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## Introduction

Austria-Hungary entered the First World War totally unprepared to conduct a prolonged economic and military conflict. Its army had suffered decades of insufficient funding because of Hungarian obstructionist policies, placing it at a great disadvantage to the other European great powers that had been arming during the multiple years' arms race, particularly after 1911. Its industrial base proved inadequate to fight a long war. The Entente naval blockade prevented the Dual Monarchy from receiving crucial raw materials and food supplies, producing starvation and misery and retarding industrial development. Internally, the Czech and South Slavic peoples increasingly demanded autonomy while the nationality issue affected both internal and external affairs. During 1914, 5,100 businesses closed with the mobilization and the basic economy suffered from the unemployment caused by the call-up of millions of soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the war Germany provided raw materials and financial assistance of a hundred million marks per month until late 1918, purchases having to be for German goods. The Germans also supplied submarines for the Adriatic Sea and airplanes for reconnaissance purposes. They also provided seventy planes in 1914 and ten a month throughout the conflict. The ally consistently reacted to Habsburg appeals for military assistance, when it ultimately depended on the Western front military situation for its survival. The Central Power alliance became fatal in 1918, when the Entente determined that no separate peace could be consummated with Austria-Hungary following Emperor Karl's "Canossa" at the May 12, 1918 meeting at the German headquarters at Spa.

As the war continued the overall economic situation steadily worsened, while the railroads began to deteriorate during 1916. The lack of raw materials eventually caused factories to fail to meet their quotas and, by 1918, many had to close because of the lack of coal and oil as well as the necessary materiel.

When the war commenced, the Habsburg Army proved grossly under-strength relative to trained officers and manpower, possessing obsolete weapons and equipment, and the vast majority of troops proved inadequately trained for modern warfare. Only 414,000, a quarter of the mobilized troops, were trained professional soldiers. Well over a million Habsburg troops

mobilized, many not having had any military training for years, if any, particularly the older *Landsturm* troops. Some literally had had none.

In the initial 1914 military campaigns the Habsburg Army suffered embarrassing defeats and enormous casualties on both the Balkan and Russian fronts. The army, unprepared and incapable of conducting a two-front war, was probably capable of only defeating Serbia. General Conrad von Hötzendorf, chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, altered his 1914 mobilization plans just before the Habsburg mobilization. This resulted in disaster and catastrophic casualties, particularly in the professional officer and troop ranks, which could never be replaced. Attacking Habsburg infantry received inadequate artillery support, if they received any, and artillery shells were rapidly expended early in the war. The early embarrassing battlefield defeats forced General Conrad to approach his German ally for immediate assistance, and each year the Germans had to turn their attention from the critical Western front to aid their lackluster ally on the Eastern.

A major problem resulted from General Conrad's adherence to the cult of the offensive. This proved catastrophic with the two early devastating Lemberg battles and resulting retreat. Conrad continued to launch offensives against numerically superior enemy forces. The Habsburg artillery branch proved grossly inadequate when it failed to support infantry attacks in the repeated Conrad offensive formations against numerically superior enemy forces. The fact that the Habsburg Army had no defensive doctrine, or training, because of Conrad's belief in the offensive, resulted in the unanticipated September 1914 retreat proving an absolute chaotic disaster.

Its numbers decimated in the opening WWI battles, the Dual Monarchy became the only European great power that no longer possessed a reserve army; its railroad system proved inadequate to conduct a one-front war, let alone a multiple-front conflict. Poor annual harvests worsened the Homeland food situation, resulting in annual food crises early in the war. During 1914 food rationing commenced. Meanwhile, the enormous battlefield casualties eroded troop and civilian morale, and war weariness escalated as the Habsburg economic situation steadily worsened. As the war dragged on, people desired peace as Dual Monarchy cemeteries filled to capacity.

Anti-military and dynastic episodes had occurred before the war erupted, particularly in Bohemia during the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars. With the two fateful 1914 Lemberg battles, the defeated troops retreated 150 kilometers into the Carpathian Mountains. Then, after the catastrophic failure of the Carpathian Mountain Winter War campaign, Italy declared war on May 23, 1915. The Dual Monarchy became mired in a three-front war for which it was totally unprepared. Russian numerical superiority and its numerically superior artillery overpowered the Habsburg Army numerous times, while in the three 1914 Balkan campaigns a serious underestimation of Serbian troop capabilities and failed strategy rapidly proved disastrous. The German High Command

did not comprehend the depth of Dual Monarchy nationality problems, while in September 1914 Conrad was not informed that General Moltke had been removed as chief of the German General Staff and replaced by General Eric Falkenhayn, the war minister. Allied command friction commenced almost immediately.

Austria-Hungary represented the exception in an age of extreme nationalism as the Dual Monarchy consisted of eleven major nationalities.<sup>2</sup> The Habsburg nationality issue extended back to Empress Maria Theresa (r. 1740–1780), crowned Queen of Bohemia and her son Joseph II (r. 1780–1790), who decreed that the German language be that of the empire. Matters remained fairly quiescent until the nineteenth century, when the 1848 revolutions reopened the nationalism question and the first serious national and political stirrings of the Dual Monarchy's various peoples.

The Dual Monarchy possessed a majority Slavic population particularly when the provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina were annexed in 1908. When the war erupted, the Slavic peoples did not enthusiastically support fighting against fellow Slavic Russians and Serbians. Many Slavs also opposed the German alliance. Reputed Slavic troop desertions and surrendering to the enemy on the Russian and Serbian fronts led to charges of treason against them, but all Slavic troops fought well against the hated Italians who were perceived as seeking to seize South Slav lands, when Italy declared war on May 23, 1915.

The failure of the Habsburg central government to alleviate the multitude of problems that arose during the war, or provide adequate alternatives – particularly for food shortages and hunger – proved disastrous. The steadily worsening economic situation following the multiple Habsburg battlefield defeats ultimately destroyed the empire during October 1918. The masses eventually turned to revolutionary activity, even creating national councils. The central government quickly proved it could not resolve the accelerating economic and nationality problems. Government corruption became rampant, accelerated by the lack of coordination between Vienna and Budapest. The unresolvable economic situation gradually awakened the festering nationality question. By 1918 the government had been paralyzed, as attention turned to the anticipated German Western front offensive victory. The multiple Habsburg military defeats culminated in the catastrophic June 1918 offensive disaster. German Western front defeats and the September 1918 collapse of the Bulgarian front resulted in ultimate defeat and the almost bloodless Austrian revolution as the various nationalities established their own sovereign states. The Bulgarian debacle opened the Balkan front to eventual Serbian invasion of Hungary and accelerated the end of the war. It also persuaded German Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff that the end was approaching.

During 1917 indications abounded that the government had become helpless, but by 1918 it had failed to resolve the nationality issue because of the lack

of any positive action with battle defeat on the Italian front, which resulted in the collapse of the entire Habsburg edifice. The German alliance allowed the Habsburg central government to avoid any earnest attempt to resolve the nationality issues until it proved too late.

Common people, suffering war weariness and malnutrition, desired peace at any price. The government's failure to also resolve the multiplying domestic problems proved fatal. During January 1918 hunger strikes added political dimensions to the numerous monarchy problems. Many obstacles prevented resolving critically necessary Dual Monarchy reforms. The few attempts before the war collapsed and the failure of Habsburg leadership to agree upon, or attempt, to find a wartime solution proved deadly. This caused Vienna to increasingly depend upon a German Western front military victory to justify the lack of resolution to solve the deadly nationality issue.

Economic difficulties commenced with the early rationing measures resulting chiefly from the Entente blockade of food and raw materials in 1914.<sup>3</sup> The blockade resulted in shortages of all forms of food, producing starvation in the general population, and the loss of raw materials increasingly retarded industrial production; by 1918 it dwindled catastrophically.

A major factor in the ultimate fate of the Dual Monarchy resulted from the Germans and Hungarians vociferously fighting to maintain their special privileged positions in their respective halves of the empire, a result of the 1867 *Ausgleich*, the agreement to create the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Austria the Germans enjoyed cultural leadership and fought to maintain it, while in Hungary any attempt to change the status quo, particularly relative to the numerous nationalities, was vociferously opposed and considered a violation of Hungarian rights. The Magyarization policy prevented a solution to the increasingly fatal nationality policy.

The *Reichsrat*, the Habsburg parliament, had been dissolved in March 1914 because of the vociferous Czech-German nationalistic obstruction tactics that precluded smoothly conducting the empire's political affairs. When resurrected during 1917 it provided the opportunity to again obstruct business while increasing nationalist claims and opposition. Prior to 1914 various national delegates had attempted to force the government to support their specific programs, negatively affecting the conduct of regular business. This eliminated any possibility of compromise as the common people increasingly became malnourished, grew war weary and desired peace. Increased disillusionment targeted the ineffective and inefficient central government. Meanwhile, in the 1917 resurrected *Reichsrat* Czech passive resistance accelerated against the German liberal parties. This encouraged South Slav agitation commencing in late 1917 that steadily increased because the central government failed to provide assistance for famine conditions in the southern areas of the Dual Monarchy. The South Slavs in the Yugoslav Club, particularly Slovene Catholic leaders, became concerned about potential Italian or

German intentions for their territories. The significant May 1917 Declaration progressively produced radical solutions to perceived South Slavic problems. The May Declaration increasingly unleashed nationalistic demands for some form of South Slavic unity, originally without Serbian leadership. The movement gained support as it spread from Slovenia to other South Slavic provinces.

By 1918 the nationality question proved fatal combined with the horrendous general conditions created by the war. Complicating the situation, all the main eleven nationalities were in different phases of political, cultural and economic development. In addition, several, such as the Slovaks, Serbians, Slovenes, Romanians and Ruthenians, did not possess a national history. They had to be created. The various nationalities had become members of the Dual Monarchy through Habsburg dynastic ties, marriage and war, but the question became whether they could adjust and survive in this age of rampant nationalism.<sup>4</sup>

The German and Hungarian populations represented less than one-half in their respective portions of the empire. In the Austrian section Germans represented only 35 percent of the population, Slavic peoples 65 percent, but the Germans predominated culturally as their language remained the official one and they represented almost 70 percent of the army's officer corps. However, during the prewar period, opposition steadily increased toward such privileged positions. During the war, a serious lack of sufficient numbers of officers speaking the various ethnic languages became a significant factor when many of the original officers and noncommissioned officer corps perished on the 1914 battlefields. The reserve officers that replaced them, in addition to many displaying inferior leadership skills, could not speak or understand their troops' languages. Professional officers had to be conversant with any national group that comprised 20 percent of unit manpower.

The Hungarians represented only 48 percent of their country's population but dominated all aspects of government and society. The post-1867 *Ausgleich* period resulted in the introduction of a Magyarization policy, or cultural and social supremacy, against the non-Magyar nationalities. All attempts at empire-wide reform failed because the Hungarians refused to compromise their privileged positions to the various nationalities. (Power rested with the landed aristocracy not the people.) Any attempt to fulfill Slavic efforts toward an altruistic creation of separate Slavic entities failed because of determined Hungarian resistance to losing any power or influence.

The South Slavic (Croats, Slovenes, Serbians) problem became irreversibly intertwined with the Great Serbia nationalistic movement outside of Austria-Hungary, particularly after the Habsburgs formally annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1908–1909 crisis. These provinces became the center of Serbian agitation within the Dual Monarchy. During the Bosnian Crisis the South Slav question became a dominant factor for the Habsburg regime,

remaining unresolved until the demise of the Dual Monarchy in 1918, because Habsburg leadership failed to provide a solution to the cancerous problem. Following the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars, Serbia became a magnet for South Slavs seeking leadership, while the Dual Monarchy's positions in the Balkan Peninsula suffered. The South Slav question became an internal and external Habsburg matter, because the Slavs would become a vast majority within Hungary if it annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus the provinces became a separate administrative unit within the Habsburg territories. They increasingly became a hotbed for Serbian propaganda in that they represented the majority of the population. Later wartime conditions and the central government's failure to alleviate the people's plight slowly eroded South Slav loyalty to the state.

The festering question could not be settled partially because of Russian protection of Serbia that made it a major foreign policy issue. South Slavic unrest resulted from opposition to the Magyars' privileged position and their Magyarization policies. Following the March 3, 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, South Slavic *Reichsrat* deputies formed a Yugoslav committee that demanded independence and the creation of a separate South Slavic state within the Monarchy. Meanwhile, during July 1917, exiled Slavic compatriots formed a Yugoslav committee. Eventually they accepted that the Serbian government would create a Slavic state regardless of the problem of various religious, cultural and language differences.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Czechs and Poles, the South Slavs did not possess an independent military force fighting on the Entente side (only the Serbians at Salonica). The revitalized *Reichsrat* Yugoslav Club began attacking the lack of central government support as the economic, particularly food, situation worsened in the South Slav territories. During October 1918, as the Dual Monarchy disintegrated, Slovene and Croat representatives met in Zagreb. They proclaimed the creation of a new state consisting of Croatia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Bosnia, intending to prevent an Italian occupation of the Dalmatian coast and Istria. Serbian military crushing of the bandit green cadres helped bring the Croatians and Slovenes into Belgrade's orbit as their cities and the countryside became estranged.

South Slavic political influence was partially handicapped because the Slavic population lived in both portions of the Dual Monarchy, but the connection between northern and southern Slavs was maintained through religion and language ties. The resolution of the South Slav problem would be decided in 1918 when the Entente Powers determined to destroy the Austro-Hungarian monarchy after they accepted that Vienna had become irrevocably subservient to the German alliance after the May 12, 1918 meeting at the Spa military headquarters when Emperor Karl approved closer ties to Germany. This followed Emperor Karl's disastrous Sixtus Affair fiasco, an attempt to negotiate peace with the French, to be explained in detail in Chapter 9.

The Croats, 9 percent of the population in Hungary, enjoyed some autonomy having been the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia in the eleventh century and battling the Turks earlier at the Habsburg frontier for centuries. During the decade preceding the war, but particularly in 1917, the Croats became major players in the South Slavic unification issue. During the nineteenth century, Zagreb became the center for the attempt to achieve cultural independence vis-à-vis the Hungarians. Croatian leaders also desired a trialist Austria-Hungary with them serving in the Slavic leadership role. The failure of the central government to alleviate the deteriorating wartime economic situation in South Slavic lands resulted in the Croats joining the Slovenes to support their May 30, 1917 May Declaration. The Croats' favorable position resulted from their 1868 agreement with the Hungarian government, which reputedly guaranteed them specific rights.

The Croats and the other South Slavic peoples became bellicose when the terms of the 1915 Entente Treaty of London with Italy became known; they recognized that if Italy won the war it would seize Croatian and other Slavic territory. Ultimately, on October 29, 1918, in order to preclude Italian occupation of the territories and fearing German hegemony, the Zagreb Sabor [parliament] proclaimed Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia a sovereign state. Serbian troops invaded the territories, in the process, as mentioned, eliminating the green cadres – former Habsburg soldiers that had become powerful, fully armed renegades particularly in South Slavic regions. Their suppression by Serbian military forces became a major factor in creating the new “Yugoslav” state with obvious Serbian dominance.

Turning to the Czechs, it was claimed that during the opening 1914 Serbian campaign Czech troops deserted their units, causing multiple battlefield defeats. Often these accusations camouflaged command mistakes and continued throughout the conflagration. A prewar prejudice against Slavic troops escalated during the conflict that increased Czech resentment toward the Habsburg regime. Also, many inadequately trained Czech *Ersatz* troops often became cannon fodder.

Oppressive central governmental and military measures in the Czech lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia produced internal opposition as several national leaders were arrested, including leading radicals, such as Kramar, arrested in September 1914. Emperor Karl eventually released him and other Czech leaders accused of treason with his 1917 amnesty act that backfired because Czech *Reichsrat* deputies increasingly demanded the creation of a Czech state. The emperor's amnesty produced extreme opposition in Habsburg military leadership and civilian circles.

The Czech region contained the most advanced industrialized area within the Austrian portion of the Dual Monarchy. Before the war Czech leaders sought autonomy within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, having become part of it after the battle of Mohacs in 1526. The continued struggle over the

administrative language question in regional education and administration matters developed into one of the major if not the most significant nationality problem haunting the Habsburg establishment until the late October 1918 collapse. The language question fueled the Czech-German struggle that intensified between 1879 and 1909. The Czech question had remained dormant until the 1815 Congress of Vienna following the Napoleonic Wars. Czech leaders demanded the acceptance of their *Staatsrecht* dating back to the 1620 Pragmatic Sanction after the fatal lost Thirty Years Wars 1618–1648 battle of White Mountain when they lost their independence.

A Czech-Slovak National Council was eventually established in Paris but the émigré leaders such as Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš had little influence in the Homeland until late in the war. In the Czech lands a *Mafie*, an underground organization of loyal supporters of Masaryk, helped spur passive resistance toward the Habsburg central government, even perpetuating sabotage activities. Coordination between Czech émigrés and leaders at home only became significant late in the war as living conditions continued to decline and the Habsburg Army collapsed after the fatal June 1918 battle. Earlier in 1848, a turning point in the nationality question, the “Old Czech” party was gradually replaced by the “Young Czech” in the late 1880s *Reichsrat*. The Czech passive resistance strategy against the Germans in the *Reichsrat* was later utilized by the Poles, Romanians, Slovenes, even Italians. One of the major factors in the evolution of Czech nationalism evolved from the 1867 *Ausgleich*, which ignored Czech nationality strivings. For seven decades until 1918 Bohemia remained the classic nationality battleground for Austria with continuing unresolved Czech-German hostilities.

Many Czechs proclaimed loyalty to the Habsburg regime early in the war, but in time these proclamations became insecure pledges of support. In 1914 many Czechs still accepted that Austria-Hungary prevented German and Russian expansion, so appeals for national separatism were temporarily subdued. Nevertheless, the Czechs enjoyed greater political autonomy than other nationalities, gaining experience governing themselves. This proved critical during late October 1918, when the existing Habsburg bureaucracy personnel simply reverted to governing the new nation, Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian Slovak population, on the other hand, did not experience any self-government.

During the war the Paris Czech National Committee had the advantage of developing a strong diplomatic position with the Entente, while the creation of the Czech Legion in Russia made it part of Allied military forces. Secret negotiations, a result of Habsburg peace feelers, between March 1917 and April 1918, made the Entente leadership reluctant to commit to the Czechs. The November 1917 Bolshevik coup and Lenin peace decree changed the situation, as did the Russo-German Austro-Hungarian Brest-Litovsk Armistice on March 3, 1918 and the belated US declaration of war against Austria-Hungary. During 1918 the Czech Legion fought its way across Siberia



to redeploy to the Western front to fight the Germans, but became embroiled in the Russian Civil War in 1918 as it traveled eastward on the one-track Trans-Siberian railroad.

After the fateful Emperor Karl Sixtus Affair and resulting Habsburg Canossa meeting at the German headquarters at Spa in May, US Secretary of State Lansing informed President Wilson that the Habsburg monarchy had become an irrevocable instrument for German domination of Southeastern Europe. Secretary of State Lansing insisted that a defeated Dual Monarchy be divided into national components. Not completely comprehending the significance of the situation, on May 29, 1918 President Wilson encouraged Czech-Slovak and South Slavic national aspirations. Britain and France followed suit on June 3. On June 28 an American position statement declared that all Slavic peoples should be freed from the German-Austrian yoke. Then on September 3 the USA recognized the Czech National Council in Paris as the *de facto* Czech government. Seeking permanent political change became the Czech objective, particularly after the Entente allies rejected a final Austrian appeal on September 14, 1918 for nonbinding discussions to establish peace terms. Even though the Habsburg government had acted independently of the Germans, the overture was rejected. President Wilson eventually agreed that the Dual Monarchy should be divided into its various national parts, which proved disastrous for Austria-Hungary during the historical October 1918 events. On October 28 a Czech-Slovak republic was proclaimed and, on November 13, a provisional assembly created a provisional national assembly. The Czechoslovakian state was recognized in the St. Germain (Austria) and Trianon (Hungary) Versailles treaties.

The Slovaks, 9.4 percent of the population in Hungary, suffered because they had lived only in that country. Even with the possibility of joining the Czechs in the Austrian portion of the empire, the Slovaks feared not being accepted as an equal partner, which actually proved fatal later. Czechs and Slovaks also possessed significant linguistic and literary distinctions. During the century after the 1815 Congress of Vienna, the Slovaks remained the most severely suppressed national group in the Dual Monarchy, a result of Hungarian Magyarization policies. Their population spread over large areas east of the Carpathian Mountains, but they possessed no independent political history because of the thousand-year Magyar domination. They also possessed no sizable intellectual class and few middle-class or industrial elements. To their detriment, the Czech leader Tomáš Masaryk made “equality” promises during the war to the Slovaks if they joined the new Czechoslovakian state that never occurred, the promises never being fulfilled.

The question of Italian irredentism in the Habsburg Trentino province and 1915 Treaty of London presented a major roadblock to Austria-Hungary’s attempts to establish a separate peace with the Entente. Italian demands for the Tyrol and Habsburg maritime crown lands (the Adriatic Sea area) stiffened

Habsburg and Slav resistance during the war. The Italian territorial demands extending to the northern Brenner Pass represented a crass negation of Wilson's self-determination principle. The Italians and Yugoslavs clashed over claims to the Adriatic coast possessions during the early postwar period.

Italians represented the smallest national group in the Dual Monarchy, but increasingly looked across the frontier, particularly after the 1861 and 1870–1871 Italian unification. During the July 1914 crisis, the Italians declared neutrality on the basis of the Triple Alliance Treaty Article VII, that the war was not a defensive one. The Italians then awaited what they considered the most opportune moment to declare war on their former ally. This transpired on May 23, 1915, influenced by the earlier disastrous Habsburg Carpathian Mountain Winter War campaign. Unfortunately for the Italians the Germans launched the successful Gorlice–Tarnow offensive just before the declaration of war. After multiple Central Power Russian front victories, significant Habsburg troops were redeployed to the Italian theater. During the November 1918 armistice negotiations with the Italians, Rome's actions were influenced by the intent to seize all the irredentist lands promised to it in the 1915 Treaty of London, as well as grasp additional territory in the Adriatic Sea region. Italy received numerous promises of compensation to declare war on Austria-Hungary. Because of the Entente's unfavorable military situation, its leaders felt they needed Italian assistance, but became disillusioned with the lack of successful Italian military efforts during the conflict.

War on the Italian front produced some of the most horrific battle conditions of the entire war, much of the fighting conducted on steep mountainous terrain. Winter mountain weather proved horrendous as Habsburg troops faced an enemy with an enormous superiority in troop and artillery piece numbers. Soldiers on both sides suffered from periodic avalanches, Habsburg troops losing 1,200 men in one day from one such disaster, 12,000 during one month. Lightning storms, frostbite, hypothermia and the "White Death" (freezing to death) also caused many noncombat deaths. Troops had to remain in their positions accompanied by dead, wounded and sick comrades as enemy artillery consistently blew body parts asunder numerous times, killing many soldiers. Habsburg defensive positions had to be dynamited or bored into the rocky mountain surfaces. By the 1917 Tenth and Eleventh Isonzo River offensives, the intensity of the battles matched those of Verdun and the Somme on the Western front, with the distinct difference that bloody battle never really halted on the Italian front. Italy then suffered the humiliating Caporetto defeat, but with British and French assistance the Italian military recovered for the Habsburg June 1918 battle and won the so-called Vittorio Veneto victory over diseased, starving and war-weary Austro-Hungarian troops.

The critical relationship between the Serbians and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy commenced with the 1875–1876 Bosnian uprisings against brutal