
Explaining World War I

- Catalyst: Assassination of Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Hungary by Bosnian Serb nationalists (July Crisis)
 - Austria-Hungary affirms alliance with Germany
 - Russia reaffirms alliance with France and partially mobilizes to secretly support Serbia
 - Germany sees mobilization, and declares “preventive” war on Russia
 - * German troops invade France through Belgium
 - * Belgium triggers alliance with UK
 - * France, UK, and Russia become the triple entente
 - Japan enters the war after Germany invades Russia
 - Ottoman Empire enters war on the side of Germany
 - US joins in 1917 and Russia signs a treaty and exits the war
- Structural Causes
 - Rise in German power and imperialism
 - Hardened alliances

Van Evera’s Cult of the Offensive

Rather than a structural explanation, Van Evera highlights two key ideas

- European military leaders/militaries believed that offensive solutions to military problems were the most effective and offered the best advantage
- That this view is heavily flawed and was weakened by the development of new military technology during the late 19th and early 20th century
 - Machine guns, trench warfare, rails, chemical warfare, etc.

Working on these assumptions, theoretically it is expected that

- States adopt more aggressive foreign policies and tighten alliances
- Risk of preemptive war increases
- Windows of opportunity widen
- States adopt more competitive styles of diplomacy (ultimatums, brinkmanship)
- States tighten their security and secrecy

Van Evera then turns to historical evidence to determine the validity of this explanation, and argues that this presupposition of the cult of the offensive explains all the conventional causes of WWI.

Causal Explanations of WWI