

# World War I and the Russian Revolution

## THE STORY MATTERS...

On June 28, 1914, an assassination in the Balkans created an international crisis, igniting a European powder keg created by nationalism, massive military buildups, complex alliances, and imperial rivalries. By August, Europe was at war. The widespread use of trench warfare on the Western Front in France created a destructive stalemate that lasted four years. The introduction of new weapons, including heavy artillery, tanks, machine guns, and poison gas, produced casualty levels that dwarfed those of previous wars.

## Lesson 27-1

# World War I Begins

### READING HELPDESK

#### Academic Vocabulary

military                      complex

#### Content Vocabulary

conscription                  mobilization

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why do politics often lead to war?
- How can technology impact war?

### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

As European countries formed alliances and increased the sizes of their armed forces, they set the stage for a global war. All they needed was a good reason to mobilize troops. When a Serbian terrorist assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife, World War I soon followed.

## Causes of Decline

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What factors contributed to the start of World War I?*

Nineteenth-century liberals believed that if European states were organized along national lines, these states would work together and create a peaceful Europe. They were very wrong.

### Nationalism, Imperialism, Militarism, and Alliances

The system of nation-states that emerged in Europe in the last half of the nineteenth century led not to cooperation but rather to competition. Each European nation-state regarded itself as subject to no higher interest or authority. Each state was guided by its own self-interests and success. Furthermore, most leaders thought that war was an acceptable way to preserve the power of their national states. These attitudes made war an ever-present possibility.

The imperialist expansion of the last half of the nineteenth century also played a role in the coming of war. The competition for lands abroad, especially in Africa, led to conflict and heightened the existing rivalries among European states.

Nationalism, along with imperialism, had another serious result. Not all ethnic groups had become nations in

Europe. Slavic minorities in the Balkans and the Austro-Hungarian Empire still dreamed of their own national states. The Irish in the British Empire and the Poles in the Russian Empire had similar dreams.

Industrialization offered new methods of shipbuilding and the use of iron, steel and chemicals for new weapons. The growth of mass armies and navies after 1900 heightened tensions in Europe. It was obvious that if war did come, it would be highly destructive.

Most Western countries had established conscription, a military draft, as a regular practice before 1914. European armies doubled in size between 1890 and 1914. With its 1.3 million men, the Russian army had grown to be the largest. The French and German armies were not far behind, with 900,000 soldiers each. The British, Italian, and Austro-Hungarian armies numbered between 250,000 and 500,000 soldiers each.

Militarism – the aggressive preparation for war – was growing. As armies grew, so did the influence of military leaders. They drew up vast and complex plans for quickly mobilizing millions of soldiers and enormous quantities of supplies in the event of war.

Fearing that any changes would cause chaos in the armed forces, military leaders insisted that their plans could not be altered. This left European political leaders with little leeway. In 1914 they had to make decisions for military instead of political reasons.

At the same time, a system of alliances intensified the dangers of militarism. Europe's great powers had been divided into two loose political alliances. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the Triple Alliance in 1882. France, Great Britain, and Russia created the Triple Entente in 1907.

In the early years of the twentieth century, a series of crises tested these alliances. Especially troublesome were the crises in the Balkans between 1908 and 1913. These events left European states angry at each other and eager for revenge. By 1914 the major European states had come to believe that their allies were important. They were willing

to use war to preserve their power and the power of their allies.

### Internal Dissent

National desires were not the only source of internal strife at the beginning of the twentieth century. Socialist labor movements also had grown more powerful. The Socialists were increasingly inclined to use strikes, even violent ones, to achieve their goals.

Some conservative leaders, alarmed at the increase in labor strife and class division, feared that European nations were on the verge of revolution. This desire to suppress internal disorder might have encouraged various leaders to take the plunge into war in 1914.

#### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Analyzing** How might internal dissent in European states have led to World War I?

## The Outbreak of War

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How did the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand spark the outbreak of war?*

Nationalism and imperialism, militarism and alliances, and the desire to stifle internal dissent might all have played a role in starting World War I. However, it was the decisions that European leaders made in response to a crisis in the Balkans that led directly to the conflict.

### Assassination in Sarajevo and Responses

By 1914 Serbia, supported by Russia, was determined to create a large, independent Slavic state in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary, which had its own Slavic minorities to contend with, was equally determined to prevent that from happening.

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the Hapsburg throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Sophia visited the city of Sarajevo (SAR • uh • YAY • voh) in Bosnia. A group of conspirators waited there in the streets.

In that group was Gavrilo Princip, a 19-year-old Bosnian Serb. Princip was a member of the Black Hand, a Serbian terrorist organization that wanted Bosnia to be free of Austria-Hungary and to become part of a large Serbian kingdom. An assassination attempt earlier that morning by one of the conspirators had failed. Later that day, however, Princip succeeded in fatally shooting the archduke and his wife.

The Austro-Hungarian government did not know if the Serbian government was directly involved in the archduke's assassination, but it did not care. It saw an opportunity to "render Serbia innocuous once and for all by a display of force," as the Austrian foreign minister put it. Austrian leaders wanted to attack Serbia but feared that Russia would intervene on Serbia's behalf. So, they asked for – and received – the backing of their German allies.

Emperor William II of Germany gave Austria-Hungary a "blank check," promising Germany's full support if war broke out between Russia and Austria-Hungary. On July 28, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.

Russia was determined to support Serbia's cause. On July 28, Czar Nicholas II ordered partial mobilization of the Russian army against Austria-Hungary. Mobilization is the process of assembling troops and supplies for war. In 1914 mobilization was considered an act of war.

Leaders of the Russian army informed the czar that they could not partially mobilize. Their mobilization plans were based on a war against both Germany and Austria-Hungary. Mobilizing against only the one front of Austria-Hungary, they claimed, would create chaos in the army. Based on this claim, the czar ordered full mobilization of the Russian army on July 29, knowing that Germany would consider this order an act of war.

### The Conflict Broadens

Indeed, Germany reacted quickly. The German government warned Russia that it must halt its mobilization within 12 hours. When Russia ignored this warning, Germany declared war on Russia on August 1.

Like the Russians, the Germans had a military plan. General Alfred von Schlieffen (SHLEE • fuhn) had helped draw up the plan, which was known as the Schlieffen Plan. It called for a two-front war with France and Russia because the two had formed a military alliance in 1894.

According to the Schlieffen Plan, Germany would conduct a small holding action against Russia while most of the German army would carry out a rapid invasion of France. This meant invading France by moving quickly along the level coastal area through Belgium. After France was defeated, the German invaders would move to the east against Russia.

Under the Schlieffen Plan, Germany could not mobilize its troops solely against Russia. Therefore, it declared war on France on August 3. At about the same time, it issued an ultimatum to Belgium demanding that German troops be allowed to pass through Belgian territory. Belgium, however, was a neutral nation.

On August 4, Great Britain declared war on Germany, officially for violating Belgian neutrality. In fact, Britain, which was allied with France and Russia, was concerned about maintaining its own world power. As one British diplomat put it, if Germany and Austria-Hungary won the war, "what would be the position of a friendless England?" By August 4, all the great powers of Europe were at war.

#### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Interpreting** What roles did the assassination of Francis Ferdinand and the existence of prior military plans play in leading quickly to the outbreak of World War I?

## LESSON 27-1 REVIEW

**conscription** military draft

**mobilization** the process of assembling troops and supplies and making them ready for war