

## ESSAY EXAMPLE 1

# To what extent should Germany be held responsible for causing the First World War?

The outbreak of the First World War is one of the most controversial topics in history. In November 11, 1918 the war ended but it led to the question of concerning the causes of the war and dealing out war guilt. There were several events that have had an impact and contributed to cause the World War One before 1914 such as assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, crises of July and the Balkan wars etc. According to article 231 of Treaty of Versailles, Germany and her allies were held responsible for causing all the loss and damage. But the question is, to what extent should Germany be held responsible for causing the First World War?

The European system of alliances, nationalism, economic competition, and imperialism all played an important role to cause World War One. On 28 June 1914, the final crisis was triggered by the assassination in the Bosnian town of Sarajevo of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary from 1896. His murderer was Gavrilo Princip, a member of a Serbian terrorist organization known as the "*Black Hand*". There was no clear evidence that the Serbian government was responsible for this assassination but however, it was clear that its intelligence chief played a leading role in the conspiracy, and that Serbia's Prime Minister had some foreknowledge of the attempt. This assassination led to the July Crises 1914, thus encouraged, Austria-Hungary to deliver an ultimatum to Serbia on 23<sup>rd</sup> of July in such a way that it was almost impossible for the Serbian Government to accept all the demands. For instance, Serbia's government was required to suppress all anti-Austrian organization and propaganda, and to dismiss any officials to whom the Vienna government might object. Consequently, Austria-Hungary declared war on 28 June 1914 because Serbia did not satisfy Austria-Hungary's demands. (In the result, Serbia sought help from Russia. Russia did not want to lose her influence over the Balkan and chose to mobilize its forces on its southern borders. Such an action triggered the Austria- German alliance and raised the question of German support for its ally. The continuation of Russian mobilization led Germany to declare war on Russia. Germany also demanded France a formal declaration of neutrality, but France refusal led to a further declaration of war by Germany (3 August). Britain entered the war when Germany invaded Belgium because Belgium refused German troops to go through its territory and attack France and the First World War had been fully started at that point.

There is still a wide range of discussion amongst historians about the cause of the First World War. According to a German historian Fritz Fischer Germany was responsible for preparing and launching the First World War. Germany's leader deliberately accepted the risk. of war for the continuance of their political ambitions during the course of the July crises of 1914.

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The evidence of this argument is the German foreign policy *Weltpolitik*, German arms race, naval race and taking part in colonialism hinted the desire to achieve further territory. Fischer also argued that Germany encouraged Austria-Hungary to start a war with Serbia, and continued to do so, even when it seemed that a war could not be localized. The Blank Cheque was an encouragement from Germany to Austria-Hungary which in fact convinced Russia and France leaders that their countries were at risk, and that they needed to defend themselves.

The debate is now extremely complicated amongst historians, especially concerning the calculations and policies of the German leadership and revolves around whether Germany intended an offensive war of territorial expansion or a defensive war designed to re-order European diplomatic relations. To clear the preceding notion, John Röhl, recently has assembled important new evidence which adds powerful weight to

the view that leading German figures were planning war. The German government was pursuing a pre-existing plan during the July crises, either to split the Triple Entente, or to provoke a European war. The main key of this plan was to make Austria-Hungary to be in the front line during the crises, and for Russia to declare war first.

On the other hand, many historians believe that all countries that had contributed to the war to greater or lesser degrees must share the blame'(collective responsibility). There is no evidence of a unified German plan for war or world domination. According to another German historian, Gerhard Ritter; Germany acted defensively throughout the July crises to preserve its position in the existing states quo, and also that when Austria-Hungary declared. war on Serbia, Germany main aim was to support Austria-Hungary, Germany's only ally Germany supported her ally when Russia started to mobilize its troops to help Serbia. Ritter also claims that the German government put too much reliance on military planners, who devised war plans which were bound to lead to an escalation of the crises.

Austria-Hungary started a crisis in the Balkan without anticipating that it would raise a big conflict. Germany was then trapped by its close links to Austria-Hungary which operated in much the same way as the links between France and Russia, to drag the states into the conflict. The German government realized too and miscalculated that the conflict could not be localized.

There is a wide range of contradiction amongst historians to put forward blame on one more country for causing the First World War even though the Treaty of Versailles declared Germany as the guilty one. Germany acted defensively throughout the July crises to preserve

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its position. Germany supported her firm ally Austria-Hungary when she was convinced that Russia would support Serbia and then Serbia and Russian started to mobilize its troops.

There was nothing else that Germany could do that supporting Austria-Hungary. However, to some large extent Germany could held responsible for causing the WWI. Germany's foreign policy ambitions, naval race, economic race and her interest in imperialism before WWI could be taken into consideration that Germany wanted a world domination. To support this once the war began Germany developed a clear set of aims, already discussed before the war, to gain large territory in central and Eastern Europe. Germany gave the Blank Cheque to Austria-Hungary which upset France, Russia and later on Britain. It would have been a different situation if Germany would have negotiated with Austria-Hungary about the ultimatum that was sent to Serbia not to make it impossible for the Serbian government to accept it. By looking at the activities of Germany before 1914, to some large extent Germany should be held responsible for causing the First World War.