Figure 1.10
The Boer War between the Dutch and British settlers in South Africa was the first of many armed conflicts in the twentieth century. More than 7,300 Canadians served in South Africa during this war. Shown are troops of the Royal Canadian Regiment storming a hill in 1900. Repeatedly, the interests of the indigenous peoples of the region were never considered. What is the political status of South Africa today?

Figure 1.11
The maps of the world were one of the first in the twentieth century to divide people around the globe and even within Britain and its empire. Better communications and a growing mistrust of the power of the state led to real debate and division. Look at these two political cartoons and note the different messages presented. One of these is British, the other is French. Can you tell which is which? Which is most effective in your opinion? Why?

of the vast gold and diamond deposits of the Transvaal. It took half a million troops for the British to prevail. The British even had troops from Canada and Australia. In 1902, the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were defeated and annexed as British Crown Colonies.

“I would annex the planets if I could.”
— Cecil Rhodes, British imperialist and business magnate

MAP STUDY

At the turn of the twentieth century, European nations and the United States believed in building vast empires. Little concern was shown for the peoples actually inhabiting these conquered lands.

Interpreting
1. In 1900, which region of the world was least affected by European empires?
2. Which of these empires is still intact today?
3. Which areas of the world have since gained full independence and political freedom?
4. In your view, what are the major arguments for and against the notion of “empire”?
In Review

1. What were the conflicting views and values of Western society at the beginning of the twentieth century? How were these reflected in politics and culture?

2. In a chart, compare the strengths and weaknesses of the following nations at the turn of the century: Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the United States.

3. "We do not desire to put anyone else in the shade, but we want our place in the sun." [Prince Bernhard von Bülow, German Chancellor, 1900-1909]. What does this statement tell you about imperialism and the attitudes of the European powers at the turn of the century?

4. What evidence is there that the twentieth century would likely be a violent period? In your view will the twenty-first century be violent too? Explain.

Summary

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Europe was the centre of world politics, economics, and culture. The British Empire stood at the zenith of its power. The interests of nations and peoples in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the world seemed to carry little weight. It was a moment of European triumph. Nations such as Japan and the United States were just beginning to flex their political, military, and industrial muscles.

Forces for change were everywhere. New technologies, ideas, and energy were exploding across a shrinking globe. The old order was being openly challenged. However, except for some minor skirmishes, peace had reigned for almost 100 years. The interlude of King Edward VII’s reign after the long Victorian age camouflaged the tremendous forces waiting to erupt into the cataclysm of the First World War.

The nineteenth century had somehow been able to contain the forces of imperialism and democracy, liberty and authority, individualism and collectivism, science and religion. The twentieth century would witness the explosion of these forces into open conflict. To many historians, the First World War marked the true beginning of the twentieth century. It foreshadowed an era of war, revolution, and tremendous social, political, and technological change. These realities would characterize much of the new century.
Economic and Military Potential of the Powers, 1913 to 1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Austria-Hungary</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions)</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>175.1</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military and naval personnel*</td>
<td>532,000</td>
<td>910,000</td>
<td>1,392,000</td>
<td>881,000</td>
<td>444,000</td>
<td>164,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warships tonnage*</td>
<td>2,714,000</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>679,000</td>
<td>1,385,000</td>
<td>372,000</td>
<td>985,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total industrial potential (UK in 1900 = 100)</td>
<td>127.2</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>137.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>298.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% shares of world manufacturing output</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 2.2
Which nations appear to be stronger in terms of military power? Which nation appears to have the greatest potential? Why?

A System of Alliances
Otto von Bismarck, the powerful German chancellor who had brought about the unification of Germany, engineered an alliance system in the 1880s that provided Europe with the illusion of peace and stability. Behind the scenes, however, tensions were mounting.

Bismarck's diplomacy had been aimed at isolating France. In 1879, he signed the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary. Three years later, in 1882, he negotiated the Triple Alliance that drew Italy into the pact. Then in 1887, he persuaded Russia to sign a secret Reinsurance Treaty in which both countries agreed to remain neutral if the other was attacked by a third power. Bismarck avoided conflict with Britain by refusing to pursue a colonial empire and by resisting German naval expansion.

After the death of Wilhelm I in 1888 his successor, Wilhelm II, embarked on very different policies. The new kaiser decided to act as chancellor himself and dismissed Bismarck in 1890. In the same year he allowed the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia to lapse. Feeling cast aside by its former ally, Russia turned to France.

In 1891, the two countries negotiated an understanding, and in 1894 they entered into a military alliance. This marked an important shift in European alignments as France and Russia had been enemies since the French invasion of Russia in 1812 during the Napoleonic Wars.

These changes in Europe were a source of concern for Britain. Its leaders were distrustful of the new alliance between Russia and France and uneasy about Germany's growing economic power and increasing militarism. But of even greater importance was Germany's new policy of naval expansion. Growing insecurity caused Britain to end its century-old policy of "splendid isolation" from alliances with continental powers. By 1907, Britain had joined France and Russia to form the Triple Entente.

Europe was now divided into two rival camps—the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy against the Triple Entente of France, Russia, and Britain. From this point until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the arms race intensified, navies expanded their fleets—and international tensions grew. All that was lacking was a spark to set off a deadly chain of events.

In Review
1. Summarize the four major underlying causes of the First World War.
2. In your opinion, which of these causes was most important? Why?
3. Which, if any, of these causes of the First World War still exist in our world today? Explain.
The Road to War

As 1914 approached, the international power struggle became more intense. One incident followed another and each contributed to the mounting tension and hostility between the European powers.

Tension in the Balkans

The humiliation of defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 recouped Russian interests on Europe, particularly the Balkan states. The Balkans included Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Bulgaria, and part of Greece. They became a focus for European nationalism and imperialism as Turkey, Russia, and Austria-Hungary had conflicting interests there.

In 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed the states of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Turks. This act of aggression infuriated Serbia because these two states held large numbers of Serbs. In addition, the annexation effectively cut Serbia off from the Adriatic Sea. Serbia hoped that Russia would intervene on its behalf, but Russia, aware that Germany would back Austria-Hungary, decided not to become involved in the conflict.

In 1912, the situation changed dramatically. A Balkan league was formed under the leadership of Serbia. It declared war on Turkey and succeeded in defeating the Ottoman Turks, thereby reducing Turkish influence in the region. The rise of Serbian power concerned Austria-Hungary. These fears were heightened in 1913 when another Balkan war erupted. After the battles, Serbia had almost doubled its size. Afraid of Austro-Hungarian aggression, Serbia turned to its ally Russia for protection. The situation was becoming increasingly volatile. As Russia and Austria-Hungary took opposite stands in the Balkan conflicts, their allies watched with growing apprehension.

The Major Powers in 1914

Britain

In the decades preceding the First World War, Britain was overtaken industrially by both the United States and Germany. Where the British empire had been the foremost colonial power of the nineteenth century, by the twentieth century it was facing intense competition in its commercial and colonial interests. Still, Britain remained the leading power in the world, even if its domination was in decline. The greatest challenge for Britain at this time was to maintain the status quo, or at least to maintain a strong level of control over the unfolding of events. British foreign policy was often ambiguous. Britain's leaders were reluctant to form a military alliance with Germany in 1889 and again from 1898 to 1910, or against it from 1906 to 1914.

Germany

In the years leading up to the First World War, Germany was an industrial power led by an authoritarian monarch. Unlike the British monarch, the German Kaiser exercised enormous power. His personality, views, and beliefs shaped German foreign policy. The Kaiser challenged the existing order. He directed Germany to flex its muscle, and thereby dramatically alter the European balance of power.

Russia

By 1914, Russia had a rapidly expanding population several times larger than that of either Britain or Germany. The size of its standing army was enormous, with 1.3 million troops and up to 5 million reserves. In addition, Russia had become the fourth largest industrial power. Other European nations were concerned about Russia's emerging might. But this picture of Russian power was misleading. Most of Russia's industrial development was in textiles and food processing, not equipment or armaments. Its status as an industrial power ranked well behind the United States, Britain, and Germany. Russia was still a peasant society, with 80 per cent of its population deriving their livelihood from agriculture.

France

By the eve of the First World War, Germany industry was eclipsing France's industrial development. By 1914, France ranked fifth as an industrial nation among the European powers. Its population growth was almost stagnant compared to that of Germany. Between 1890 and 1914, Germany's population surged by 18 million while the population of France rose by only 1 million. These factors served to increase Germany's power while France's relative position declined. This was a particularly bitter pill for the French given the history of conflict between the two countries.

MAP STUDY

Figure 2.4

The Balkans in 1914

Unrest in the Balkans became a serious issue for the major European powers. Great powers such as Austria-Hungary and Russia had competing interests in the increasingly volatile region.

Interpreting

1. What alliances did Austria-Hungary and Russia represent?
2. Why might the region be considered so important to European politics?
3. Which Balkan nation was most significant? Why?
Voices

Pre-War Germany and Britain: A Clash of Values

The First World War was not only a clash of armies, it was a conflict of different beliefs and values. Britain and its empire represented the most powerful and successful nation in the world, they past, to traditional values, and the status quo. Germany represented the rise. Germans looked to the new world in which German power and be recognized. As you read these, compare the beliefs and values of the. In what ways might the differences two contribute to rivalry and conflict?

Attitudes to the War 1914

regarded, especially in Germany, as the test of spirit and as such, a test of culture, and life. 'War,' wrote historian von Bernhardi in 1911, was a principle. It was an expression of culture. 'War,' wrote a contemporary, 'was in fact the price one pays for culture.' In other words, whether as the foundation of culture or as a one to a higher plateau of creativity, war was an essential part of the community and image.

— David Lloyd George, British politician and prime minister (1916-1922) in 1911

"For the Germans this was a war to change the world, for the British this was a war to preserve a world. The Germans were propelled by a vision, the British by a legacy."


Responding
1. Do you accept either of these views of war? Explain.
2. In your opinion, is war ever justifiable? Explain.

British Attitudes to the War Before 1914

"If a situation were forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated, where her interests were vitally affected, as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of Nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure."

— David Lloyd George, British politician and prime minister (1916-1922) in 1911

The Schlieffen Plan

German leaders based their military strategy on the quick victory promised by the Schlieffen Plan. General Schlieffen believed that a long war was impossible in the modern age where "the existence of nations is based on the uninterrupted progress of trade and commerce." Like many European leaders, he assumed that the enemy would quit rather than risk a long, destructive war. The Schlieffen Plan called for the concentration of almost the entire German army on a decisive assault. The goal was the knockout blow. Timing was critical since Germany had to defeat the French army before the Russians attacked from the east. To succeed, France had to be defeated in just six weeks.

MAP STUDY

Figure 2.7

The Schlieffen Plan and ensuing Battles

- The Schlieffen Plan called for the German army to avoid the heavily armed and defended French-German border to the east. The Germans instead attacked France through defenseless Belgium. The objective was to smash across the French border in a rapid hammerhead blow and surround Paris, the capital. The French would be taken by surprise from behind.
- However, the Belgians fought valiantly. The British sent troops into France and German troops were sent to the border with Russia. The German hammerhead slowed.
- French forces made a desperate counterattack in the Battle of the Marne and blunted the German advance.
- Germany moved to capture the towns of Calais and Boulogne but they battled British forces for six weeks at Ypres.
- The German dream of a swift victory was shattered. The war became a deadly struggle of increasingly bloody battles over hundreds of metres of battle-scarred fields. Europe was spit by a wall of barbed wire and trenches that snaked across half a continent.

Interpreting
1. In your view what were the key strengths and weaknesses of the Schlieffen Plan?
2. What was the chief result of the German failure to launch a knockout blow?
The Eastern Front

On the eastern front, the line was much more mobile. Nevertheless, conditions were deplorable. In August 1914, at the Battle of Tannenberg in Prussia, the Germans out-maneuvered a much larger Russian force and won a major battle. The Russian supply system had failed, leaving the troops exhausted and half-starved after their long march. Russian communications had broken down, and the Russian high command, unaware of German troop movements, made fatal mistakes regarding the deployment of Russian armies. As a result, the Second Russian Army was surrounded and destroyed. The Germans killed at least 30,000 Russians, took 100,000 prisoners, and captured a vast supply of guns at Tannenberg. The Russian commander, General Samsonov, unable to face his men or the czar, shot himself.

In early September, the Germans took another 125,000 prisoners at the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. The Russians fell back across the border, confused and demoralized. Within the first two months of the war, Russia had lost two armies.

The Russian army was ill-equipped. Russia did not have a strong munitions industry, and arms could not be shipped by its allies, Britain and France, because Germany controlled access to the Black and Baltic seas. Russian soldiers frequently ran out of weapons and ammunition and at times had to fight with pitchforks and swords. It is estimated that one in three Russian soldiers was sent to the front without a weapon. There they waited for someone to be killed or injured and then took his weapon and fought on.

For the next three years, the Russians...
Conditions on the eastern front were different. Here there were large-scale battles with considerable movement and huge casualties. The trench system was not nearly as formidable. German forces won tremendous victories against the Russian forces.

By the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia ceded its territory (green stripes) to Germany and allowed German troops to enter and occupy it, including the rich wheat lands of the Ukraine. Thus the German army was more powerful because it had a rich new food supply and entire armies could now be transferred to the Western Front to fight the final battles of the war. For the first time since 1914, Germany was able to concentrate its forces on one front.

Interpretation
1. Why were the Russians unable to contain the German attacks?
2. Why was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk so important to German hopes of victory?
3. How do you think the Allies regarded the new Bolshevik government of Russia? Why?

Fought bravely. But by the beginning of 1917, 3 million Russian soldiers were dead or captured. Within Russia the constant defeats, combined with crushing poverty and unbridled corruption, led to a loss of confidence in the czarist regime. Protest groups marched through the streets of St. Petersburg and Moscow demanding food, an end to the war, and economic reforms. Finally in March 1917 the people revolted (see pages 69-70). The czar was forced to abdicate his throne and a more moderate reform government was established. Russia was prepared to continue the war against the Central Powers, but the new government was unable to satisfy the needs of its own people never mind continue a savage war against a much more powerful foe. In November 1917, the moderate government of Alexander Kerensky was toppled by the Bolsheviks, a radical socialist group of workers and soldiers led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. The Bolsheviks, who would become the Russian Communist Party the following year, opposed the war. Once they had established a revolutionary government they proceeded to negotiate an armistice with the Central Powers. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918, ended Russia's involvement in the war. But the terms were harsh. Russia lost one-third of its population and agricultural land and almost all of its coal reserves. For the time being, Germany now dominated eastern Europe.

The Russian armistice was a devastating blow to the Allies. It meant that Germany could relieve food shortages caused by the naval blockade by using the agricultural products of Ukraine. It also allowed Germany to concentrate its forces on the western front against France and Britain. The war was now hurtling towards its final great battles.

Technology and the First World War

As war clouds gathered and even during the fighting, advances in technology were feverishly applied to a new industry—armaments. The types of weapons and the enormous quantities turned out by European, and later American, industries between 1900 and 1918 not only made the war longer and bloodier, but they changed the nature of war.

The world was shocked by the frequent use of weapons of mass destruction such as gas. As early as 1914, gas was employed on the battlefield. The main types of gas were chlorine and mustard gas. Chlorine gas produced violent choking and death while mustard gas left horrible internal and external burns. Even those soldiers who survived gas attacks were often left with disfiguring scars or damaged lungs that often resulted in an early death.

In Canada's first major battle at Ypres, Belgium, in 1915, Canadians distinguished themselves by extending and holding their lines in the midst of a gas attack that sent French colonial troops fleeing. The Canadians' courage cost 6000 lives. Troops were seen "to roll about like mad dogs in their death agonies." Gas attacks were blunted by the advent of good gas masks and the fact that using gas was dangerously unpredictable as a shift in the wind could send the gas back to kill the force unleashing the weapon.

Although machine guns had been developed earlier, they were perfected as brutally effective killing machines of the First World War. This marriage of industrial technology and the mass citizen armies resulted in millions of casualties along the killing fields of Europe. Placed in an entrenched position, defenders using a weapon such as the Vickers Mark I could
Reparation payments were blamed for Germany's staggering inflation and economic collapse. To make these payments, the government printed paper money until the currency was worthless. By 1923, the German economy was in ruins. Furthermore, the military restrictions imposed on Germany were seen as harsh and humiliating. Thousands of demobilized German troops, resenting the terms of the treaty and disgruntled with a political system that had been incapable of striking a better deal in Paris, joined right-wing political groups. The treaty provided fertile ground for propaganda against the Allies' treatment of Germany and it was employed with great success. German violations of the treaty grew bolder and more flagrant until finally Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party effectively killed the Treaty of Versailles in the early 1930s.

**In Review**

1. What were the key objectives of France, Britain, and the United States at the Paris Peace Conference? In your opinion, which country was most successful in achieving its objectives? Explain your answer.
2. Why did Wilson's idealism not gain much support at the peace conference?
3. In your opinion, do Wilson's Fourteen Points have any relevance in today's world? Explain.
4. How would you have changed the Treaty of Versailles and why?
5. In general, what do you think should be the central purpose of a treaty that ends a serious conflict?
6. How did the Treaty of Versailles help the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party?

**Summary**

When war broke out in 1914, the mood was almost festive. Most people believed it would be a short war that would solve many of the problems of the competing nations. As the war dragged on, it became a battle of attrition: who could continue to supply soldiers and weapons in order to outlast the others.

The war cost Europe dearly in terms of human lives and almost ruined the continent economically. The cost of feeding and equipping the military forces was staggering. The destruction left vast areas of Belgium and France in ruins. But while the economies of both the victors and the vanquished in Europe were severely damaged, the American economy was strengthened by the war. Even though most European countries recovered by 1924, they faced a new order in which the international economic balance of power had shifted from Europe in favour of the United States.