1 The World in 1914 and the Origins of the War

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.
1904–05	Entente Cordiale links France with Britain. 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.

The controversy over the origins of World War I began in the summer of 1914, as soon as the declarations of war were exchanged. 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 experience of World War II refocused the lion's share of the responsibility on Germany, 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 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 held the office from 1871 until 1890, followed by seven less capable men, most notably Bernhard

von Bülow (1900–09), 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 but could not initiate legislation. Balancing these authoritarian aspects, the constitution of 1871 made Germany the second European power after France to hold elections based on universal male suffrage. Between 1890 and 1913 the German population boomed from 49 million to 67 million, and urban areas doubled in size. Germany's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) ranked behind only the United States, Britain, and the British Dominions, and its industrial productivity surpassed that of Britain. Politically, these developments benefited the Social Democratic Party (SPD), favorite of the growing working class, which gained strength despite Bismarck's constitution not having provided for redistricting to account for population shifts. In the election of 1912, the SPD won 35 percent of the vote – twice as much as any other party – and 27 percent of the seats in the Reichstag. The rise of the SPD concerned Emperor William II (Figure 1.1) and conservative leaders, because it favored reforms that would make Germany a true constitutional monarchy and also

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.
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> … 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 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.

Figure 1.1 William II

Emperor William II (1859–1941, German emperor 1888–1918) in the uniform of a Prussian field marshal. Son of an English mother (Queen Victoria's eldest daughter), William considered Britain to be Germany's primary role model as well as its greatest rival. His favorites included Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, whom he appointed to head the Imperial Navy Office in 1897. William supported Tirpitz's fleet plan and the pursuit of German world power status (*Weltpolitik*) even though it drove Britain to form the Triple Entente with France and Russia. The volatile emperor became notorious for his gaffes, most notably the *Daily Telegraph* affair of 1908, touched off by an interview with a leading British newspaper including his opinions on foreign policy. The affair raised concerns about William's instability and led some Germans to call for his abdication. Afterward he played a less active role in the affairs of state and, during the war, acquiesced in the army's domination of the German home front.

opposed the country's aggressive foreign policy, consistently voting against funding for Europe's strongest army and second strongest navy. The fleet did more harm than good to Germany's strategic interests, pushing Britain into the camp of its traditional rivals, France and Russia, while growing to consume more than one-third of the defense outlay. Only in 1913 did the Reichstag reverse the trend, approving an 18 percent increase in the size of Germany's peacetime army, to 890,000 men.

After defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1866 ended its traditional role in German affairs, the Austrian Empire transformed itself into the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Henceforth, Francis Joseph (emperor since 1848) reigned over a uniquely constructed state with a common foreign policy, army, and navy, but separate prime ministers, cabinets, and parliaments at Vienna and Budapest. Austria and Hungary maintained separate law codes, citizenship, and reserve military formations, and renegotiated their economic relationship every ten years. This "compromise of 1867" aimed at bringing domestic peace to the multinational Habsburg domain by elevating the ethnic Hungarians (Magyars) to co-equal status with the traditionally dominant German Austrians, but because the latter accounted for just 25 percent of Francis Joseph's subjects and the Magyars 20 percent, it excluded more than it included. For Austria-Hungary, more so than any other European power, domestic and foreign policies were inextricably linked. The Dual Monarchy's per capita GDP trailed every European power other than Russia, and half of its foreign trade was with Germany, putting it in the

uncomfortable position of dependent ally. But both of the dominant nationalities supported Austria-Hungary's close ties with the Second Reich (German Austrians viewing it as the next best thing to being part of Germany, Magyars as the best insurance against a Russian invasion from the east). The Panslav movement, supported by Russia, appealed to the intelligentsia of the Slavic nationalities that made up almost half of the overall population of 52 million (as of 1913), and the millions of Italians, Romanians, and Serbs within the empire affected its relations with those neighboring states. Each half of the empire took its own approach to the nationality problem, neither providing much hope for the future. Austria gave all nationalities access to its parliament via universal male suffrage, granted in 1907, but ended up with twenty-two parties in the Reichsrat of 1911, leaving prime ministers unable to govern without frequent resort to the emperor's emergency powers. In contrast, Hungary's restricted franchise kept power in the hands of Magyars, and except for a fixed number of seats reserved for Croatians, the rest of the population went unrepresented. Francis Ferdinand, nephew and heir of the aging Francis Joseph, hoped to reduce dependence on Germany and reorganize the empire to empower the South Slavs as a third political force. Such ideas earned him the enmity of many German Austrians, virtually all Magyars, and those Slavs (the Serbs in particular) who feared a revitalization of the empire. Austria-Hungary had the smallest army, per capita, of any European power, with a peacetime strength of just under 400,000. The small but respectable navy – one of the empire's only truly integrated, multinational institutions – by 1912 received more than 20 percent of the total defense outlay.

Italy achieved national unity in the same decade as Germany, with Sardinia-Piedmont playing the role of Prussia and its monarch, Victor Emmanuel II, becoming king. The similarities ended there. Italy relied upon France in the war of 1859 to drive Austria from most of its northern Italian possessions, acquired Venetia by allying with Prussia against Austria in 1866 (despite being defeated by the Austrians on land and at sea), and secured Rome upon the demise of the pope's protector, Napoleon III, at the hands of Prussia in 1870. Afterward, Italians remained self-conscious about the less than glorious nature of their unification. Under Italy's British-style constitutional monarchy, the centrist Liberal party dominated parliament from 1870 to 1914, in part because so many conservative Catholics heeded the call of Pope Pius IX to protest the annexation of Rome by boycotting Italian politics altogether. The issue of the pope's status vis-à-vis the Italian state – unresolved until Benito Mussolini's Lateran Treaty of 1929 established Vatican City – also affected the kingdom internationally. Official visits from countries with large Catholic populations, including Italy's own allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary, had to be hosted in cities other than Rome. Italian statesmen who saw France as their country's primary rival championed the Triple Alliance and, after 1882, developed Mediterranean and African ambitions that depended upon German diplomatic support, accepting as part of the bargain alliance with the Austrians and continued Austrian possession of ethnic Italian territories in the Alps (the South Tyrol

or Trentino) and on the Adriatic Sea. Italy's industrialized north boosted its per capita GDP to a level significantly higher than Austria-Hungary, but it ranked as the least of the great powers in population (35 million in 1913) and in armed might. Indeed, Italy had the smallest standing army (just over 250,000 men) of any European power except Britain, and every other great power except Austria-Hungary had a larger navy. Italy lost faith in the Triple Alliance after 1900, when the deterioration of Anglo-German relations raised the specter of war with Britain, but on the eve of World War I the Italo-Turkish War (1911–12) damaged Italy's relations with all three members of the Triple Entente and resulted in the renewal of the Triple Alliance in 1912.

The Triple Entente: Britain, France, Russia

Under the Pax Britannica of the Victorian era, Britain had functioned as global hegemon, claiming one-quarter of the world's land surface, dominating its oceans with the largest navy, and dominating its economy with an industrial sector that for years out-produced all other countries combined. Secure in its "splendid isolation," Britain also wielded a great deal of what international relations specialists call "soft power," not only because of its widely admired parliamentary system and concepts of individual rights, but also its tremendous influence over world culture on both the elite and popular levels. Internationally, these achievements sparked a complex mixture of admiration, envy, and in some cases outright hostility. The Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) underscored the isolation of Britain and made British leaders self-conscious about it. Afterward they moved quickly to conclude an alliance with Japan (1902), the Entente Cordiale with France (1904), and rapprochement with Russia (1907), the latter two agreements laying the groundwork for the Triple Entente. In per capita GDP Britain still led Europe, but had fallen behind the United States, and its aging industrial base had been surpassed by Germany in key areas such as steel production. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy's innovative battleship *Dreadnought* (1906) (Figure 1.2) and battle cruiser designs enabled Britain to face down the German naval threat. The Liberal government of Herbert Asquith (prime minister 1908–16) paid for naval expansion and an ambitious social welfare program with unprecedented taxes on the rich, proposed in Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George's "People's Budget" of 1909. When the predominantly Conservative House of Lords vetoed the budget, the Liberals fought back with the Parliament Act of 1911, eliminating the veto power of the Lords and paving the way for the passage of Home Rule for Ireland (home to almost 5 million of Britain's pre-war population of 46 million), which Liberals had long championed and Conservatives opposed. The Labour Party, an emerging third force in British politics, supported the Liberals on reform and Ireland, but none of the three parties had the courage to embrace women's suffrage, whose proponents after 1910 adopted increasingly violent tactics. On

Figure 1.2 HMS *Dreadnought*

HMS *Dreadnought* (18,110 tons, 527 ft long, ten 12-inch (30-cm) guns, 11 inches (28 cm) of armor, with a speed of 21 knots), laid down in October 1905, commissioned in December 1906. The *Dreadnought* featured the lethal combination of unprecedented size, all big-gun armament, and turbine engines. It revolutionized naval shipbuilding worldwide, rendering all existing "pre-dreadnought" battleships obsolete. By 1914 every European power had "dreadnought" battleships in service or nearing completion, as did the United States, Japan, and several second-tier naval powers. Like nuclear weapons later in the twentieth century, dreadnoughts meant that a country mattered in global or regional balances of power, and the ability to build them from one's own domestic resources became the measure of true great power status. Ironically HMS *Dreadnought* never fought a battle, as the prewar naval race gave Britain dozens of dreadnoughts larger and more formidable than the original. It was not with the Grand Fleet at Jutland in 1916, and was sold for scrap in 1921.

the eve of war Home Rule finally passed into law, effective September 1914, only to be suspended by Asquith for the war's duration, embittering Ireland's Catholic majority and strengthening the revolutionary elements within it. In order to win the naval race with Germany, Britain increased naval spending by 57 percent between 1907 and 1913; in the same years, spending on Britain's 200,000-man volunteer army rose by just 6 percent. The relative decline of Britain in Europe increased the strategic significance of its empire (see "Dominions and Colonies" section below).

As of 1914, France was arguably Europe's most vulnerable great power other than Austria-Hungary, but its deepening partnership with Britain under the Entente

Cordiale, the rapid recovery of Russia from its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, and the Anglo-Russian rapprochement of 1907 had improved its strategic situation considerably. The isolation France had endured between the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and the conclusion of the Franco-Russian military convention (1892) was a thing of the past. The Third Republic, established after Napoleon III's defeat at Sedan in 1870, featured a strong legislature and a weak, indirectly elected president, sacrificing stability to spare it the fate of France's two previous republics (which gave way to Bonaparte monarchies in 1804 and 1852). Between 1871 and 1914 the premiership changed hands forty-nine times. During its isolation the Third Republic expanded the French overseas empire, and after nearly coming to blows with Britain on the Nile at Fashoda (1898) leveraged British support under the Entente to face down German designs on Morocco in two crises (1905–06 and 1911), emerging with a protectorate there. The conservative French Army was deeply shaken by the Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906), in which Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jewish officer on the general staff, stood accused of passing secrets to the Germans. The affair revealed a deep political and social divide between conservative Catholics and liberal secularists; the latter, triumphant following Dreyfus' exoneration, scrapped Napoleon's Concordat of 1801, thus achieving separation of church and state, and pressed for a more egalitarian army with a two-year service term. These measures helped to provoke a conservative backlash in the legislative elections of 1910, and the second Moroccan crisis the following year ushered in a "nationalist revival." The issue of Alsace-Lorraine returned to the forefront, personified by Raymond Poincaré (president 1913–20), a son of Lorraine, for whom the fate of the lost provinces formed the foundation of a visceral anti-Germanism. Among the European powers France ranked third in per capita GDP, only narrowly trailing Germany, but demographic trends left the French in no position to fight the Germans on their own, in part because France was the first country whose population had practiced birth control on a widespread basis. By the late 1800s, France had Europe's lowest birth rate, and in 1913 its population stood at 40 million, just 2 million more than in 1890. The year before the outbreak of war France increased its peacetime army to 700,000 men (compared with Germany's 890,000), but only by resorting to a three-year service term (to Germany's two) and increasing defense spending to 36 percent of the national budget (to Germany's 20 percent). France's allies would not support an attempt to reconquer Alsace-Lorraine in an aggressive war, but once a general war broke out, neither the French nor their allies would accept a peace that left the provinces in German hands.

Tsarist Russia and republican France, ideologically the most unlikely of partners, on the eve of World War I had Europe's closest alliance. Russia entered the twentieth century with the continent's last absolute monarchy and most backward economy. The country was industrializing rapidly thanks in part to loans from France, but 40 percent of its foreign trade was with Germany, the leading importer of Russian grain. In per capita GDP Russia trailed even Austria-Hungary by a wide margin, and only 7 percent

of Tsar Nicholas II's 175 million subjects lived in urban areas. Few peasants had prospered after the abolition of serfdom in 1861, and their disaffection, along with that of the country's small, overburdened working class, led to a revolution against Nicholas in 1905, during Russia's lost war against Japan. The tsar saved his throne by agreeing to a limited constitutional monarchy; the Russian prime minister (like the German chancellor) was responsible only to the monarch, and the parliament, or Duma, that opened in 1906 was elected on a restricted franchise that left most peasants and workers unrepresented. In 1907, Russia ended its long-term rivalry with Britain in an agreement that delineated their respective spheres of interest from Persia across Central Asia to the Far East. Defeat at the hands of Japan and entente with Britain left the Balkans as Russia's only outlet for future expansion. Russian Panslavism struck a chord with the emerging Slavic nations of the Balkans – Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria – all of whom also shared Russia's Eastern Orthodox faith. Russia likewise had friends in Romania and Greece, which were Orthodox but not Slavic, and the entire region appreciated Russia for its historical role as the primary enemy of Ottoman Turkey. Because Russian Panslavists also encouraged revolutionary elements among the Slavs of Austria-Hungary, the Dual Monarchy provided sanctuary and support to Russian revolutionaries, including Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and most other Bolshevik leaders of 1917, all of whom were living in Austria-Hungary as of 1914, as well as Polish socialist Józef Pilsudski, who received command of a Polish legion serving alongside Austro-Hungarian troops on the Eastern front shortly after the war began. Russia's 1.3 million-man army, the world's largest, had been wracked by mutinies during the Russo-Japanese War, and most of the navy had been sunk. Both recovered quickly afterward, though the country still lacked the industrial base to support them adequately. By 1914, the degree to which Germany and Austria-Hungary underestimated Russia was perhaps Russia's greatest strategic asset.

The Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Wars

Ever since the Ottoman Turks seized Constantinople and overthrew the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the southeastern European lands known as the Balkans (after the Balkan Mountains of eastern Serbia and Bulgaria) had served as a bridge between Europe and the Muslim Middle East. After their apogee of power in 1683, when the sultan's armies last laid siege to Vienna, the Turks lost strength and territory on a consistent basis: to the Austrians in the western Balkans, to the Russians in the Caucasus and around the Black Sea, and eventually to local independence or autonomist movements (supported by various great powers) in the eastern and southern Balkans and in North Africa. Not without justification, the statesmen of the nineteenth century labeled the Ottoman Empire "the sick man of Europe."

During the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire sought to modernize itself, yet with no industrial revolution of its own it became dependent upon Europe for arms, manufactured goods, and the expertise to construct its railways and exploit its raw materials. The Turks (like the Chinese and Japanese later) granted humiliating extraterritorial privileges to foreigners who managed these projects; after the Ottoman government defaulted on its loans in 1882, Europeans even administered the state debt. Sultans used their absolute powers to reorganize their armed forces, bureaucracy, schools, and legal system along European lines, but these measures only earned them the enmity of local and regional noblemen, Islamic leaders, and devout Muslims in general, foreshadowing the travails of twentieth-century Middle Eastern rulers who would attempt to establish more secular states. In particular, secularization jeopardized the loyalties of the empire's non-Turkish Muslim population – mostly Arab, mostly Sunni – because for centuries Turkish sultans had also been recognized as caliphs (successors to the Prophet Muhammad) by the Sunni majority of the world's Muslims. Ironically, the Ottomans succumbed not to the opponents of reform, but to frustrated advocates of greater reform. The Young Turks, established in 1889, sought to reduce the sultan to a figurehead and revitalize the empire as a secular, constitutional Turkish national state. They gradually infiltrated the Ottoman army officer corps and seized power in a coup in 1908, thereafter ruling as the Unionist Party (Committee of Union and Progress). Their program included legal equality for all nationalities and freedom of religion, but also established Turkish as the official language. These measures threatened the empire's Arab and Armenian populations, and especially the Slavs in the part of the Balkans still under Turkish rule.

At the time of the Young Turk coup, the Balkans had been stable since the Congress of Berlin (1878), which had left Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania independent, Bulgaria autonomous but still under Ottoman suzerainty, and Bosnia-Herzegovina still technically Ottoman but occupied by Austria-Hungary. Fearing a change for the worse under the Young Turks, in 1908 Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria declared its independence. Thereafter the Turks faced the loss of their remaining Balkan territories – Albania, Macedonia, and Thrace – which were coveted in whole or in part by Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece. After the Turks became embroiled in the Italo-Turkish War (1911–12), these four states formed the Balkan League and mobilized for war. In October 1912, just as the Turks made peace with the Italians by relinquishing Libya, the Balkan League declared war on the Ottoman Empire, initiating the First Balkan War. Russia supported the Balkan League and Austria-Hungary the Ottomans, and tensions between them became serious enough for each to partially mobilize its army. When the war ended in May 1913, the great powers allowed Serbia to keep Kosovo and Greece to retain Epirus, but assigned the rest of Albanian territory to a new independent state. Greece also received Crete and, with Serbia, partitioned Macedonia, limiting Bulgaria's gains to Thrace. Public outrage over the meager spoils