

History Scholarship Exam 2021 : Sources Booklet

Why did the assassination of Franz Ferdinand lead to the first world war?

*Study the introduction and the sources carefully, and then answer **all** the questions.*

Introduction

On 28 June 1914 Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated by Serb terrorists in Sarajevo. Austria blamed the Serbian government and by early August most of Europe was at war. Historians have always disagreed about which country was most to blame.

The chronology of events is clear: on 23 July Austria sent an ultimatum to Serbia and, on 28 July, declared war on Serbia. By 30 July Russia had mobilised its armed forces. On 1 August Germany declared war on Russia and, on 3 August, on France. But who was responsible for the assassination leading to a major war? Some historians blame Russia for beginning to mobilise its army even before Serbia had replied to the Austrian ultimatum. Was Russia to blame?

The leaders of Russia shared with the leaders of Germany a belief that the two empires were fated to participate in a historic struggle between Germanism and Slavdom. The two nations' most obvious point of friction and threatened collision was Turkey. They circled the ailing Ottoman Empire (Turkey) as predators, each bent upon securing choice portions of its carcass. Control of the Straits, the entrance to the Black Sea through which 37 per cent of Russian exports passed, was an especially critical issue. **(See map on the next page).**

Russians were proud of their role in helping to free much of the Balkans from Ottoman rule and were determined not to see this replaced by Austrian or German control. The semi-official Russian newspaper *Novoye Vremya* wrote in June 1908 that it was impossible 'without ceasing to be Russian' to allow Germanic cultural domination of southern and eastern Europe. In 1913 a British government minister wrote that 'Serbia is, practically speaking, a Russian province.' This was an exaggeration, because Serb leaders were intensely self-willed, but Russia made plain that the country was under its protection. Russian security guarantees to Serbia proved as fatal to European peace as was German support for Austria - with the important difference that the former was defensive, the latter aggressive. But at the very least, Russia was irresponsible in failing to insist upon a halt to Serbian meddling in the Habsburg Empire (Austria Hungary) as the price for its military backing.

EUROPE'S PLUNGE TO DISASTER IN THE SUMMER OF 1914



SOURCE A

Serbia was of purely symbolic interest to Russian foreign policy. Of course, Russia had no wish to see 'heroic little Serbia' carved up by hostile neighbours such as Austria-Hungary, but neither did it wish to see Serbia strengthened. Denying Serbia access to the Adriatic became one of Russia's main foreign policy goals following the Second Balkan War, to the extent that it plotted to restore Albania to Ottoman control so as to weaken Serbia.

To assume that Russia really went to war on behalf of Serbia in 1914 is foolish. Great powers do not usually mobilise armies of millions to protect the territorial integrity of minor client states. An extensive survey of Russia's diplomatic correspondence in the months before the Sarajevo incident does not reveal undue concern with any sort of Serbian problem, nor indeed is concern voiced in the months after July. What it does reveal is a widespread obsession, bordering on panic, with the Straits question. It was universally assumed that Turkey would not last for long. The question was, which power would swallow which pieces of the carcass as the Ottoman Sick Man was carved up? And for Russia, the question was starker still: who would now control the Straits?

From a book published in 2011

SOURCE B

A cartoon published in Britain, 29 July 1914



THE POWER BEHIND.

AUSTRIA (at the ultimatum stage). "I DON'T QUITE LIKE HIS ATTITUDE. SOMEBODY MUST BE BACKING HIM."

SOURCE C

The crime of Sarajevo is not the deed of a single individual, but the result of a well-arranged plot whose threads reach to Belgrade (the capital of Serbia). So long as Serbia is unpunished, the peace policy of all European monarchs is threatened. The danger will only pass when Serbia is eliminated as a political power-factor in the Balkans.

From letter sent by Emperor Franz-Joseph of Austria-Hungary to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, 5 July 1914

SOURCE D

News reached us from Vienna that the Austrian government claimed the Sarajevo murders were the outcome of a political plot whose roots could be traced to the Serbian government. The inquiry held at Sarajevo gave no support to this idea but the Austrian government continued to blame Serbia. The Russian government heard with anxiety the bad news from Vienna; we daily expected the Austrian government to make some openly hostile move against Serbia.

On 23 July Austria delivered an ultimatum to Serbia in terms which aroused the astonishment and indignation of all Europe. Its appearance marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Europe and the whole world. The demands were such that had never been made by a European power, and their acceptance in full by Serbia would have been the equivalent of her giving up her national independence.

From the Russian foreign minister Sazonov's memoirs, which he wrote in the 1920s while living in France

SOURCE E

I appeal to you to help me. A wrongful war has been declared on a weak country. The indignation in Russia and shared by me is enormous. I foresee that very soon I shall 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 whatever you can to stop your ally Austria from going too far.

Nicky

Extract from a telegram from Tsar Nicholas II of Russia to Kaiser William II of Germany, 29 July 1914.

SOURCE F

On your appeal to my friendship I began to mediate between your Government and the Austrian Government. While this was proceeding your troops were mobilised against Austria, my ally.

I now receive news of serious preparations for war on my Eastern frontier. Responsibility for the safety of my empire forces preventative measures of defence upon me. The responsibility for the disaster which is now threatening the whole world will not be placed on me. In this moment it still lies in your power to avert it. Nobody is threatening the honour or power of Russia. The peace of Europe may still be maintained by you, if Russia will agree to stop the military measures which threaten Germany and Austria.

Willy

Extract from a telegram from Kaiser William II of Germany to Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, 31 July 1914.