

## Causes of World War I

**FOCUS QUESTION:** What political forces were at work that contributed to the climate that led to the start of World War I?

### European Alliances, map, 1914 (Source A)

Source: Wikipedia Commons, 2020, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_Europe\\_alliances\\_1914-en.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Europe_alliances_1914-en.svg)



### Document Analysis

1. The map shows the alliance arrangement in Europe in 1914. In what year did World War I begin?
2. What countries made up the Triple Alliance? What countries made up the Triple Entente?
3. Germany worried about one day having to fight a war on two front or two different borders. According to the map, was this fear justified? Explain.
4. Italy would switch sides in 1915. Who did this hurt?
5. Russia had a special ethnic tie with Serbia because both countries had Slavic populations. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia in July 1914. Use the map to explain how this could lead to a widespread war?

**“The Crime of the Ages. Who Did It?”, political cartoon, 1914 (Source B)**

Source: John T. McCutcheon, artist, *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1914.



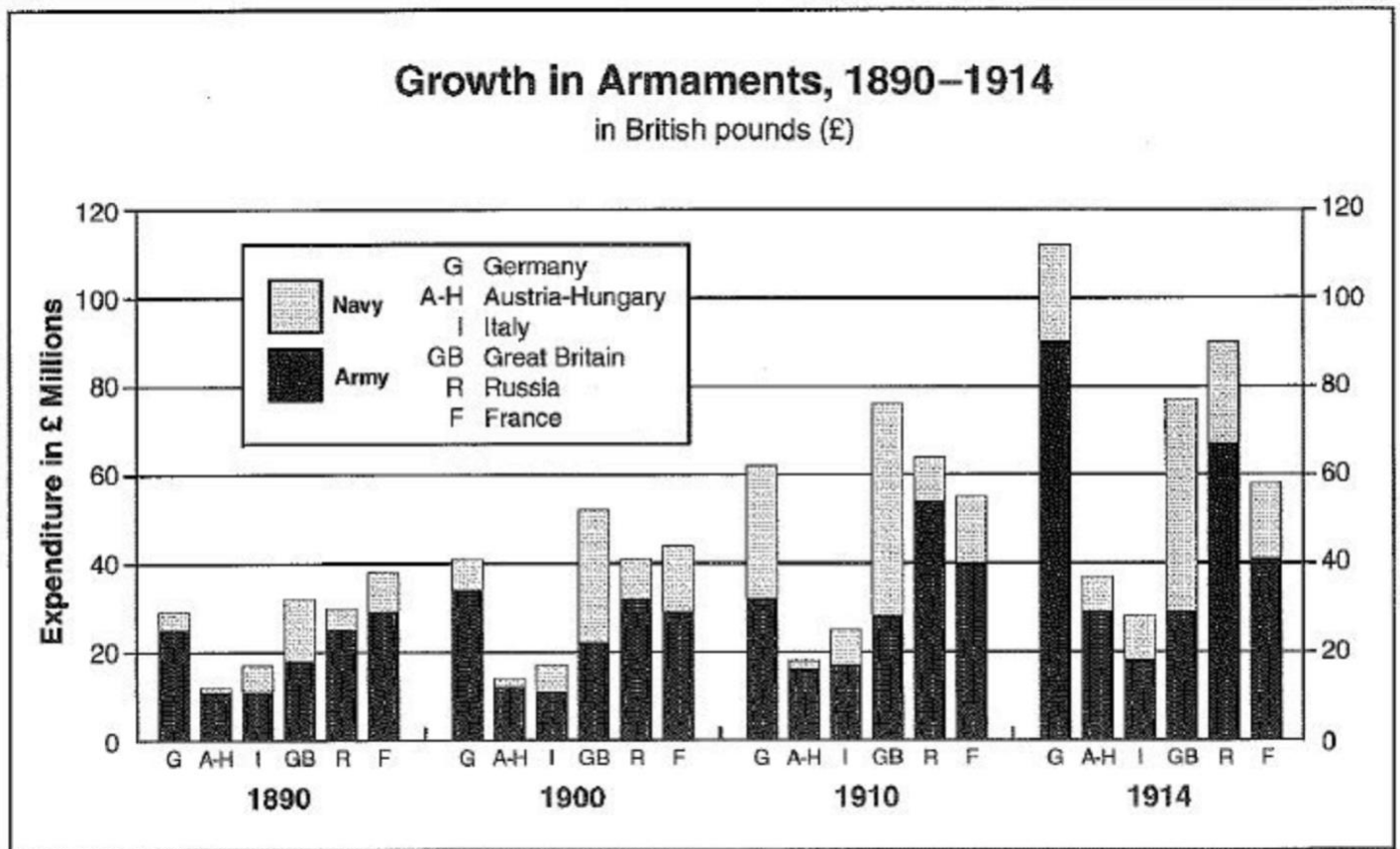
Source: John McCutcheon, *The Chicago Tribune*; H. H. Windsor, *Cartoons Magazine* (adapted)

**Document Analysis**

1. How soon after the war broke out was this cartoon published?
2. What is the name and nationality of the cartoonist? Knowing this, what can you infer about the point of view?
3. What is the “Crime of the Ages”?
4. What does the hand in the upper left corner represent?
5. Can this cartoon be used in any way to argue that alliances were a cause of WW I?

## Growth in Armaments, statistical graph, 1999 (Source C)

Source: adapted from *The London Times History of the World*, new edition by Richard Overy, 1999.



Note: By 1914 the Entente Powers could field 2.23 million men, Germany and Austria-Hungary 1.2 million.

### Document Analysis

1. In millions of British pounds, how much did Germany and Austria-Hungary spend in 1890? In 1914?
2. How much did Great Britain, Russia, and France spend in 1890? In 1914?
3. Which nation spent the greatest percent on its navy? Why would it do that?
4. Is there evidence in the chart to support the argument that arms build-up (militarism) was an underlying cause of World War I? Explain.
5. How can an argument be made that an arms build-up might lead to peace? Explain.

### **“The Hammer or the Anvil”, speech, 1899 (Source D)**

*Source: Bernhard von Bulow, German Chancellor, spoke these words in a speech before the Reichstag (German Congress) on December 11, 1899*

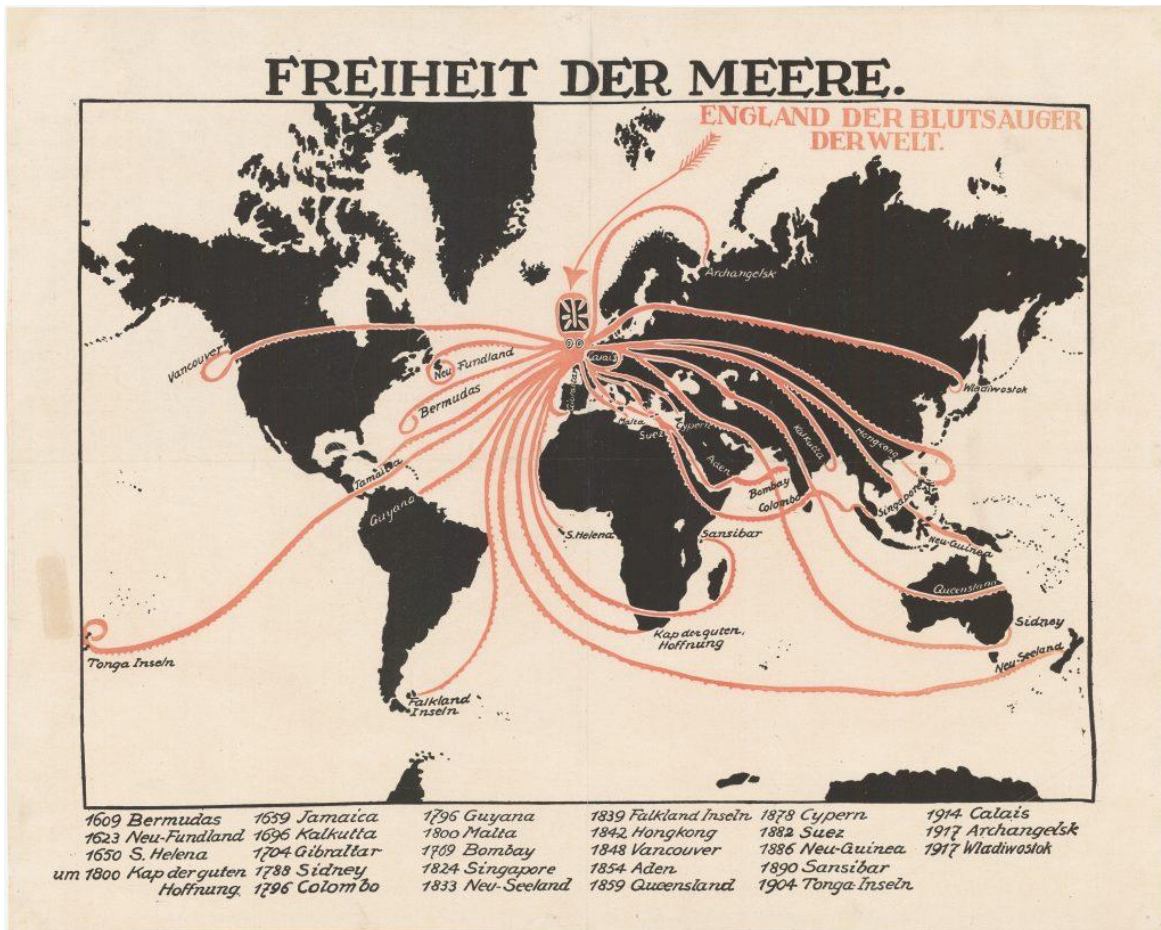
In our nineteenth century, England has increased its colonial empire -- the largest the world has seen since the days of the Romans...the French have put down roots in North Africa and East Africa and created for themselves a new empire in the Far East; Russia has begun its mighty course of victory in Asia....We don't want to step on the toes of any foreign power, but at the same time we don't want our own feet tramped by any foreign power and we don't intend to be shoved aside by any foreign power.... We don't ever again want to become... the 'slaves of humanity.' But we'll only be able to keep ourselves at the fore if we realize that there is no welfare for us without power, without a strong army and a strong fleet. The means, gentlemen, for a people of almost 60 million -- dwelling in the middle of Europe and, at the same time, stretching its economic antennae out to all sides -- to battle its way through in the struggle for existence without strong armaments on land and at sea, have not yet been found. In the coming century the German people will be a hammer or an anvil.

### **Document Analysis**

1. Why is von Bulow worried about England, France, and Russia?
2. What is an anvil? What does von Bulow mean when he says Germany will be “a hammer or an anvil”?
3. Judging from the document, who is Germany likely to “hammer”?
4. One half-century earlier, The Englishman Charles Darwin introduced his idea of evolution, which was based on the idea of survival of the fittest. Do you think von Bulow believed in this idea? Explain.
5. How can you use this document to make an argument that the arms build-up was more important underlying cause than the network of alliances? How could you counter this argument?

## The British Octopus, propaganda cartoon, 1917 (Source E)

Source: German propaganda cartoon, 1917. GE104A Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.



\* "Freiheit Der Meere" = Freedom of the Seas

\* "England Der Blutsauger der Welt" = England, the Bloodsucker of the World

### Document Analysis

1. In what language, and in what year, was this cartoon created?
2. Note the translation of "Freiheit der Meere" and "England der Blutsauger der Welt." How does the choice of language contribute to the meaning of the cartoon?
3. What is the main point being made by the cartoonist?
4. Examine British Naval expenses in 1914 from **Growth in Armaments, statistical graph (Source C)**. Do the Germans have reason to worry about freedom of the seas?
5. What does the document suggest is an underlying cause of World War I? Explain.

## Colonial Empires, statistical chart, 2001 (Source F)

Source: Size of Colonial Empires in 1913, adapted from Colin Nicolson, *The First World War, Europe 1914-1918*, Essex, England, Pearson Education Limited, 2001.

SIZE OF COLONAL EMPIRES IN 1913		
	AREA (square miles)	POPULATION of Colonies
Great Britain	12,740,000	400,000,000
France	4,440,000	56,000,000
Germany	1,139,000	12,000,000
Belgium	927,000	15,500,000
Italy	579,000	1,600,000
United States	125,000	10,000,000
Austria-Hungary	0	0
Russia	0	0

### Document Analysis

1. What was the total area of British colonies in 1913?
2. What was the combined area of colonies held by nations of the Triple Entente? What was the combined area of colonies held by Germany and Austria-Hungary?
3. How could colonies help a mother country economically?
4. How could colonies help a mother country militarily?
5. How can you use this document to argue that imperialism (colonization) was one underlying cause of World War I?
6. How can you use **The British Octopus, propaganda cartoon, (Source E)** and this document to argue that imperialism was more important than alliances and arms build-up as the underlying cause of World War I? How could you counter this argument?