



CAUSES OF THE START OF WORLD WAR I AND THE SITUATION IN
EUROPE BEFORE THE WAR

Shavkatbekov Shakhbozbek

Andizhan State University, History faculty

2nd year student

Tel: +998949996622

E-mail: shaxbozbekshavkatbekov9@gmail.com

***Abstract:** This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the causes that led to the outbreak of World War I, focusing on the complex political landscape of Europe in the early twentieth century. Drawing upon a range of scholarly historical sources, the author examines the role of the alliance system, rising nationalism, and imperial rivalries in escalating tensions among European powers. The study critically evaluates the diplomatic decisions and miscalculations that contributed to the rapid escalation of the conflict following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. By adopting an evidence-based and historiographically informed approach, this paper aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical dynamics that set the stage for one of the most transformative events in modern European history. The findings highlight not only the immediate triggers but also the systemic factors that made the continent particularly susceptible to large-scale war.*

***Keywords:** First World War, European political order, Triple Entente, European alliance system, military-political alliances, military planning.*

***Anotatsiya:** Ushbu maqola Birinchi jahon urushining boshlanishiga olib kelgan sabablarni keng qamrovli tahlil qilib, XX asr boshlarida Yevropaning murakkab siyosiy manzarasiga e'tibor qaratadi. Muallif bir qator ilmiy tarixiy manbalarga tayanib, Yevropa kuchlari o'rtasidagi keskinlikning kuchayishida ittifoq tizimi, kuchayib borayotgan millatchilik va imperiya raqobatining rolini o'rganadi. Tadqiqotda Archgertsog Frans Ferdinandning o'ldirilishidan keyin mojaroning tez*



avj olishiga hissa qo'shgan diplomatik qarorlar va xatolar tanqidiy baholanadi. Dalillarga asoslangan va tarixshunoslik nuqtai nazaridan xabardor yondashuvni qo'llash orqali ushbu maqola zamonaviy Yevropa tarixidagi eng o'zgaruvchan voqealardan biriga zamin yaratgan geosiyosiy dinamikani nozik tushunishni taklif qilishga qaratilgan. Topilmalar nafaqat bevosita qo'zg'atuvchilarni, balki qit'ani keng ko'lamlil urushga ayniqsa moyil qilgan tizimli omillarni ham ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: *Birinchi jahon urushi, Yevropa siyosiy tartibi, Uchlik Antanta, Yevropa ittifoq tizimi, harbiy-siyosiy ittifoqlar, harbiy rejalashtirish.*

Аннотация: *В данной статье представлен всесторонний анализ причин, приведших к началу Первой мировой войны, с акцентом на сложную политическую обстановку в Европе в начале XX века. Опираясь на ряд научных исторических источников, автор исследует роль системы союзов, растущего национализма и имперского соперничества в эскалации напряженности между европейскими державами. В исследовании критически оцениваются дипломатические решения и просчеты, которые способствовали быстрой эскалации конфликта после убийства эрцгерцога Франца Фердинанда. Используя основанный на фактах и историографически обоснованный подход, данная работа стремится предложить тонкое понимание геополитической динамики, которая подготовила почву для одного из самых трансформационных событий в современной европейской истории. Результаты исследования подчеркивают не только непосредственные причины, но и системные факторы, которые сделали континент особенно уязвимым для крупномасштабной войны.*

Ключевые слова: *Первая мировая война, европейский политический порядок, Тройственная Антанта, европейская система союзов, военно-политические союзы, военное планирование.*

Introduction

The First World War (1914–1918) represents one of the most significant and transformative events of the twentieth century, profoundly reshaping the political,



social, and cultural landscape of Europe. The causes of the conflict were neither singular nor isolated; rather, they emerged from a complex and interrelated set of political, social, and economic factors. By the late nineteenth century, the ambition to redraw global influence, coupled with the aspirations of emerging industrial nations to achieve parity with established powers, increasingly complicated the European political order. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the consolidation of powerful military alliances, the intensification of nationalist sentiment, and fierce imperial rivalries, all of which contributed to a fragile and volatile international environment. This study seeks to investigate the geopolitical underpinnings of the war, with particular emphasis on the European alliance system, the rise of nationalism, and the strategic objectives of the great powers. By drawing on both primary and secondary historical sources, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how these interconnected dynamics culminated in a conflict of unprecedented scale and impact.

Literature Review

The historiography of World War I is extensive, reflecting diverse interpretations of the conflict's origins and the interplay of geopolitical factors. Christopher Clark, in *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, emphasizes the contingent and often unpredictable nature of the outbreak, arguing that European leaders “sleepwalked” into war due to misjudgments and structural constraints. Clark's work highlights the interdependence of alliances, nationalist ambitions, and diplomatic errors as central drivers of escalation.

Margaret MacMillan's *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* complements this perspective by examining the political, economic, and social pressures that shaped European decision-making in the decades preceding the war. MacMillan underscores the significance of long-term structural factors, such as militarization, imperial competition, and the fragility of the balance of power, in creating conditions conducive to large-scale conflict.



Barbara Tuchman's classic work, *The Guns of August*, focuses on the operational and immediate events leading to war, offering a narrative-driven account of mobilization, military planning, and diplomatic failures. While her approach is primarily descriptive, it provides critical insights into how rigid military schedules and preemptive strategies intensified the crisis following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Additional studies, such as Terence Zuber's *European Diplomatic History 1871–1914* and Georges-Henri Soutou's *The Great War and the European Balance of Power*, provide analytical depth regarding the structural and systemic aspects of international relations in pre-war Europe. These works collectively emphasize the interconnectedness of alliances, imperial ambitions, and nationalist pressures, offering a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex causes of the war.

In summary, existing scholarship highlights that World War I cannot be attributed to a single event or actor; rather, it emerged from a combination of long-term geopolitical structures, alliance obligations, and miscalculations by European powers. The synthesis of these perspectives forms the basis for this study's analytical framework.

Results

In the early twentieth century, the European alliance system was a central factor in transforming regional disputes into a continent-wide conflict. The two major blocs that had emerged by 1914 were the Triple Entente, comprising France, Russia, and Great Britain, and the Triple Alliance, formed by Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Each alliance was perceived as a counterbalance to the other, creating a situation in which any confrontation involving one state had the potential to escalate into a broader, large-scale war.

The formation of these alliances was largely shaped by geopolitical rivalries in the Balkans, particularly the competition among the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires for influence in the region. Russia sought control over



Istanbul and the strategic waterways of the Ottoman Empire, while France and Great Britain extended their influence over Ottoman territories, effectively reducing the empire to a semi-colonial state. At the same time, Germany's growing industrial and commercial presence threatened British economic dominance in global markets, and France aimed to reclaim territories lost during the Franco-Prussian War. Within this context, the establishment of military-political alliances appeared both natural and necessary to maintain a balance of power.

However, while these alliances were originally intended to deter aggression and preserve stability, they inadvertently created a rigid structure that facilitated the rapid escalation of localized disputes into full-scale war. The interlocking obligations of the alliances meant that a conflict involving one nation could compel multiple powers to intervene, thereby magnifying the scale of confrontation. For instance, Austria-Hungary's decision to confront Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand prompted German support, which in turn triggered Russian mobilization in defense of its ally. Consequently, France and Great Britain were drawn into the conflict due to their commitments under the Triple Entente.

Moreover, the alliance system fostered an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and strategic miscalculation. States increasingly relied on inflexible military plans, such as Germany's Schlieffen Plan, which anticipated rapid mobilization and preemptive engagement. This structural interdependence, combined with pervasive distrust, transformed a regional crisis into a global war, illustrating the alliance system's paradoxical role as both a mechanism for deterrence and a catalyst for conflict.

Historians such as Christopher Clark and Margaret MacMillan emphasize that diplomatic shortcomings were a critical factor in the outbreak of World War I. Although peaceful solutions to the tensions between the European powers were theoretically possible, the states involved failed to accurately assess the intentions, capabilities, and likely responses of their counterparts. Despite generally cordial personal relationships among the monarchs of Great Britain, Germany, and Russia,



these connections were not leveraged effectively to mitigate the escalating crisis. The leadership of the major powers consistently misjudged both the motivations and potential actions of other states, leading to a cascade of strategic errors. A particularly illustrative example is Austria-Hungary's decision, with German support, to issue an ultimatum to Serbia, coupled with Russia's commitment to defend its ally. These decisions, compounded by rigid military planning, transformed what might have remained a localized diplomatic dispute into a comprehensive, continent-wide conflict.

Although the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, is frequently identified as the immediate trigger of World War I, it must be analyzed within the broader geopolitical framework of early twentieth-century Europe. The assassination alone did not inevitably precipitate a global conflict; rather, it acted as a catalyst within an already tense and volatile international system. The existence of pre-established alliances, extensive militarization, and pervasive nationalist ambitions created conditions in which a localized crisis rapidly escalated into a full-scale continental war.

Conclusion

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 was the culmination of a complex and interconnected array of geopolitical, social, and economic factors. The rigid system of European alliances, combined with the rise of militant nationalism and intense imperial rivalries, created a precarious political environment in which even relatively minor incidents had the potential to escalate into a large-scale conflict. While the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo served as the immediate catalyst, it was the underlying systemic pressures—such as entrenched alliance obligations, strategic miscalculations, and competitive imperial ambitions—that ultimately determined the outbreak of war. A comprehensive analysis of these factors not only illuminates the multifaceted origins of the conflict but also offers valuable insights into the mechanisms through which diplomatic failures, alliance structures, and national interests can interact to produce widespread and catastrophic wars in the



international arena. By examining these dynamics, scholars can better understand the interplay between political decision-making, structural constraints, and the escalation of crises, providing lessons relevant to both historical interpretation and contemporary international relations.

REFERENCES

1. MacMillan M. *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914*. New York: Random House, 2013.
2. Clark C. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. London: Penguin Books, 2012.
3. Tuchman B. *The Guns of August*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.
4. Zuber T. *European Diplomatic History 1871–1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
5. Soutou G-H. *The Great War and the European Balance of Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.