

THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

1870-1	Franco-Prussian war
1873	League of the Three Emperors (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia)
1879	Austro-German alliance
1881	Alliance of the Three Emperors (lapsed 1887)
1882	Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy)
1887	Russo-German re-insurance treaty (lapsed 1890)
1890	Bismarck falls from power
1891-4	Conclusion, by stages, of the Franco-Russian alliance
1897	The Balkans 'on ice'
1898	Germany decides to build a new battle fleet
1899-1902	Boer war
1901	Death of Queen Victoria. Accession of Edward VII
1902	Anglo-Japanese alliance
1904	Entente Cordiale
1904-5	Russo-Japanese war
1905-6	First Moroccan crisis
1906	Launching of the <i>Dreadnought</i>
1907	Anglo-Russian agreement completes the Triple Entente
1908	Young Turk revolution Asquith liberal prime minister
1908-9	Bosnian crisis
1910	Accession of George V
1911	Agadir crisis
1911-12	War in Libya between Italy and Turkey
1912	First Balkan war
1913	Second Balkan war
1914	Assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand (28 June) Austrian ultimatum to Serbia (23 July) Austria declares war on Serbia (28 July) Russia mobilises (30 July) Germany declares war on Russia (1 August) Germany declares war on France and invades Belgium (3 August) Britain declares war on Germany (4 August)

Below: London goes joyfully to war. Its population was notorious for the enthusiasm with which it habitually greeted declarations of war. 'War or anything that leads to war', wrote Asquith, 'is always popular with the

London mob. You remember Sir Robert Walpole's remark "Now they are ringing their bells; in a few weeks they will be wringing their hands". How one loaths such levity'.



Though the Kaiser was beginning to have second thoughts, however, the German government continued to press Austria for an immediate declaration of war in order to make mediation impossible. In response to German pressure Austria formally declared war on Serbia on 28 July, a fortnight earlier than it had intended. The Kaiser's view that war was now unnecessary was passed on to Vienna by the German Foreign Office only when it was too late. Bethmann-Hollweg, the German chancellor, had no intention of trying to avert a war. He recognised that an Austrian war with Serbia would mean a European war with France and Russia, but was confident of victory.

Bethmann-Hollweg, however, had counted on obtaining British neutrality. Only on 30 July, when he learned that British neutrality was not to be secured on the terms offered by Germany, did Bethmann-Hollweg at last make a serious attempt to restrain Austria. He urged Austria to halt its forces at Belgrade and agree to talks with Russia. By now, however, it was too late to hold Austria back. Nor was Germany speaking with a single voice. While Bethmann-Hollweg was counselling moderation, Moltke was telegraphing Conrad: 'Mobilise against Russia at once. Germany will follow suit'.

Even Bethmann-Hollweg's eleventh-hour attempt to hold Austria back was not wholly dictated by a desire to preserve the peace. He was also concerned—perhaps mainly concerned—to fix on Russia the responsibility for transforming a local war with Serbia into a continental war between the great powers of Europe. If Russia were the first to mobilise its forces for a continental war, Bethmann-Hollweg believed it would be possible for Germany to brand Russia as the aggressor.

Russia mobilises

Russia went to war against Austria, as Austria went to war against Serbia, because it believed that its status as a great power left it no alternative. Just as Austria believed that it could not remain a great power without war with Serbia, so Russia believed that it could not remain a great power if it aban-

Right: the young Adolf Hitler (ringed) listens to the proclamation of war in Munich on 2 August 1914. He wrote later of this moment in Mein Kampf: 'Now began for me, as for every German, the greatest and most unforgettable period of my life on earth. Compared with the events of that mighty struggle, all the past fell into empty oblivion. I think with pride and sorrow of those days, and back to the weeks at the beginning of our nation's heroic fight in which kind fortune allowed me to take part'. (Imperial War Museum, London.)