

What caused the First World War?

Different historical explanations

1. It was a product of **Capitalism**. The need to make new markets caused the clash between the European powers. This is Lenin's explanation
2. It was caused by "**old diplomacy**". The old alliance system built up after the Vienna Congress. A local war quickly emerged to a World War because of this.
3. It was caused by **fear and enmities** generated by changes in the established **power balance** within Europe. Germany growing economically and politically strong, the nationalistic movement in the Balkans.
4. It was caused **by discontent internally** in the European countries. The social changes in the industrialized countries made the leaders look for a foreign enemies. The growing wrath among the working class was led against a foreign enemy instead of the internal problems.
5. The war was **caused by accident**. Bad intelligence and threats of and declarations of war that was intended to scare rather than to be carried out. One thing led to another. This explanation is supported by the very famous A J P Taylor.

OK, so which one is it? Why are these explanations unsatisfactory?

1. **Lenin's explanation** is bad since it focusing on rivalry between Germany and Great Britain. *Britain never signed any alliance against Germany*, the only ally they had was Japan, and the reason for this alliance was to stop the Russian expansionism. Great Britain's main interest was the North Sea, not the colonies. If it was capitalism and the fight for colonies that caused the war, then GB and France or GB and Russia should had been fighting.
2. **Taylor's explanation** is equally unsatisfactory, that happened by chance. *There were obvious threats from the German expansion and the German building a huge navy to the independence of both France and GB. There was a true motive to go to war, and nothing happened by chance. GB tries to put Germany in a cage trying to close them in and stopping their industrialization and expansion. There were apparent reason for them to go to war.*
3. The idea that the war was **caused by alienation** and psychological disturbance of the masses bares no relation to the actual cause of events. *If industrialization had led to that the masses was upset and alienated and this alienation led to a war-hungry population then the USA, Belgium and GB should have been the most aggressive countries. That's not what happened.*
4. The idea that it was caused by **old diplomacy** is also unsatisfactory. Countries enter alliances to gain something. *If the alliance proves to be a disadvantage, it is simply not carried out.* If Russia had the opinion that it will only loose on acting against Germany or Austria it would have acted. *Italy's actions* are a typical example of this, in 1882 they entered the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary with the purpose to stop French expansionism and maybe gain territory from France, but at the start of WW1 their interest laid elsewhere, hence they never acted on the alliance and later joined forces against Germany and Austria.

Did a country cause the war?

- Did **Germany** cause the war?
- France wanted revenge for 1871. In the event of war the French would if possible attack Germany.
- Germany had grown significantly both economically and politically. Especially British historians have a tendency to claim British interests and saying that the Germans were a threat to British interests and independence, but they seem to forget that Germany had the same valuable reasons for entering the war. If you imagine that you are German, why should you not be allowed to have colonies? Why should you not be allowed to build up a major fleet etc?
- Since France had said that they would attack Germany they had to avoid a two front war.
- Russia was posing a constant threat to Germany as to Austria-Hungary. In the event of a war Germany would have to defend itself against Russia too.
- So to blame Germany is a bit too easy.
- **Did GB cause the war?** Well no, if you look on the actual events, but sure if you look on the way they had treated Germany.
- **Did Austria-Hungary cause the war?** Yes, if you look on the actual events, they attacked Serbia, but no if you see to the intentions to cause a big war. Austria had no desire to get involved in a big conflict especially not against Russia. Austria was cheered on by Berlin, with the promise that if anything happened and Russia did mobilize, then Germany would take care of Russia.
- **Did Russia cause the war?** Well yes, if you look on the actual events, they mobilized their army moving towards Austria and Germany. This caused the Germans to react. But no if you look on the intention and the actual declarations of war.
- **Did France cause the war?** Yes, if you look on the official policies against Germany, but no if you look on the way war was declared etc.

Questions:

1. To what extent do you agree with the statement that Germany caused the war?
2. How did the war start? Describe the events in June, July and August of 1914.
3. The German Kaiser said "We will be home before the leaves fall" in reference to how long he thought the war would last. What kind of conclusions around the question what caused the war do you draw from this statement?