

DBQ 10: Causes of World War I

(Adapted from *Document-Based Assessment for Global History*, Walch Education)

Historical Context:

At the turn of the twentieth century, Europe seemed to enjoy a period of peace and progress. Yet below the surface, several forces were at work that would lead Europe into the “Great War.” One of these forces was nationalism, and it had an explosive effect in the Balkans. But, nationalism was only one of the many causes of World War I. Historians and eyewitnesses have described the causes of World War I and have tried to assess the responsibility for it. What were the causes of World War I?

- **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author’s point of view. Be sure to:
 1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
 2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
 3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
 4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
 5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: Who and/or what caused World War I?

Part A: The following documents provide information on the causes of World War I. Examine the documents carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1

This chart provides information on the increasing amounts of money spent on armaments from 1870 through 1914.

Per Capita Expenditures of the Great Powers on Armaments

	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1914
Great Britain	\$3.54	\$3.46	\$3.84	\$12.60*	\$7.29	\$8.23
France	2.92	4.02	4.66	5.21	6.47	7.07
Russia	1.28	1.50	1.26	1.44	2.32	3.44
Germany	1.28	2.16	2.80	4.06	4.06	8.19
Austria-Hungary	1.08	1.70	1.50	1.46	1.68	3.10
Italy	1.38	1.74	2.52	2.34	3.36	3.16

*Boer War Costs

Source: From *Europe, 1815-1914*, by Gordon A. Craig, 1966.

Which three countries increased the amount of money spent on weapons? _____
 How did this increase the chance of war? _____

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 19: Causes of World War I (continued)

Document 2

On the eve of World War I the alliance systems were:

Members of the Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy
Members of the Triple Entente: Great Britain, France, Russia

How did alliance systems contribute to the outbreak of World War I? _____

Document 3

This is an excerpt from the Austro-Hungarian Red Book No. 7. It is the ultimatum that Austria-Hungary sent to Serbia on July 23, 1914.

. . . the Royal Serbian Government has done nothing to repress these movements. It has permitted the criminal machinations of various societies and associations directed against the Monarchy, and has tolerated unrestrained language on the part of the press, the glorification of the perpetrators of outrages and the participation of officers and functionaries in subversive agitation. . . .

. . . [The] Royal Government see themselves compelled to demand from the Royal Serbian Government a formal assurance that they condemn this dangerous propaganda against the Monarchy. . . .

. . . To accept the collaboration in Serbia of representatives of the Austro-Hungarian Government for the suppression of the subversive movement . . .

What were the accusations made by Austria-Hungary to Serbia? _____

What two demands did Austria-Hungary make on Serbia? _____

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 19: Causes of World War I (continued)**Document 4**

This excerpt is from Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty, which Germany signed, thereby ending World War I.

. . . The Allied and Associate Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage. . . .

According to the Versailles Treaty, who was responsible for World War I? _____
Why? _____

Document 5

In this excerpt from May 7, 1919, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau leader of the German delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference, protested.

It is demanded of us that we shall confess ourselves to be alone guilty of the war. Such a confession from my lips would be a lie. We are far from declining all responsibility for the fact that this great World War took place or that it was fought in the way that it was. . . . But we energetically deny that Germany and its people, who were convinced that they fought a war of defense, were alone guilty. No one would want to assert that the disaster began only at that disastrous moment when the successor of Austria-Hungary fell a victim to murderous hands. In the last fifty years, the imperialism of all European states has chronically poisoned international relations. Policies of retaliation, policies of expansion, and disregard for the right of peoples to determine their own destiny, have contributed to the European malady which came to a crises in the World War. The mobilization of Russia deprived statesmen of the opportunity of curing the disease, and placed the issue in the hands of the military powers. . . .

What position did the German delegation leader present? _____

What did he say caused the war? _____

Document 6

In his book, *Origins of the World War*, Sidney Bradshaw Fay stated his position on the causes of World War I.

Nevertheless, a European war broke out. Why? Because in each country [of Europe] political and military leaders did certain things which lead to the mobilization [of their armies for war] and [finally] to the declarations of war, of [these leaders] failed to do certain things which might have prevented [the war]. In this sense, all the European countries in greater or lesser degree were responsible [for the outbreak of World War I].

(continued)

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 19: Causes of World War I (continued)According to this author, who was responsible for the outbreak of World War I? _____
_____What did he cite as evidence to support this claim? _____
_____**Document 7**This is an excerpt from *The Century of Total War* by Raymond Aron (Doubleday & Co. 1954).

. . . The rise of Germany, whose supremacy France dreaded and whose navy menaced [or threatened] England, had created among [England and France] an alliance which claimed it was defensive in nature but was denounced by German propaganda as an attempt at [the] encirclement [of Germany]. The two armed camps alarmed each other, and each grew heavy with multiplied incidents, which spread East [with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand], where Russia and Austria were advancing contradictory claims. . . .

What role did the assassination and the ultimatum play in the outbreak of war? _____
_____What responsibility did the alliance systems play in the outbreak of war? _____

- **Part B—Essay**

Who and/or what caused World War I? _____

Grading Key**Teacher Guide Page****Document 1**

According to this chart, Germany, Great Britain, and France spent the most per person on armaments. The money spent on armies and navies meant that these countries were prepared for war. This led to an arms race and fear among neighboring countries.

Document 2

The map shows that there were two alliance systems. The Triple Entente included Russia, France, and Great Britain. The Triple Alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The alliances produced two armed camps, ready for war.

Document 3

The Austrian ultimatum accused Serbia of doing nothing to control groups that were criticizing the Austrian monarchy. The Austrian government demanded that the Serbian government condemn the propaganda against Austria. Secondly, the Austro-Hungarian government said they would join with Serbia to investigate and suppress the “subversive” groups in Serbia.

Document 4

According to the Versailles Treaty, Germany accepted the blame. Germany lost the war and had to accept the terms given in the treaty.

Document 5

The leader of the German delegation said that Germany alone was not to blame. They were fighting a defensive war. He says the cause of the war was “imperialism of all European states.” This imperialism led to conflict. When the Russians mobilized, military men took over and diplomacy faded.

Document 6

Fay believed all of the European countries were to blame for the war. The leaders either took steps that led to war, or did nothing to stop the war.

Document 7

Aron believed it was the alliance systems that brought on the war. Germany’s rise in power threatened France and England who joined together in a defensive alliance. Germany saw itself encircled by enemies. Therefore, when the assassination occurred, the countries who already had conflicts were pulled into war.

Additional Information Beyond the Documents

The documents provide students with only fragments of evidence. Answers should include relevant information from beyond the documents—information that students have learned from their classroom study. The following list suggests some of the information that students might include in their essays from outside learning.

Nationalism among the subject nationalities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and between European countries

Imperialism and economic rivalries among European nations

Alliance systems, militarism, the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and the ultimatum

