

DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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THE GREAT WAR, THE GREAT MISTAKE

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Abstract

The title of this thesis is the Great War: The Great Mistake. What it aims to achieve is to explain why the war happened and what can be learned from it today. The areas that will be looked into are the underlying tensions between the various nations before the Great War broke out. This will be followed by the economic situation in Europe, examining the stability of Europe. Next, there will be a review of what led up to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand: why was he targeted? Why were Bosnian Serbs so hostile to the monarchy in the first place? The national rivalries which led to the military and naval brinkmanship between the powers, which led to countries not being focused on their own domestic issues will also be explored. The final areas of discussion will be: did anyone see the war coming and if so, why were they not listened to? And, were there any attempts at communication and negotiations for peace? Was the war simply a reactionary response to a situation that the various powers thought could be resolved with swift hard action without realising the ultimate price they would all pay for it. The research methodology that will be applied is the use of primary and secondary resources.

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Dedication

Everything that is difficult to do needs the support of others. I want to give thanks my mother, Valerie Jackson for all her tireless encouragement during this challenging time. It is never easy supporting/pushing students into doing work, she achieved this through exceptional effort.

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This thesis is going to discuss why the Great War happened and was it a war that could have been prevented. To do this, several different areas will be researched to get an understanding of the mind- set of the time. A review will be undertaken of the binding treaties that tied the different powers to one another and will also examine the economic situation. The thesis will consider the imperialist expansion and the arms/naval race which left countries wary of one another. The question must be asked was there any attempt at communication between the powers for a resolution rather than all-out war? Did anyone see the war coming, economists or politicians and if so why were they not heeded? The final part of this thesis will discuss if there is a lesson to be learned today from the Great War that could help circumvent such a thing from happening again or is it a mistake to be repeated just in a different way and with different players or even some of the same players.

Chapter 1:

The underlying tensions between the various nations before the Great War broke out

The Treaties

How did the countries involved in the war get dragged into the war in the first place? The answer is treaties. There was a complex series of treaties linking and protecting various European countries. Austria Hungary, Germany, Russia, Britain, Belgium, Italy and France were all tied to one another through treaties ensuring that if one of them was to go to war, then they would be backed up by their ally. The following paragraphs will outline the treaties between the countries and what they promised. Britain's treaty with Belgium went as far back as 1839 and was known as the Treaty of London. The promise within this treaty was to protect Belgium's neutrality from an outside aggressive force.

Austria's and Germany's alliance was the dual alliance of 1879. This treaty had both sides agree that if Russia were to attack either of them, then the other would come to its aid. This also took into account a country's neutrality being threatened by an outside force. The Franco-Russian alliance tied France to Russia and when Russia went to war with Germany and Austria, France found itself having no choice but follow suit. The Russia Serbia alliance meant that when Serbia and Austrian tensions broke out with the assassination the Arch Duke Ferdinand, Russia gathered its military forces for defence of Serbia. Italy did have an alliance with both Germany and Austria (the triple alliance of 1882) but it found a loop hole in the treaty to avoid being pulled into the war. It made the argument that the treaty only stipulated Italy entering if the war was a defensive one and Italy countered by stating this was an offensive war started by Germany and Austria. Italy would join the allies later on under the treaty of London, as they were promised territory if they joined.

(The map below demonstrates the close quarters between the countries and the ease with which soldiers could move across terrain.)

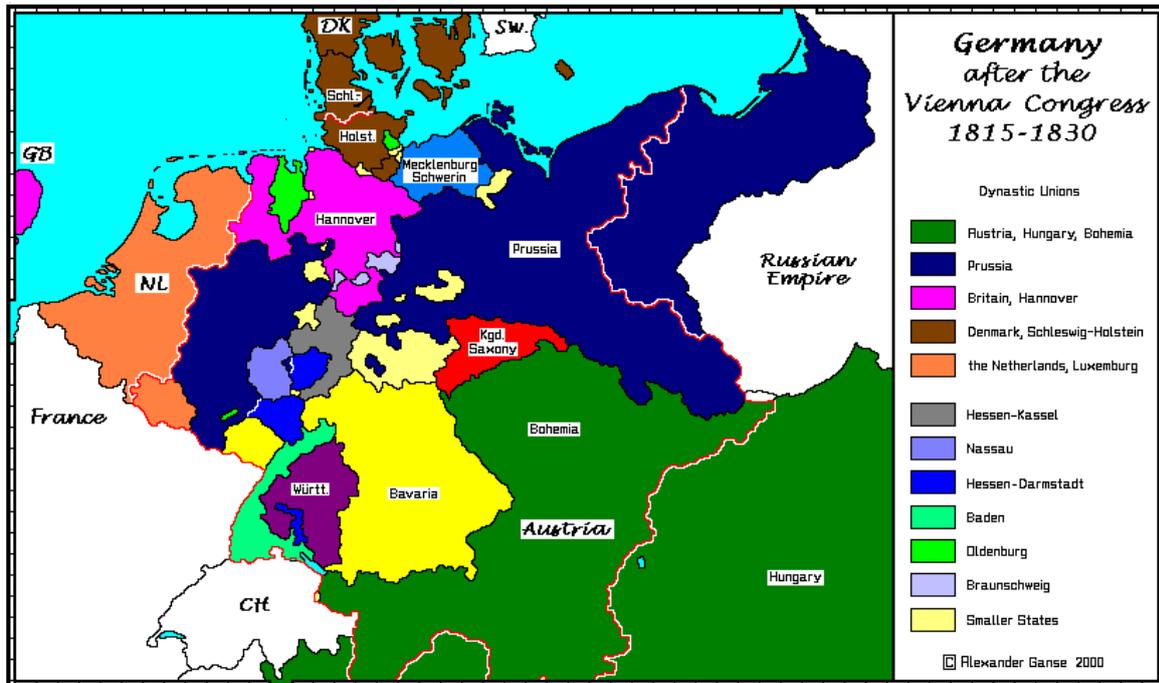


(Fig 1: Map of Europe before 1914)

The treaties showed how all the countries were intertwined with one another. One could make the argument that if the treaties were not so many, then there would not have been cause for war, especially on the scale of the Great War. The counter-argument however is that countries were looking for a reason to fight and these treaties provided the excuse needed. This point will be backed up by detailing the economic stress of the time in the various countries and the national rivalries they all suffered from. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to the rivalries.

One must not forget the period of history this world was living in. It was imperialist and colonial. The British Empire had many territories to its name but it was not the only country

that sought power for itself. All of them did and rising competition for expansionism at the time would have been Germany. Under Bismarck Germany had expanded greatly and became a unified country.



(Fig 2: Germany before Bismarck map)



(Fig 3: Germany after Bismarck map)

Even though one can recognise all the countries actions for what they were, colonial masters wanting to build empires that would be dominant forces, it is easy to see how they all became cautious of one another. A paranoia that would ultimately fuel their rivalries ensued in the form of investing large amounts of money into the military and navy.

Back to the question at hand, could the Great War have been prevented? The conclusion of this chapter is that the war could not have been prevented. The treaties put in place were intended to protect the various powers but instead, the agreements were responsible for dragging the participants into war. The same treaties served as an excuse for the participants to fight each other.

Chapter 2:

The economic situation in Europe before 1914.

In the early years of the twentieth century historians and economists had differing opinions on how the state of the economy could affect the prospects of war both before and during one. Otto Neurath, was an Austrian economist who saw benefits to countries warring with one another. He observed ‘Great wars are not as damaging as might have been expected either to the defeated or the victorious side and that, on the contrary, something of a boom can be observed during and shortly after a war’. One can see the reasoning behind this thinking as many wars have shown that through such times a country can expect a great rise if not full employment of its citizens. The occupations that require manpower are military manufacturing and anything to help with the war effort. However, such a boost is short term as again we see that with the conclusions of many wars, economic strife follows as countries both winners and losers are indebted to one another and the defeated can suffer especially as can be seen with the treaty of Versailles. Otto Neurath does not think long term.¹

By contrast financier Paul Rouvier came from a different angle ‘as long as there was money, one fought, when the coffers had been emptied, one made peace. Now everything revolves around credit. Nations are bound closely to each other by the links of credit. A war in Europe would bring about a general disaster’. Rouvier could not have been more right, the after effects of the Great War left an economic strife in its wake for the major powers and this of course was one of the reasons why appeasement in the time of Hitler’s Germany was allowed to happen as the nations knew they were in no fit state for yet another war. The economic

¹ Neurath, Otto, War Economy in Thomas Uebel and Robert Cohen eds, Otto Neurath Economic Writing Selections 1904-1945 (Vienna 2004 pp 160-1) 5

entanglements of Europe promoted peace, to hurt one economy is to hurt another, that can even be seen today. ²

The growth in global trade from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth century was very substantial, global trade increased from \$1.7 billion in 1850 to \$18.7 billion in 1913. Amongst the signs of increasing global market integration was the convergence of prices. In 1910 a bushel of wheat sold in Liverpool was only 16c more expensive than the sale price in Chicago which was the centre of the United States wheat market at that time.

What this meant was globalisation was taking a stronger hold on the world than it had before. Britain had become a large creditor by 1914 with the total of \$28.3 billion lent overseas. France was the next largest creditor with \$8.6 billion given in loans to other countries. They were followed by Germany with \$5.6 billion loaned overseas. By comparison, the United States, Russia, Turkey and China were debtor nations.

Not every economist was for the idea of growing dependence on international trade. Max Weber was one such economist. His focus was on the national picture rather than the international 'if our work is to have any meaning, it lies, and can only lie, in providing for the future, for our descendants. The interests of the nation should determine economic policy and to hell with the consequences for the international system'. 'As for the dream of peace and universal happiness is concerned, the words written over the portal into the unknown future of human history are: Abandon all hope.' Weber had a lack of foresight in not realising that through international dependence there was more to gain than lose for the national side he cared most about.

² Cited in Rene Girault, *Emprants russes et investissements francais en Russie 1887-1914* (Paris 1973) pp 425

Some historians argue that economic issues are an influencing factor to political tensions and war. Paul Kennedy's study *Anglo-German antagonism* argues that the roots of the conflict between these two nations are to be found in their shifting economic weight. The relationship between economic and military power were very important parts of the balance of power. As said earlier these were imperialist times. For Britain, a great empire, knew even a force like theirs could fall, much like the Roman empire once had. That is why one can understand why such focus was put on economy and defence.

Economic and industrial strength did not necessarily translate into military power but it did however have a strong impact.

In the early years of the twentieth century Britain was in a strong economic position. Germany on the other hand in 1908 had reached debts of \$4.1 billion marks. They tried to raise taxes but the situation did not improve. The lack of money impacted greatly on Germany's ability to compete with Britain in Naval resources. Germany also struggled to pay the army bills of 1912 and 1913. France too had similar difficulties in raising taxes for their military. According to Boris Barth, neither Germany nor France gave enough resources, financially, politically and intellectually, to their economic preparation for war.³

³ (Boris Barth, *Die deutsche Finanzwirtschaft und die Imperialismen, Banken und Außenpolitik vor 1914* (Stuttgart, 1995) pp 437-45; Martin Horn and Talbot Imlay, 'Money in Wartime:

1 Max Weber, 'Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaft May 1895' in Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (eds), *Weber: political writings* (Cambridge 1994), pp 13- 16.

Frances financial preparation for the two World Wars, *International History Review* 27, 4 (2005): 712-27.

William Mulligan argues that those who believed that economic factors would either prevent or lead to war overestimated the importance of economic issues as perceived by great power politics. He held that commercial and financial issues rarely determined policy. Economic levers were nonetheless part of the arsenal of diplomatic weapons allowing for the application of diplomatic pressure without engaging the military.⁴

Similarly, the French Minister of Public Works is reported to have said in 1909 that ‘If it is true that influence follows the fleet, it is also true that influence follow business.’⁵

According to William Mulligan the development of the international economy had its own dynamics which were independent of politics.

Trade wars and economic power never had the capacity to be the driving force for the initiation of war.

It is widely acknowledged that the countries involved in the Great War expected it to be short. No provision had been made for a long term conflict. There was a marked division of wealth and capacity to finance the war between the allies and Germany. The allies had far greater

⁴ William Mulligan, *The Origins of the First World War* pp. 205- 206, Cambridge University Press 2010

⁵ (Cited in Philip Nord, ‘Social Defence and Conservative Regeneration: The National Revival 1900- 1914 in Robert Tombs ed. *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: from Boulangism to the Great War 1889- 1914* London 1991) pp. 214).

wealth which could be spent on waging war. Statistics show that the allies spent \$147 billion. (\$45 billion was spent by Germany).⁶

Economic warfare was waged against Germany with the British putting an effective blockade in place. Although the Germans attempted a counter blockade with their U-boats, their strategy was largely beaten by the allied shipping convoys. Britain paid not only its own war costs but also those of its allies until she ran out of money in 1916. After that point it was the United States who funded Britain and the rest of the allies. This shows how short sighted Otto Neurath idea of wartime being a profitable time both during and after war. After the Great War both Britain and her allies and Germany would come to greatly rely on the United States for economic support which in itself could only put the U.S under great strain and eventually lead to its own economic crisis in the form of the Great Depression.⁷

GDP increased significantly for Britain and the United States but the reverse happened in France and Russia which suffered substantial decreases. A drop in GDP of more than 30% was experienced in France, Austria and Russia. The greatest single cost on both sides of the conflict was the provision of artillery shells. Ten million shells were fired in the battle of Verdun.⁸

⁶ (H E Fisk. *The Inter. Allied Debts* (1924) pp 13 and 325).

⁷ David Stephenson, *with our backs to the wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (2011) pp 350- 438.

⁸ John Horn *Companion to WW1* (2012) pp 58, 218.

Britain's productivity grew substantively during the war with huge efforts being placed into the production of ammunition and warplanes. The annual manufacture of artillery in 1914 was 91 whereas 8039 was achieved in 1918. The production of warplanes went from 200 to 3200 over the same period. The production of machine guns rose from 300 to 121,000.⁹

Germany had less financial capacity to wage war than Britain and the United States. Of the 170 billion marks spent during the war by Germany, only 8% was covered by taxes with the rest being borrowed from German banks and the people. Eight national loan programmes raised 100 million marks. The bonds that were issued against these loans subsequently became worthless due to hyper-inflation.¹⁰

The situation in Austria/ Hungary was less economically strong at the beginning of the war. Industrial modernisation had commenced later here than in Britain and the United States. Austria dominated in the first industrial revolution manufactory while Hungary was more advanced in the second industrial revolution producing products which were more modern. Heavy industry centred for the greatest part on machine building while light industry provided for precision mechanics. Insufficient cognisance was taken of the potential effect to the economy of drafting skilled workers into the army.¹¹

⁹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) pp 267.

¹⁰ T. Balderston, *War Finance Inflation in Britain and Germany 1914-1918 economic history review* (1989) 43#3 pp 222-244.

¹¹ Tucker, *The European Powers* (1999) pp 85- 91.

Could the Great War have been prevented if the economic situation had been different? One thing history has shown time and again is the correlation between economic down turn, political upheaval and civil unrest in causing war. However, although the economy was a factor, one has to keep going back to the time period under review. This was an era of imperialism. What these various empires were doing to each other was literally a way of life. It would take time for that kind of thinking to change.

Chapter 3:

The National Rivalries between the Powers and the impact of military and politics

The national rivalries of Europe go back further than the start of the Great War. The reasoning behind them was intricate and delicate, they would all come together and push tensions between the powers over the praecipes which would lead to the war.

Starting with Germany, in the times of Bismarck and his quest for a unified Germany through power politics ('the capacity of a state to regulate behaviours and enforce order within its territory. The extroverted concept of power in international relations'. internet). Germany had gone to war with France in 1870. This was known as the Franco Prussian war. It did not end until 1871. It was thought that military power and the use of war was good. Bismarck shared this view as did his contemporaries. The impact of the military on politics would play a crucial part on the relationships between the powers. The military encouraged spending on itself and the navy. It lit the fire for the arms race.

After the war of 1870 Europe would have forty-three years of peace. However, as a result of the Franco Prussian war the European powers were making plans for war, in order to be prepared for a time when it might be necessary. This act alone shows the worry and paranoia that the powers were going through. For Germany one can see their concern when France and Russia made an alliance in 1894. They were now caught in a pincer movement if the two countries ever wanted to attack. That is why the Schlieffen Plan was drawn up to allow for a fight on two battle fronts. It was the General staff of the European powers that made the plans for war. The Origins of the First World War by William Mulligan shows 'The plans reflected the security dilemmas facing the great powers, the shifts in the balance of power and the

changes in the constellations of great power alignments'. This means that the powers were keeping an eye on one another, on their shifts in power, their alliances etc.

The next country to look at to understand the power of military influence is Serbia. In 1903 its military led a coup which saw the deaths of the King and Queen. They surrendered afterwards to the government of national unity. The policies had started to change after this. They went from pro Austrian to pro -Russian. Now one might think that if it had not been for this coup, the politics that were in favour of Austria might not have changed and the Black Hand might not have had such an impact as it did. The Black Hand was led by the man who headed the coup, Dragutin Dimitrijevic. Originally its purpose was to take Macedonia. Macedonia was a territory that was part of the Ottoman Empire and was fought over by Serbia and Bulgaria.

(The map below puts into perspective the territories, their proximity and the likely hood of the other countries wanting to expand into it).



(Fig 4: Austrian, Ottoman Empires)

In response to the Macedonia situation, a faction of soldiers based there known as the Young Turks revolted. They wanted to bring back the liberal constitution of 1876. This constitution focused on protecting Ottoman territories from external forces. Considering they had two outside countries fighting over one of their domains, one can understand the reasoning behind this act.

The influence of the military on politics can cause dramatic shifts on policies, as can be seen from the outcome of the Serbian coup. The General Staffs of Europe encouraging their countries to fuel military campaigns could only heighten the populations paranoia of going to war. These factors coupled with this being an imperialist time where fighting and taking territory was the norm, may explain to an extent why the powers thought that if war were to happen it would not last long or be any different from past wars they faced before.

In France the military influence was non-existent by comparison to Serbia and Germany. A coup was attempted by Déroulède but he was not backed by the rest of the military so it failed. Britain was influenced by the military but it was different from the others. The influence came from relationships made between officers and political leaders rather than coups. There are two examples of such relationships between military officers and politicians. The first example being Sir Jackie Fisher who got close to Churchill and Grey. He would slip information to journalists which would lead to the government feeling cornered on certain issues. The second example is Henry Wilson who made a connection with Arthur Nicholson (the Under -Secretary at the Foreign Office.). Through Nicholson, Wilson's viewpoints were seen by other politicians. He would become a prominent player in military planning before the outbreak of the Great War.

Austria and Hungary had two General Staff offices, one for Austria and one for Hungary, and they could go straight to the Kaiser. In Austria one military figure in particular sticks out, Conrad who was chief of the General staff. He was a warmonger, who kept trying to convince Franz Josef to go to war. Franz Josef as well as his ministers kept denying Conrad every time he suggested launching a pre-emptive strike against a country.

It too can be said that Germany's leader/Kaiser Wilhelm II and Bismarck also kept a handle on the military just like Austria did. Their military, much like Austria's, wanted to start a war before someone else could get the advantage and attack them first. This speaks again of seeing enemies in the shadows that were most likely not even there.

However, it does not matter what the differences in military influences in the various powers were. What matters is the role they played in determining their countries policies both foreign and at home. The foreign policy led to too much military influence and aggressive stances being made. Attempts were made to take over territories and planning for wars on a scale that could only make the political side and its people too fearful of a possible attack. At home the military having too much say led to money being put into an arms race in what could only be called the battle of brinkmanship rather than investing more into domestic affairs. That said, one can argue the importance of the military view. Defence is a necessity and that is not going to change but what went wrong before the Great War was a lack of balance between the political and the military.

Mulligan does argue that the military, although influential in certain fields, was not the main cause of the Great War happening. That it was actually the political side that was the leading factor for Europe going to war. It can be seen that most of the politicians had a strong hold on their military. As far as can be seen they reigned them in at every turn, yet 1914 still happened,

why? It could be argued that it was a combination of politics and military and the time that this era was set in.

Here are the factors to consider when one thinks of Europe at this time:

- 1) The military of many of the various powers were either planning for war or vying for it by wanting to be the first ones to strike.
- 2) These empires were imperialist in their nature, warring and expansion was the accepted norm of the day.
- 3) The powers saw each other as competition, a threat to themselves. With every increase in one of the powers military or navy or new allegiance, was an increase in the other powers concern.

Does this chapter show any possibility that the Great War was preventable? Again this chapter shows the likelihood of war because conflict was a common approach to addressing political and military ambition. The military from many countries wanted to be the first aggressors. The politicians were not compromising enough with the other empires on territorial issues and they all acted without properly thinking about the consequences. Predicting backlashes or realising how bad the reactions could be was not given much thought.

Chapter 4: What led up to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand?

The following chapter will discuss the lead up to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination. It will also go into Austrian, Hungarian and Serbian tensions to give a background to where the Serbian extremist groups such as the Black Hand came from and why they had such an impact.

It is known that Archduke Ferdinand's assassination was the final straw that would drag all the European powers into war. His death was the result of an extremist Serbian group, the Black Hand (meaning union or death) whose origins were briefly discussed in chapter three. Its head was Dragutin Dimitrijevic, an extreme nationalist. He was the same man who led the military coup of 1903. One could make the argument that if the government tried to get a handle on the Black Hand or at least remove known military members from their ranks that had affiliations with the group, then perhaps it would not have had influence in political matters or get its opportunity to take out Austria's heir.

However, there is a counter argument to be made and it can only be seen by going into Serbian history.



(Fig 5: Austria, Hungary map 1914)

Serbia has had a long history of being conquered by other empires from the Romans in the second century to the Ottoman Empire in the fourteen hundred's. It was in 1878 that Serbia was seen as an independent state. King Obrenovic established close trading ties with Austria which would result in Serbia becoming economically dependent on them. This did not please many people and things became worse when King Obrenovic was replaced by his son Alexander who brought back autocracy to his country when it had become used to being an auto democratic state. This explains the coup of 1903 and the death of King Alexander by the military and subsequently why they were not punished for doing so. The throne was given to Prince Peter from the Karageorgevic region. His rule was very different from Alexander and his father. King Peter went on to make a constitutional democracy, to make Serbia economically independent of Austria through trading with other countries such as France and Russia etc. Although this can be seen as smart on Serbia's part, it was not well liked by Austria Hungary. They responded by issuing economic sanctions. This once again brings to the fore the importance of economy to the powers.

There were territories with people of Serbian and Slav origin in both the Ottoman and Austrian empires. Groups in Serbia wanted to take them back. This shows the underlying tension between Serbia and Austria Hungary before the Archduke Ferdinand's assassination ever happened. Austria Hungary then fully incorporated Bosnia and Herzegovina into itself, a statement that could only anger Serbia.

To understand why the Great War happened one must keep going back to the main question, what were the histories of all these countries in Europe? They did not all start off the same, in thinking, in culture, in concepts. Yes, they shared similarities such as imperialist expansion. How they came about was different from each other. England, one of the longest ruling empires

could not understand what it would be like to be one of the colonies they took over. On the other-hand, Serbia knew all about being taken over and fighting to establish itself as independent. These are just two examples that show that powers which do not try to understand one another or willingly choose to turn a blind eye for their own gain, can cause avoidable wars.

In June of 1914 the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was shot in Sarajevo by a member of the Black Hand. If Austria Hungary ever wanted a reason for war, this act even though done by an extremist group with no official government sanction by Serbia would have been enough for the Austrians. 'Austria issued an ultimatum to Serbia which, in the extent of its demand that the assassins be brought to justice effectively nullified Serbia's sovereignty.'¹² This ultimatum from the sounds of it failed to recognise Serbian independence. As discussed in chapter one, Serbia and Russia had a treaty which meant Russia would support Serbia if it was needed and we know the escalation that followed.

One thing that becomes clear while researching this topic is territorial desire and paranoia of losing territory played a deciding role in the start of the Great War. All of Europe wanted to put their mark on this world and with that same desire came a worry that others would come along and take it. Evidence of this was seen with England's concern with Germany when she became a navel threat. It can also be seen with Germany's worry of France when she allied herself with Russia, knowing France could only be angry after the result of the Franco Prussian war. Of course Austria Hungary felt threatened by Serbia as she was becoming a more independent nation and had groups within the country demanding Serbian territories be returned. It can be seen that to protect themselves, the powers tried to make tactical alliances

¹² Firstworldwar.com

that would, if war broke out, result in a quick and decisive resolution. However, those plans did not work and instead of the war lasting a few months, it would go on for four years. Something not seen by all concerned.

Looking at this chapter, could the Great War have been prevented? A lot of communication would have needed to be established. No negotiation took place on possibilities for boundary and border changes. Aggressors took what they wanted. That said, this was not exactly a diplomatic time, it was autocratic and autocratic democratic period. Europe was still some way away from becoming the type of democracy we see today and even that has not been perfected yet. A modern day example to illustrate political domination is Russia and Ukraine. Part of Ukraine wants to go back to Russia as it was once part of that nation but another part wants to stay sovereign and one day join the EU. It is safe to say that the full lesson from the Great War has not been learnt yet.

Chapter 5: Was there anyone who saw the war coming?

This chapter will be focussing on whether there was anyone during this time who saw the Great War coming and if so, why were their concerns not listened too? There were three people of note who did see the war coming and they were Friedrich Engel's, Pyotr Durnovo and Ivan Bloch.

These men foresaw the war coming and not only that, but just how disastrous it would be to all those involved. First Engels, he was a German philosopher and a social scientist. He founded Marxist theory with Karl Marx and he co-authored the communist manifesto with him. This gives a little insight into the type of man he was. In 1887 Engels shared what he saw coming. To quote him 'world war of never before seen intensity if the system of mutual outbidding in armament, carried to the extreme, finally bears its natural fruits. Eight to ten million soldiers will slaughter each other and strip Europe bare as no swarm of locusts has ever done before. The devastations of the Third Years War condensed into three or four years and spread all over the continent: famine epidemics, general barbarization of armies and masses, provoked by sheer desperation; utter chaos in our trade, industry and commerce, ending in general bankruptcy, collapse of the old state...' ¹³. This prediction of the outcome of the war finds its origins in Engels analysis of the consequences of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. This conflict generated both the technological military advances and the nationalistic division of the working class which made the Great War possible.

This point was made twenty-seven years before the outbreak of the war and yet it did not do anything to sway future events. Pyotr Durnovo also saw things to come. He was a Russian

¹³ <http://akarlin.com/2010/05/great-war-prophets> for all quotes in this chapter

conservative nationalist and a minister who gave his finding to the Tsar in 1914 of how bad it would be if Russia allowed itself to go to war. He outlines perfectly how the countries would align themselves. 'Italy, if she has any conception of her real interests, will not join the German side. Italy will remain neutral until the scales of fortune favour one or another side then, animated by normal political self-interest, she will attach herself to the victors, to be rewarded at the expense of either Russia or Austria. Of the other Balkan States, Serbia and Montenegro will unquestionably join the side opposing Austria.' Low and behold that was the exact layout. He goes on to discuss how Russia was not militarily ready for such a war, that their railways although strategic in their placing would not cope in a time of war and also technologically they were behind the other powers. Finally, he points out how economically damaged Russia would be if they lost the war. They would be dependent on foreign loans and their economy would be left destroyed. He saw the legislative institutions and intellectual parties being swept away in preference for extreme social revolution, which would be the communist revolution, which did happen. Durnovo got a lot right and yet, like Engels, it made no difference.

The final man to be discussed will be Jan Bloch. He was a financier and Warsaw banker. He studied modern industrial warfare which tells one a little of his knowledge base and where his ideas would come from. In 1877 he was appointed a member of the Russian Finance Ministry Scientific Committee and not only did he see the war coming but he sent out a warning. He wrote a book in 1898 called 'The War of the Future in its' Technical, Economic and Political Relations'. This book talked about how the European powers defence would make winning a war very difficult and lead to many deaths. As seen earlier in this thesis his point makes perfect sense. All the powers had an arms race and were working on strategic alliances to protect themselves. They had constructed war plans and prepared for worst case scenarios. No one

country was more dominant than the other but many countries were capable of untold damage to each other. It was in 1901 he addressed the Royal United Service Institution in Whitehall, England. He was a man who saw arbitration as the way of handling clashes between countries. An interesting idea, an advanced form of haggling but would it have worked? No, he does not take into account human nature and it most likely wouldn't have worked for that time anyway due to the heavy imperialist thinking of taking what one thinks is due to them. However, he does get the changed approach to warfare correct, regarding the changes made to weaponry like the rifle being able to fire repeatedly rather than one shot at a time. Most impressively he saw the use of trenches coming. Many were under the assumption that the Great War would be fought with artillery much like many if not all previous wars before it, so it would not last long. That thought however, is now seen for how wrong it was. Bloch warned that the powers would be stuck in slow grinding trench warfare that would never make great advances resulting in four years of going back and forth and lasting damage to the various economies.

These are just three examples and there are probably more of people who saw the War coming. From a philosopher academic, Engels, to a minister like Durnovo and an economist like Bloch, men from different fields who for the most part saw the same picture and were dismissed by pretty much everyone around them. What this section demonstrates is that there are people who always see something coming. Another example of such foresight would be the terms of the treaty of Versailles after the Great War where economist Keynes foresaw great problems for Europe with the severe punishment given to Germany. However, he too was not listened to and his views not recognised until much too late.

What does this say in regard to our question, could the Great War have been prevented? It seems to say that despite the obvious signs made by insightful people be they of political,

economic or of philosophical background, the military and those of high political station do not appear to take the warnings on board. It speaks to an arrogance that the Empires seemed to be under about themselves. Delusions of old still existed, that wars only lasted at most a year and the victors reap great gains at the end of it. As is known today though that did not happen. It resulted in four years of fighting, economic desolation for all those concerned both victors and losers. Yes, some suffered far more so than others, Germany being the primary example with how she was territorially taken apart and economically crushed with reparations but all the powers took a massive blow. All economies were hit hard as seen with their dependence on the United States for loans which one could argue would trigger the great depression in America and subsequently cause great economic issues for Europe. Ultimately there are always warnings, signs of things to come and people with ability to predict them. What needs to happen for prevention is simple, they need to be listened to.

This chapter shows the Great War could have been prevented if the people in high positions actually listened to those who could see the domino effects in economic and political policy. There are always those perceptive enough to see when an economic downfall is coming and usually well in advance. If they were listened to, something might have been done to rectify the situation.

Chapter 6: What lessons from the war can be learned today?

What researching the Great War has shown was that there were warnings from the outset. From the draw up of alliances which in a way served as a doubled edged sword for countries that hungered for an excuse for war, to the economic situation that plagued Europe at that time, the national rivalries between empires that all sought expansion through conquering territories and defending said territories from being taken back. The paranoia showed itself through alliances that were made and the increase in army and naval preparations and war plans. People were predicting this war for many years before it happened and yet despite this knowledge no passive preventive acts were put into play from what can be seen. The Archduke's assassination was just the straw that broke the camel's back. War was inevitable and if he had not been killed something else would most likely have set things off.

The Great War can serve as a lesson though. It can teach humanity that nothing is more dangerous than holding grudges against each other and that through respect and understanding of each and everyone's histories we can have a chance of at least maintaining a long term peace. We may even be able to have successful dialogue between nations when tensions arise. After the Great War two things happened, one that would bring hope for Europe and one that would end up being a very decisive trigger for World War II. First the hope, with the end of the Great War the League of Nations came into being. Its' ideal was to join Europe together and make the countries reliant on one another through shared economic trading so that no one would ever benefit from starting future conflict. Sadly, this idea was ahead of its time and as such even though put into place, not enough key players joined to make a difference. Amongst the nations which did not join were the US (whose leaders chose isolation instead of joining) and Germany (which was not allowed to join). It would eventually evolve to become the European Union of

which many countries have joined. One bad aspect however, was the handling of Germany after the Great War, with regard to the treaty of Versailles. This treaty served to not only punish Germany severely but ultimately ripple out to hurt all of Europe economically and later cause a second world war. Even though economists like Keynes had warned that punishing Germany would only punish Europe as well, he went unheeded much like his predecessors who foresaw the first war. The lesson is simple for us to learn, watch and listen to what the politicians and economists are saying not just in one country but in all. Open dialogue and willingness to compromise to end this cycle of aggression responded with aggression is required.

What this chapter shows again is the importance of paying attention to what happens in one country as this can affect other countries. Instead of a country thinking about what it can solely gain in the short term, the thinking needed to be what it could gain in the long term through successful relations with other nations. What is obvious about this time was the leaders lack of foresight, which cost them terribly.

Chapter 7: Was there any attempt at communication before the war broke out?

There were a couple telegrams between Wilhelm II of Germany and Tsar Nicholas II of Russia before the war broke out and after it started. This chapter will be dedicated to analysing these messages and why they did not have the peaceful resolution that was conveyed in them.

‘Tsar to Kaiser

29 July 1914, 1 a.m.

Peter's Court Palais, 29 July 1914

Sa Majesté l'Empereur
Neues Palais

Am glad you are back. In this serious moment, I appeal to you to help me. An ignoble war has been declared to a weak country. The indignation in Russia shared fully by me is enormous. I foresee that very soon I shall be overwhelmed by the pressure forced upon me and be forced to take extreme measures which will lead to war. To try and avoid such a calamity as a European war I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to stop your allies from going too far.’¹⁴

The first telegram is from the Tsar asking the Kaiser for help in preventing the war and dragging all of Europe in too. That he will feel pressure from his country, Russia, to act if the situation becomes even more intense between Serbia and Austria. The wording is sympathetic towards the Serbians as the Tsar describes the situation as an ‘ignoble war declared on a weak country’. He does not express any empathy for Austria over the

¹⁴ Firstworldwar.com for all telegrams

assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, which is something of note if one is to see both sides of a dispute clearly and with a non –bias view point.

‘Kaiser to Tsar

29 July 1914, 1.45 a.m. (this and the previous telegraph crossed)

28 July 1914

It is with the gravest concern that I hear of the impression which the action of Austria against Serbia is creating in your country.

The unscrupulous agitation that has been going on in Serbia for years has resulted in the outrageous crime, to which Archduke Francis Ferdinand fell a victim. The spirit that led Serbians to murder their own king and his wife still dominates the country.

You will doubtless agree with me that we both, you and me, have a common interest as well as all Sovereigns to insist that all the persons morally responsible for the dastardly murder should receive their deserved punishment. In this case politics plays no part at all.

On the other hand, I fully understand how difficult it is for you and your Government to face the drift of your public opinion. Therefore, with regard to the hearty and tender friendship which binds us both from long ago with firm ties, I am exerting my utmost influence to induce the Austrians to deal straightly to arrive to a satisfactory understanding with you. I confidently hope that you will help me in my efforts to smooth over difficulties that may still arise.

Your very sincere and devoted friend and cousin

Willy’

The second telegram is from the Kaiser. It shows respect for the situation Russia finds itself in with having to support Serbia. However, just like the first telegram in which the Tsar did not show much thought for Austria, the Kaiser is quite negative of Serbia. Saying it has had 'unscrupulous agitation for years' 'the spirit that led Serbians to murder their own king and his wife still dominates the country'. This is an unfair statement, yes the people had been unhappy but they had reason to be, their King had taken back full power when Serbia was once a constitutional democracy country. Also it was not the masses that did the crime, it was a military coup. To brand all Serbians together shows the Kaisers natural bias. His bias was an understandable one though for one simple point. Wilhelm was a leader of the same stature that the King of Serbia was so it is obvious that he would find any sort of defecting bad. It did not matter that their new King, Peter was a better leader who achieved more for his country than his predecessor. The way in which he received his power would not be respected by other rulers who probably worried about their own people turning against them.

'Kaiser to Tsar

29 July 1914, 6.30 p.m.

Berlin, 29 July 1914

I received your telegram and share your wish that peace should be maintained.

But as I told you in my first telegram, I cannot consider Austria's action against Servia an "ignoble" war. Austria knows by experience that Serbian promises on paper are wholly unreliable. I understand its action must be judged as tending to get full guarantee that the Serbian promises shall become real facts. This my reasoning is borne out by the statement of the Austrian cabinet that Austria does not want to make any territorial conquests at the expense of Serbia.

I therefore suggest that it would be quite possible for Russia to remain a spectator of the austro-serbian conflict without involving Europe in the most horrible war she ever witnessed. I think a direct understanding between your Government and Vienna possible and desirable, and as I already telegraphed to you, my Government is continuing its exercises to promote it.

Of course military measures on the part of Russia would be looked upon by Austria as a calamity we both wish to avoid and jeopardize my position as mediator which I readily accepted on your appeal to my friendship and my help.

Willy'

This telegram from the Kaiser shows that he could not see this as 'ignoble war' by Austria the way the Tsar did. He speaks of Serbian promises not being good but that the Austrian cabinet did not want to make territorial conquests at the expense of Serbia. It is easy for the Kaiser to say Serbian promises could not be trusted but could the Austrians? This was the same country that had lands of Serbian and Slav origin and they had absorbed Bosnia and Herzegovina into its empire. What is to say they would have kept their promise not to take anything from Serbia? The tension was an understandable one between those two. The Kaiser talks about possible understanding between the Russian government and Vienna but understanding and communication are two different things. He also warns of Russian military mobilisation being seen as a threat.

'Tsar to Kaiser

29 July 1914, 8.20 p.m.

Peter's Court Palace, 29 July 1914

Thanks for your telegram conciliatory and friendly. Whereas official message presented today by your ambassador to my minister was conveyed in a very different tone. Beg you to explain this divergency! It would be right to give over the Austro-Serbian problem to the Hague conference. Trust in your wisdom and friendship.

Your loving Nicky'

The Tsar mentions how the Kaiser's telegram and the message from his ambassador were different in tone. The reason for this could be as simple as the fact that the Kaiser and the Tsar were cousins. Of course the language would be more friendly and they would know exactly what the other meant as family tend to. The ambassador and minister did not have this kind of relationship so communication/tone would have to be different.

'Tsar to Kaiser

30 July 1914, 1.20 a.m.

Peter's Court Palais, 30 July 1914

Thank you heartily for your quick answer. Am sending Tatischev this evening with instructions.

The military measures which have now come into force were decided five days ago for reasons of defence on account of Austria's preparations.

I hope from all my heart that these measures won't in any way interfere with your part as mediator which I greatly value. We need your strong pressure on Austria to come to an understanding with us.

Nicky'

By the time the Tsar received the previous message, the mobilisation of troops had already been decided. It was reactionary as Austria had begun to mobilise herself and Russia was

bound in her treaty to Serbia to take action. However, the Tsar seemed to be supportive of the Kaiser's mediating with Austria in hopes of a resolution.

'Kaiser to Tsar

30 July 1914, 1.20 a.m.

Berlin, 30. July 1914

Best thanks for telegram. It is quite out of the question that my ambassadors language could have been in contradiction with the tenor of my telegram. Count Pourtalès was instructed to draw the attention of your government to the danger & grave consequences involved by a mobilisation; I said the same in my telegram to you. Austria has only mobilised against Serbia & only a part of her army. If, as it is now the case, according to the communication by you & your Government, Russia mobilises against Austria, my rôle as mediator you kindly intrusted me with, & which I accepted at you[r] express prayer, will be endangered if not ruined. The whole weight of the decision lies solely on you[r] shoulders now, who have to bear the responsibility for Peace or War.

Willy'

Things start to become very tense from this telegram on. The Kaiser now puts the prospects of war or peace completely on Russia. The Kaiser did not show any negativity towards Austria's decision to mobilise her troops. Again the natural bias is showing through. Of course Serbia was going to feel threatened at such an act and Russia was not really left much of a choice but to show support for her ally.

'Kaiser to Tsar

31 July 1914

Berlin, 31. July 1914

On your appeal to my friendship and your call for assistance began to mediate between your and the austro-hungarian Government. While this action was proceeding your troops were mobilised against Austro-Hungary, my ally. thereby, as I have already pointed out to you, my mediation has been made almost illusory.

I have nevertheless continued my action.

I now receive authentic news of serious preparations for war on my Eastern frontier.

Responsibility for the safety of my empire forces preventive measures of defence upon me.

In my endeavours to maintain the peace of the world I have gone to the utmost limit possible. The responsibility for the disaster which is now threatening the whole civilized world will not be laid at my door. In this moment it still lies in your power to avert it.

Nobody is threatening the honour or power of Russia who can well afford to await the result of my mediation. My friendship for you and your empire, transmitted to me by my grandfather on his deathbed has always been sacred to me and I have honestly often backed up Russia when she was in serious trouble especially in her last war.

The peace of Europe may still be maintained by you, if Russia will agree to stop the military measures which must threaten Germany and Austro-Hungary.

Willy'

This telegram feels like a plea from the Kaiser, again saying it is all up to Russia to back down. He lays on a responsibility on Russia which could not be solely theirs. The Kaiser expresses that he will not be blamed for the war. Sadly, and unfairly as time would progress he and his country would take the blame. It was everybody's fault though, when they used

intimidation through mobilisations as a solution. Feeling attacked even before the shots have been fired is extremely dangerous.

‘Tsar to Kaiser

31 July 1914 (this and the previous telegram crossed)

Petersburg, Palace, 31 July 1914

Sa Majesté l'Empereur, Neues Palais

I thank you heartily for your mediation which begins to give one hope that all may yet end peacefully.

It is *technically* impossible to stop our military preparations which were obligatory owing to Austria's mobilisation. We are far from wishing war. As long as the negotiations with Austria on Servia's account are taking place my troops shall not make any provocative action. I give you my solemn word for this. I put all my trust in Gods mercy and hope in your successful mediation in Vienna for the welfare of our countries and for the peace of Europe.

Your affectionate

Nicky’

This message is clear, Russia had to mobilise because Austria had mobilised. The Tsar makes it clear that as long as talks are happening Russia will not make the first strike. These were defensive measures not offensive but it is easy to see how they could be interpreted differently by Austria and Germany or used as a reason for conflict by them.

‘Tsar to Kaiser

1 August 1914

Peter's Court, Palace, 1 August 1914

Sa Majesté l'Empereur

Berlin

I received your telegram. Understand you are obliged to mobilise but wish to have the same guarantee from you as I gave you, that these measures do not mean war and that we shall continue negotiating for the benefit of our countries and universal peace deal to all our hearts. Our long proved friendship must succeed, with God's help, in avoiding bloodshed. Anxiously, full of confidence await your answer.

Nicky’

The Tsar showed respect for Germany’s choice to mobilise as well but asked that he would not strike either just like the Tsar had. The telegrams as can be seen kept crossing. This made for inadequate communication at a crucial time.

‘Kaiser to Tsar

1 August, 1914

Berlin, 1 August 1914

Thanks for your telegram. I yesterday pointed out to your government the way by which alone war may be avoided.

Although I requested an answer for noon today, no telegram from my ambassador conveying an answer from your Government has reached me as yet. I therefore have been obliged to mobilise my army.

Immediate affirmative clear and unmistakable answer from your government is the only way to avoid endless misery. Until I have received this answer alas, I am unable to discuss the subject of your telegram. As a matter of fact I must request you to immediatly [sic] order your troops on no account to commit the slightest act of trespassing over our frontiers.

Willy'

Although these telegrams came within a few hours or days of each other, the communication was still not fast enough to alleviate tensions. If Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Serbia had a direct line to one another like the U.S and Russia do today then perhaps war could have been avoided. If Russia could have called Germany and told them that Austrian mobilisation of any sort would mean they too would have mobilise their troops, then maybe Germany could have convinced Austria not to follow suit and they could have continued talks. Austria relied on Germany as an ally. If Germany could have made that request, then in all probability Austria would have listened as she would not want to lose her biggest supporter.

Conclusion: Preventive measures that could have been used

It is easy with hindsight to think of what could have been done to prevent the Great War if certain factors had been put into play. For instance, as established earlier in this document, there were plenty of territorial disputes between the countries concerned. If one were to take the example of Serbia's desire for territory previously taken from them by Austria, both sides could have decided to hold a referendum on national borders. This is known as self-determination. At least trying for a diplomatic solution, no matter what the result would have been, might have improved Austrian -Serbian relations.

There was an absence of any serious attempt at constructive negotiation between the parties. Secondly, the empires feared each-others growing prowess in arms. The example here will be Britain and Germany. Britain prided herself on her great naval ability but Germany was becoming even more threatening, resulting in brinkmanship. The solution could have been an agreement between the countries promising to only have a certain amount of vessels for each empire therefore ensuring neither of them would feel threatened. Such an approach to limiting military capacity would have had a major impact on the perception of threat.

History repeats itself and brinkmanship did show itself in the future with two other different countries, Russia and America. America had missiles in Turkey and as one can well imagine, that made Russia very worried. It responded in a way most would expect by placing its own missiles in Cuba.

(The maps below show why both countries became fearful when they knew of the others missiles. The locations were very tactfully chosen)



(Fig 6: Map of Russia in regards to where Turkey was)



(Fig 7: Map of the States in regards to Cuba)

The result of that brinkmanship was global fear of nuclear war. Agreements were made. The Russians removed their missiles from Cuba. Later the Americans would do the same in Turkey. Treaties like SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) and START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) would be signed. A sign that escalation is not the only option and having a cooler head and listening to your allies'/rivals concern is the way to go. If something like this had been done in the 1900s then maybe relations would have been better and tensions calmer between the various powers. No such serious attempt took place in the period leading up to the Great War.

The scale and consequences of the war had not been envisaged and so compromise had not been properly addressed. Some chapters in this document have said that the Great War was preventable and some have shown that it may not have been. The final analysis bringing together all the factors that researching this question has shown is that the Great War could not

be stopped. The reason why is that on mass people refused to see just how damaging this war could be. They were sure it would be short term and it was a chance to gain some extra territory.

In essence the Great War should have been called the Great Excuse. The empires involved were expansionist in thinking and paranoid of losing. It all feels like it was a power play for dominance over one another without consideration of damage done to each other or even to themselves. It is easy to be critical of this attitude. It was the era they were in that triggered everything. Humanity, politics and philosophy are always changing to fit the stage society finds itself in. The 1900s and before was the time of empires. Europe would go through revolutions and changed ideals to become what it is today. However, that is not to say that repetition does not happen. Look at Russia and Ukraine today as mentioned earlier. Today we have new threats and realities with which to contend. Europe finds itself with large national debts. Hundreds of thousands of migrants are flooding in from the middle-east. These challenges are different to those experienced during the Great War but are similarly dangerous.

Ultimately this document finds that the Great War should be seen as the Great Lesson.

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