

## The Crises before the War

The competition among European countries was not confined to military action in northern Europe. There were two major areas of tension: Africa and the Balkans. The rules for colonizing Africa were set at the 1885 Berlin Conference, but it took until 1904 for France and England to agree on areas of influence for each in Africa. The Balkans were slowly becoming independent from the Ottoman Empire as its power weakened. Austria-Hungary and Russia were competing to influence or rule the Balkan countries as they separated from the Ottomans.

- A. MOROCCO -- France was very interested in controlling North Africa to broaden its control over the Mediterranean. England already had Egypt and influence over the Arabian peninsula as well as India, so it could tolerate expanded power by the French. Germany, a new player at colonization, was jealous of France's moves to take Morocco and staged a confrontation that could have been the start of World War I.
- B. THE BALKANS -- The Balkans are the areas of Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro. Serbia also wanted Bosnia and Herzegovina to join them in a Pan-Slavic movement, but the Austro-Hungarian empire annexed Bosnia when the Ottomans were busy putting down an internal revolution by the Young Turks. Serbia's only ally at the point, Russia, was too weak from losing the Russo-Japanese War to help it, and Germany came in on Austria's side. Like Morocco, the Balkans were an area contested by many countries in Europe.
- C. THE LAST CRISIS: The Assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand -- On June 28, 1914 the Archduke of Austria-Hungary, Francis Ferdinand, was assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Francis Ferdinand was heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire and wanted to reform the restrictive policies against Slavs in the empire. Militant Slavic nationalists in Serbia did not like Francis Ferdinand's ideas about reform. They needed Slavs to be upset and wanted Serbian help to free themselves from Austria-Hungary. One militant group called the Black Hand trained the assassin, Gavrilo Princip, who shot the Archduke and his wife while they were going through the streets of Sarajevo in an open car. The assassination started the chain of decisions that led to the military battles of World War I.

Austria-Hungary's response to the assassination was an ultimatum to Serbia: accept the following list of demands or suffer the consequence of war →

1. Serbia would ban from its schools any teachers or books that did not support the empire of Austria-Hungary.
2. Serbia would condemn any anti-Austro-Hungarian propaganda.
3. Serbia would dismiss any officials who promoted any anti-Austro-Hungarian propaganda.
4. Austro-Hungarian judges would preside over the trial of those involved in the Sarajevo assassination.

Serbia accepted all of the demands but the last one. Austria-Hungary refused to back off of its ultimatum, so it declared war on July 28, 1914.

- Austria-Hungary contacted its ally, Germany, who said that Austria-Hungary should hold to its ultimatum. Austria-Hungary interpreted Germany's response to mean that Germany would back Austria-Hungary all the way to war.
- Serbia contacted its ally, Russia, who said that Serbia should also stand firm. Russia's ally France promised to support any action Russia took in the Balkans.