance (1902).
- 1903** Coup in Serbia installs pro-Russian Karageorgević dynasty.
- 1904** Entente Cordiale links France with Britain.
- 1904–5** Russo-Japanese War foreshadows trench warfare.
- 1906** HMS *Dreadnought* commissioned; Anglo-German naval race accelerates.
- 1907** Anglo-Russian Entente completes Triple Entente.
- 1908** Austria-Hungary annexes Bosnia (occupied since 1878).
- 1911–12** Italo-Turkish War features first combat use of airplanes.
- 1912–13** Balkan Wars further weaken Ottoman Empire, destabilize region.

8 World War I: The Global Revolution

As soon as the guns fell silent in November 1918, the battle began over the origins of World War I. Governments eager to defend the decisions they had made in the summer of 1914 published collections of official documents edited to make their own actions appear in the best possible light, while historians from all countries set about the task of explaining the causes of the conflict. The decision of the victors to include a war-guilt clause in the Treaty of Versailles reflected their conviction, unanimous as of 1919, that Germany had been responsible for the war. Their verdict was rejected by virtually all German academicians and, during the 1920s, by a broad spectrum of revisionist historians who blamed the alliance system, the great powers collectively, or one or more of the great powers other than Germany. While the “anti-revisionism” of the 1950s refocused the lion’s share of the responsibility on Germany (see Perspectives 1.1), the scholarship of subsequent decades further explored the roles of all of the belligerents, their domestic politics, diplomatic alignments, and war aims as of 1914. General factors such as nationalism and other ideologies, the faith military men placed in offensive warfare, and the prewar arms races likewise received greater scrutiny.

The crisis resulting in the outbreak of World War I occurred within a system of international relations dating from the Peace of Westphalia (1648) at the end of the Thirty Years’ War. Europe’s four to six most powerful states made or broke alliances in pursuit of their own interests, within an overall balance of power, but rarely divided into mutually hostile armed camps in peacetime. This changed in the decade prior to the outbreak of World War I, when Britain, France, and Russia formed the Triple Entente in response to the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The Triple Alliance, established in 1882, by 1914 ranked as the longest running multilateral peacetime alliance in European history, enduring despite the strong mutual animosity of Austria-Hungary and Italy because each considered the friendship of Germany indispensable, for the former against Russia and for the latter against France. The Triple Entente, in contrast, had been formed by three separate agreements – the Franco-Russian military convention and treaty of alliance (1892–94), the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale (1904), and the Anglo-Russian Entente (1907) – each motivated by a fear of the growing might of Germany.

The Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy

Germany achieved political unification under Prussia thanks to the leadership of Otto von Bismarck, whose victorious wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870–71) led to the creation of the Second Reich, with Prussia’s King William I as emperor. While Bismarck annexed Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark and Alsace-Lorraine from France, he made Austria (from 1867, Austria-Hungary) Germany’s

Perspectives 1.1: The origins of the war

American historian Laurence Lafore (1917–85) characterized prewar Europe as a "powder keg" of tensions, of which the Serb threat to Austria-Hungary was the most intractable:

There was Alsace-Lorraine: once a Franco-German war had started, France could not make peace until Alsace-Lorraine was restored . . . [and] Germany would never concede the loss of the provinces. There was the Anglo-German naval rivalry: once war had started, Great Britain would not make peace until the threat of a strong German Navy had been permanently dispersed. There was Constantinople: once war broke out, the Russian government could not make peace until . . . the centuries-old ambition for Constantinople [was] satisfied. There was Germany's encirclement: once war broke out, Germany could not . . . make peace until the encirclement had been broken, which meant the decisive crushing of both France and Russia . . . But . . . the one problem that was neither negotiable nor repressible was that raised by threats to the integrity of Austria-Hungary. The composition of the Habsburg Monarchy made it fatally vulnerable to the activities of the Serbs; at the same time, it made it difficult to eliminate those activities by rapid and resolute action . . . It was this problem that caused the war which became the First World War.

Source: Laurence Lafore, *The Long Fuse: An Interpretation of the Origins of World War I*, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1971), 267–68.



Fritz Fischer (1908–99) was notable as the first prominent German scholar to blame Germany for the outbreak of the war, and also as a socialist scholar arguing for the primacy of domestic considerations in foreign policy decisions, particularly those of prewar Germany:

The [German] aim was to consolidate the position of the ruling classes with a successful imperialist foreign policy; indeed it was hoped a war would resolve the growing social tensions. By involving the masses in the great struggle those parts of the nation which had hitherto stood apart would be integrated into the monarchical state. By 1912 at any rate the domestic crisis was apparent . . . The dynamism with which, coupled with domestic components, the imperial leadership had launched out on a "world policy" in 1897 operated without a break to 1914. As then the hope was for a "Greater Germany" and the preservation of the conservative system. The illusions of the conception of 1897 led to the illusions of 1914.

Source: Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914*, trans. Marian Jackson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), viii–ix. (© 1975 W. W. Norton Co., Inc. and Chatto & Windus Ltd. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Co.)

Box 1.1 Germany's "place in the sun"

In his first speech to the Reichstag on December 6, 1897, Bernhard von Bülow (1849–1929), foreign minister from 1897 to 1900 and chancellor from 1900 to 1909, issued a thinly veiled retort to the British boast that "the sun never sets on the British Empire." Defending the onset of German imperialism in China – the seizure of Kiaochow (Jiaozhou), in retaliation for the murder of two German Catholic missionaries in China on November 6 – he asserted that Germany, too, must have her "place in the sun":

The days when Germans granted one neighbor the earth, the other the sea, and reserved for themselves the sky, where pure doctrine reigns – those days are over. We see it as our foremost task to foster and cultivate the interests of our shipping, our trade, and our industry, particularly in the East. A division of our cruisers was dispatched to and occupied the port of Kiaochow to secure full atonement for the murder of German and Catholic missionaries and to assure greater security against the recurrence of such events in the future.

... We must demand that German missionaries, merchants, goods, as well as the German flag and German vessels be treated with the same respect in China that other powers enjoy. We are happy to respect the interests of other powers in China, secure in the knowledge that our own interests will also receive the recognition they deserve. In short, we do not want to put anyone in our shadow, but we also demand our place in the sun.

True to the tradition of German policy, we will make every effort to protect our rights and interests in East Asia . . . without unnecessary harshness, but without weakness either.

*Source: Bernhard von Bülow on Germany's "place in the sun" (1897), translated by Adam Blauhut for German History in Documents and Images, available at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=783, from *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags, Vol. 1, IX LP, 5th Session, Berlin, 1898, 60.**

closest ally and a cornerstone of a post-1871 alliance system designed to keep France isolated. The constitution of Imperial Germany provided for a strong chancellor accountable to the emperor rather than to a legislative majority. Bismarck created the office for himself and held it from 1871 until 1890, after which seven less capable men occupied it for the following twenty-eight years, most notably Bernhard von Bülow (1900–9), who served as foreign secretary before becoming chancellor (see Box 1.1), and Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg (1909–17). The Reichstag judged bills placed before it by the chancellor through the Bundesrat, an upper house appointed by the governments of the German states, but could not initiate legislation. Balancing