

Joshua 6.11

Assess critically the causes of the First World War. (I've put more than three themes in this essay because some the past year qns have specified themes)

The First World War broke out after a series of events following the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary on June 28, 1914. This assassination led Austria-Hungary to give an ultimatum to Serbia. However, Serbia rejected the ultimatum and consequently, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28. Russia, in support of Serbia, underwent general mobilisation. In response to this mobilisation, Germany declared war on Russia, coming on the side of Austria-Hungary. Following this, France came into the war to support Russia, while Britain only entered the war on the side of France and Russia after Belgium, a neutral country under the protection of Britain, was attacked by the Germans. Thus the First World War began. -gd process well captured Germany and Austria-Hungary, or the Central Powers, were pitted against the Allied Powers of Britain, Russia and France. The outbreak of this war can be attributed to several factors: Germany's Weltpolitik, alliances, imperialism, Balkan nationalism, the military build-up and arms race amongst the European powers, the mobilisation in Russia, and the desire for revenge by France. Of these, Germany's Weltpolitik emerges as the most important factor for the war, because it led unintentionally to the isolation of Germany from the countries of the Triple Entente, Britain, France and Russia, and drew it closer to its ally, Austria-Hungary. It was only because of German assurance of unconditional support to the Austrians in the form of the 'blank cheque', motivated by the need to break out of encirclement caused by ~~Weltpolitik and~~ the failure of Weltpolitik to achieve imperial success for Germany???, that gave the Austrians Austria-Hungary the confidence to declare war on Serbia and spark off the chain of events that resulted in the First World War.

Germany's Weltpolitik contributed to the outbreak of the First World War. In 1897, the Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany introduced Weltpolitik or 'world policy' as Germany's new foreign policy. It was intended to make Germany a world power, and as the Kaiser himself said, Weltpolitik would make sure that "nothing must henceforth be settled in the world without the intervention of Germany and the German Emperor." This policy was motivated by several factors, not least the Kaiser's own personality and beliefs. He had a high sense of inadequacy and inferiority, wanted to wield much political power, and was strongly influenced by militaristic values. In addition, Germany felt that it was not being duly recognised as a world power, despite its growing economic and military power. It needed colonies to get resources and markets for the German industry, and middle class groups like Pan-German groups wanted colonial adventures for further industrialisation. A successful foreign policy could also be used to unite the Germans and deflect from growing political instability due to pressures from the expanding middle and working classes. Thus, an aggressive foreign policy was adopted by Germany. This would contribute to the outbreak of the First World War because it led Germany to become isolated, which encouraged it to turn to war to break out being encircled.

As one of the first steps in the direction of the new foreign policy, the Reinsurance Treaty (why is this portion/which is development of Weltpolitik separated from the above para – because then the last line of the previous para makes no sense on its own) between Russia and Germany was allowed to collapse. The Kaiser was more interested in developing relations with the British and in view of existing Anglo-Russian tensions at the time, the Kaiser was against continuing the formal alliance for fear of alienating the British. However, the collapse of the treaty only served to contribute to Germany's isolation, as the treaty had previously prevented a full Franco-Russian Alliance from being formed, but now that the treaty was gone the Russians were free to ally with the French in 1892. This destroyed the delicate balancing act that the first German Chancellor Bismarck had created in his web of alliances, which aimed to isolate France. France was no longer isolated now and instead it was Germany that began to be isolated.

Germany led further to its own isolation when it initiated the rapid expansion of the German Navy to imitate the British Royal Navy and expand its colonies. The aim was to build a navy to a size such that the British Royal Navy would not risk a battle. However, the British Royal Navy saw Germany's naval build-up as directed against them, because the German battleships that were being built were offensive in nature and could only operate in the North Sea. Moreover, the Navy was seen as important by the British in defending the British Isles and its overseas colonies. Thus began the Anglo-German naval arms race. This caused tensions between the British and the Germans to increase, and led Britain to form alliances with its imperial rivals that would otherwise not have been formed in order to check German ambitions. Britain entered into treaties with Japan in 1902, France in 1904 and Russia in 1907 to reduce threats to its distant colonies and to allow itself to concentrate its warships in the North Sea, facing the Germans. Thus Weltpolitik's naval build-up led to Germany becoming more isolated. (in order to focus on the failure of Weltpolitik you need to show how although Germany started the arms race as part of Weltpolitik, it could not sustain it – thus showing that arms race did not lead to war – but the isolation that came about due to the British response together with Germany's failure to effectively compete with Britain – therefore failure of Weltpolitik – led to actions of Germany that led to ww1)

Germany's imperialist ventures also contributed to this, because they threatened the established imperial powers like Britain and France, even though Germany eventually only succeeded in gaining a relatively small empire. It took colonies in the Far East, such as Kiaochow in China, and Africa. This was another reason why imperial rivals like Britain, France and Russia became allies. Britain's separate alliances with France and Russia were brought together in the Triple Entente in 1907. With this, Germany was encircled. It was also dismayed by the apparent strength of the alliances, such as when Germany planned to break up the Anglo-French Entente by attacking France in the two Moroccan Crises, but failed as Britain supported the French Demands for influence in Morocco and the Entente was strengthened. Germany was isolated by the Triple Entente powers, and could only draw closer to its only major ally, Austria-Hungary. (similar to above – remember to point out that Weltpolitik objective of becoming an imperial power was a failure and only outcome of such effort was alliances it brought about among other European nations, who were otherwise imperial rivals)

When Austria-Hungary sought to declare war on Serbia, it was emboldened to do so by Germany's promise of unconditional support for Austria-Hungary's actions through the 'blank cheque'. This 'blank cheque' was important because Austria-Hungary was conscious of the military strength of Russia, which could come to the side of the Serbians if Austria-Hungary declared war on them, and knew that its own military was weak and perhaps would not be able to stand up against a Russo-Serbian alliance in a war. Furthermore, Austria-Hungary knew that Germany, a key ally, had considerable military strength, thus, if Germany expressed support for Austria-Hungary, then Austria-Hungary would be given the confidence to declare war on Serbia. Thus, Austria-Hungary was able to declare war on Serbia only with German support, and this German support originated from the failure of Weltpolitik. The failure of Weltpolitik led to the encirclement of Germany, and by supporting Austria-Hungary in a war, it could break out of that encirclement by attacking Russia, a member of the Triple Entente, which ~~would probably~~ **was expected to** come on the side of Serbia. In addition, Germany's failure to achieve a sizeable empire meant that its sights now lay on the Balkans, where through Austria-Hungary, it could exert its influence.

Hence, **failure of** Weltpolitik led to the outbreak of the war because it gave Germany the motivations to support Austria-Hungary if it declared war on Serbia in 1914. This is crucial because Austria-Hungary needed to confidence from German support to be able to declare war on Serbia, and spark off the chain of events that led to the Central Powers and Allied Powers to fight each other in a war.

Alliances ~~may have contributed~~ **did not contribute** to the outbreak of the war. The two major alliances at that time were the Triple Entente, consisting of Britain, France and Russia, created in 1907, and the Triple Alliance, consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, which began in 1882. The alliances in the First World War went along similar diplomatic fault lines, with Britain, France and Russia as the Allied Powers going against the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary.

However, alliances were not the main cause of the war. Firstly, the alliances were **defensive in nature**, and did not require their members to support one another if they ~~themselves~~ were the belligerents instead. For example, Germany still supported Austria-Hungary in declaring war on Serbia in 1914 despite Serbia not having declared war on Austria-Hungary. This did not follow the defensive nature of their alliance. Secondly, members in the alliances could not always be trusted to support one another. Russia had little support from Britain and France when Austria-Hungary threatened Russia's interests over the Balkans during the Bosnian Crisis of 1908. Despite the three countries being in the Triple Entente, there was no solidarity in this case. When ~~Russia had war declared on it~~ by Germany, it had no definite assurance that Britain and France would support it. In fact, although France did support Russia immediately in the war, Britain only came in after German troops entered Belgium, a neutral country Britain claimed they had been obliged to protect under the Treaty of London. Hence, allies did not always provide dependable support. Thirdly, relations among the various countries in hostile alliances did see improvement after 1909. As an example, Anglo-German relations improved from 1912 to 1914, as a result of the end of the Anglo-German naval race by 1912. In April 1913, Britain and Germany signed an agreement over

the African territories of the Portuguese empire which was expected to collapse imminently. The British decided in 1914 to invest in a German project for building a railway from Berlin via Constantinople to Baghdad.

For all these reasons, alliances were not the main reason for why the war broke out. National interests of the various players were more important in deciding which countries supported one another. For example, Germany supported Austria-Hungary more so because it wanted to break out of encirclement and establish its influence in the Balkans than because of the alliance, which was limited because it was defensive in nature.

Imperialism ~~may have~~ did not contribute to the outbreak of the war. One of the main causes of tension between the European powers from 1880 to 1905 were their colonial rivalries. Over the course of the 19th century, the Europeans had increased their domination of countries in Africa and the Far East and competed with each other to build vast empires. Germany's Weltpolitik to make its influence felt outside Europe was to bring it into conflict with the more established powers, particularly Britain.

However, imperialism was not the main cause behind the war. This is because imperial rivalries did not determine the nature of the alliances in the war. Traditional imperial rivals like Britain and France had already resolved colonial disputes and forged alliances, such as the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 and the Triple Entente with Russia in 1907. Furthermore, Britain showed its support for France's colonial ambitions by supporting it in the two Moroccan Crises in 1905 and 1911 respectively against Germany as they competed for influence in North Africa. In fact it was Germany's failure to become an imperial power that made it feel isolated and threatened amidst the other imperial powers, who were also forming an alliance against Germany, in response to Germany's aggressive foreign policy.

Balkan nationalism ~~helped to~~ did not cause the war. In the Balkan region, the Ottoman Empire had once ruled but it was weakening. From the late 19th century onwards it was referred to as the 'sick man of Europe'. This allowed nationalist movements to come into prominence, and in 1878 Serbia gained independence from the Ottoman Empire. Serbia sought to unite all the Slavs in the Balkan region into a greater Serbia, and this Slavic nationalism threatened Austria-Hungary, as it refused to accept Austria-Hungary's dominance in the region and threatened to destabilise the multi-ethnic Austria-Hungary, which included Slavs in its population. This resulted in tensions between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, and between Russia and Austria-Hungary as Russia supported Slavic nationalism.

In various wars and crises in the first two decades of the 20th century, tensions between Austria-Hungary, and Serbia and Russia on the other hand, increased. The Bosnian Crisis of 1908 when Serbia and Russia became upset over Austria-Hungary's annexation of the two Balkan provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This threatened Serbia's project of a Greater Serbia, and blocked off its access to the Adriatic Sea. Thus, the Bosnian Crisis increased tensions between Austria-Hungary, and Serbia and Russia, which supported Serbia's project of a Greater Serbia. Next, the First Balkan War of 1912 saw Serbia, in an alliance with other Balkan states and encouraged by Russia, force the Ottomans out of the Balkans in 7 weeks. This success strengthened Serbia and horrified Austria-Hungary, whose perception of a

threat from Serbia increased. Still, in the British-led negotiations that settled the First Balkan War, Austria-Hungary was able to succeed in creating Albania to prevent Serbia access to the Adriatic Sea. This created more resentment against Austria-Hungary by Serbia, and tensions increased between the two. This was followed by the Second Balkan War in 1913, in which Serbia, in another Balkan alliance, defeated Bulgaria, and this success of Serbia strengthened nationalist feelings within the country, while encouraging Russia to support a strong Serbia. Meanwhile, Austria-Hungary was now convinced that Serbia needed to be crushed, to end the threat to her empire once and for all. Thus, tensions increased between Austria-Hungary, and Serbia and Russia. When the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Ferdinand, was assassinated on 28 June 1914, the involvement of the Serbian terrorist group the Black Hand allowed Austria-Hungary to blame Serbia for the murder and issue an ultimatum to it. **When the ultimatum was rejected, Austria-Hungary, which sought to crush Serbia, could use this rejection as the casus belli, and led it to declare war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, sparking off the series of events that resulted in the Central Powers pitted against the Allied Powers in the war. (Despite all the pre-existing tensions in the Balkans, A-H could not have gone to war without Germany's support and Serbia too had wanted to avoid the war whereby it actually accepted all but one term of the ultimatum – which indicate that Balkan tension did not actually mean these two side would have engaged in an all out war and if it had been these just these sides like in all previous cases, a world war would not have broken out)**

However, Balkan nationalism is not the most important reason for the war. While Austria-Hungary had wanted to defeat Serbia in a war to end its threat to her empire, it could not do so without German help. Austria-Hungary's military was weak and Serbia could be helped by the large military force of the Russians. Thus, the German 'blank cheque' emerges as a more important factor in emboldening Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia than Balkan nationalism. Germany did not have many interests in the Balkans, other than trying to use Austria-Hungary to extend its influence into the region, but this was not because Germany was involved in growing tensions with Serbia and Russia as a result of Balkan nationalism. More so, this need to extend its influence came from the failure of Weltpolitik to achieve a significant global empire for Germany. This, along with the failure of Weltpolitik leading to the encirclement of Germany, meant that Germany was willing to support Austria-Hungary with the 'blank cheque', which was decisive in allowing the war to formally start with the declaration of war on Serbia, and which escalated from there. Thus, the failure of Germany's Weltpolitik is a more important factor for the outbreak of the war than Balkan nationalism. **(for more concise and sharp argument in the topic sentence write down Balkan nationalism was not a cause for the outbreak of ww1 and combine/shorten this and the previous para to get to the point that this factor was not one of the cause)**

The military build-up and arms race amongst the European powers was **not** one factor in the outbreak of the First World War. Germany's Weltpolitik had led to the Anglo-German naval race, while Russia introduced the Great Military Programme in 1913 to achieve clear numerical superiority over Germany by 1917, which threatened the Germans to expand their own military, and France introduced its own military expansion. These resulted in Germany's military spending to be the greatest among the European powers between 1910

and 1914, an increase of 73%. Between 1870 and 1914, military spending by the European powers increased by 300%. The increase in the European population made it possible to have large standing armies and conscription was introduced in all continental countries after 1881. As the historians David Stevenson and David Herrmann argue, expansion in the military spending of one power for defensive purposes, provoked responses from other powers, which increased tensions between the European powers. The increase in tensions would lead to an unstable situation where conflict became more inevitable.

However, military build-up of the European powers is not a significant reason for the outbreak of the war. While arms increase by one power caused other countries to respond by increasing their own armaments, financial constraints meant that countries could not keep up with each other. For instance, by 1912 Germany's finances could not keep up with naval build-up and Britain had out-built, ending the Anglo-German naval race. Therefore, tensions due to the arms race had already dwindled by the time the war broke out in 1914. For other countries, the military build-up was also limited. The French started their rapid military spending in 1912 but lacked the financial basis to sustain it. The Russians, even though they had a large military, their army was poorly equipped and led. Thus, the threat of military build-up was not significant and even perception-wise, at least between Britain and Germany, tensions because of military arms races had diffused by the time the war broke out.

Mobilisation in Russia was one of the factors **to starting the war – are you sure, firstly mobilisation of forces does not equate to declaration of war and secondly the mobilisation took place after Germany has given blank cheque.** After Austria-Hungary had issued the ultimatum to Serbia in the wake of the assassination of the Archduke, from 24 to 25 July 1914, the Russian Council of Ministers met, and in response to the crisis and despite the fact that she had no alliance with Serbia, agreed to a secret partial mobilisation of over one million men of the Russian Army and the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets. This partial mobilisation was motivated by various reasons. The Russians saw the crisis of the ultimatum as being used by the Germans to increase their power, while the Russians also feared that acceptance of the ultimatum would mean that Serbia would become a protectorate of Russia. Meanwhile, the French had provided their clear support for their Russian allies for a robust response in their recent state visit just days before. Due to these and other reasons, aimed at Austria-Hungary, the Russians ordered partial mobilisation to occur, which then escalated to full mobilisation on 30 July. As historian Christopher Clark argues, this intention of mobilising by the Russians **only emboldened the Serbians to reject the ultimatum, (to avoid war they had accepted all but one term of the ultimatum, it was A-H that was emboldened by the support given by Germany that caused it to declare war on Serbia)** thereby giving the Austro-Hungarians the excuse to declare war on it.

The Russian mobilisation also helped to escalate the war after Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia as it motivated Germany to enter the fray formally by declaring war on Russia. On 28 July, Germany learned through its spy network that Russia had implemented partial mobilisation. The Germans assumed that Russia had, after all, decided upon war and that her mobilisation put Germany in danger. This was doubly so because German war

plans, the Schlieffen Plan, relied upon Germany to mobilise speedily enough to defeat France first before turning to defeat the Russians. Thus, when Russia refused to rescind its mobilisation order, Germany mobilised and declared war on Russia on 1 August. This also brought France formally into the war, as Germany assumed that the Franco-Russian alliance would mean that France would eventually join the war on the side of the Russians, and so it declared war on France on 3 August.

Thus, the mobilisation of the Russian military was both important in the outbreak of the war, since it encouraged Serbia to reject Austria-Hungary's ultimatum, leading to the declaration of war on Serbia, and in the escalation of the war, since it brought Germany, Russia and France formally into the war when Germany declared war on both Russia and France in response to the threat posed by Russia's mobilisation.

However, this mobilisation was not the main reason behind the start of the First World War. (your two opposing statements confusing readers) This is because the declaration of war was more so predicated on German support for Austria-Hungary, which in turn, was motivated by the need for Germany to reverse the failures of Weltpolitik. Without the German 'blank cheque', Austria-Hungary would not have dared to enter a war situation by issuing an ultimatum to Serbia in the first place. Therefore, Germany's Weltpolitik is a more important factor for the outbreak of the war than the mobilisation of Russian troops.

The desire for revenge against Germany by France did not contribute to the outbreak of the First World War. This desire for revenge, or revanchism, originated in France's defeat by Germany in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. France did not like Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, and was resentful against it for its imposition of reparations on France. French sentiments wanted to avenge military and territorial losses and the displacement of France as the pre-eminent continental military power. The French were also resentful against the isolation imposed on it by Bismarck's web of alliances. Thus, France took great pains to build relations with Russia, resulting in the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894 and, after more accords, the Triple Entente. This invariably led Germany to feel encircled by the powers of the Entente, made it draw closer to its ally, Austria-Hungary, and would motivate Germany to support Austria-Hungary with the decisive 'blank cheque', because the outbreak of a war could be the chance for Germany to break out of encirclement.

However, revanchism against Germany by France is a limited factor to the outbreak of the war, because France was only able to form alliances with Russia, then Britain to encircle Germany because of the effects of Germany's Weltpolitik. Weltpolitik had led Germany to drop its alliance with Russia in the Reinsurance Treaty, ending France's isolation by the Bismarckian web of alliances and allowing Russia free rein to ally with France. Furthermore, the imperial rivalry between Britain and France meant that it was not easy to achieve an alliance. However, Germany's attempt to increase its power through its 'world policy' was seen as a common threat by both countries, which made them form alliances that would otherwise have not been made. Thus, it was Weltpolitik, and not France's revanchism, that was responsible for Germany's encirclement that encouraged the 'blank cheque' offer to Austria-Hungary that was so decisive to the start of the First World War.

Thus, in conclusion, the outbreak of this war can be attributed to several factors: Germany's Weltpolitik, alliances, imperialism, Balkan nationalism, the military build-up and arms race amongst the European powers, the mobilisation in Russia, and the desire for revenge by France. Of these, Germany's Weltpolitik emerges as the most important factor for the war, because it led unintentionally to the isolation of Germany from the countries of the Triple Entente, Britain, France and Russia, and drew it closer to its ally, Austria-Hungary. It was only because of German assurance of unconditional support to the Austrians in the form of the 'blank cheque', motivated by the need to break out of encirclement caused by Weltpolitik and the failure of Weltpolitik to achieve imperial success for Germany, that gave the Austrians the confidence to declare war on Serbia and spark off the chain of events that resulted in the First World War.