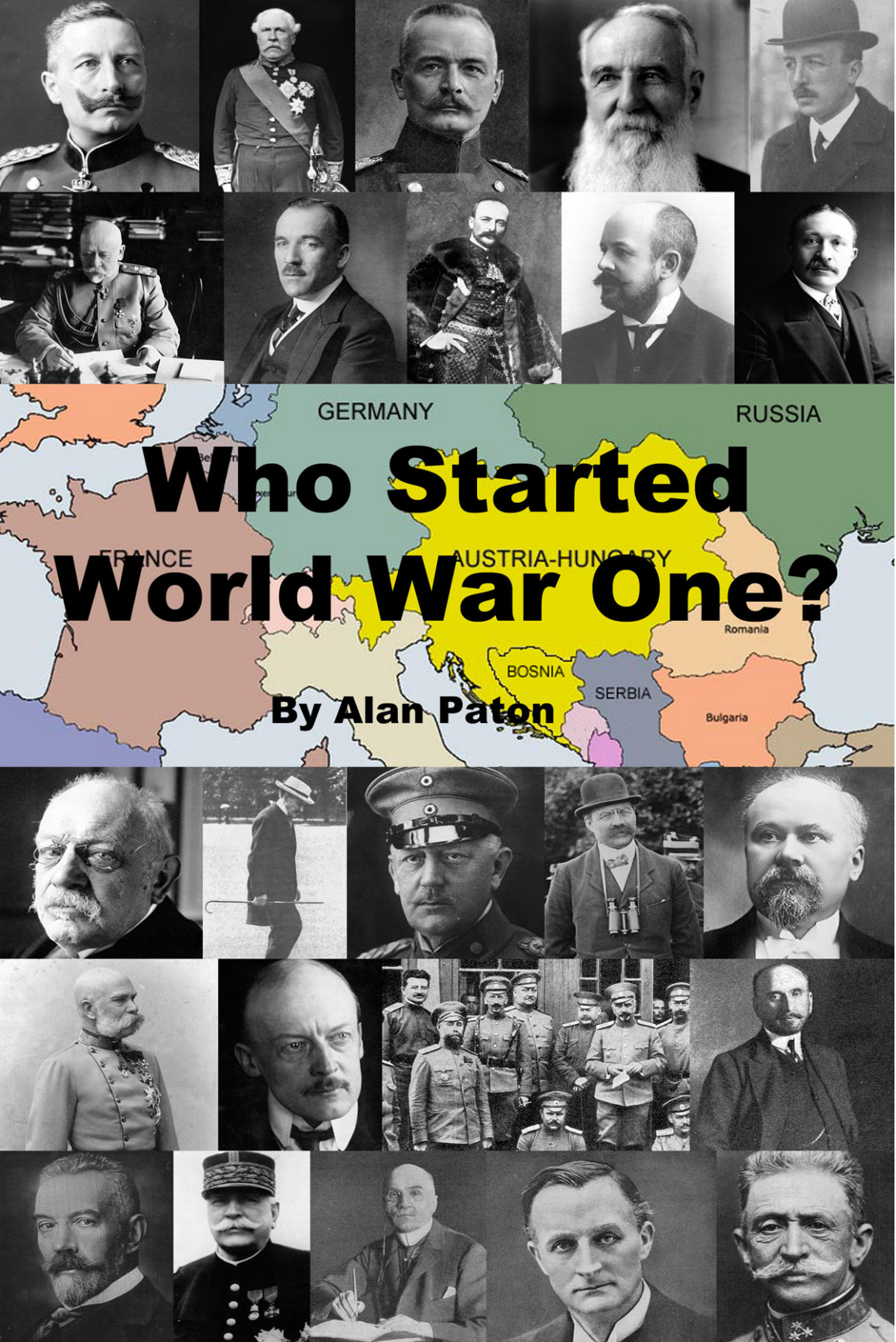

Who Started World War One?

By Alan Paton

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A true guide to what caused that terrible war; the human actions and decisions that decided the fate of Europe and much of the wider world

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Published by History Appraisals, London

First Published 2014

Second Edition 2016

This Third Edition 2022

Version 3.0

Cover Photos: The names and titles of the persons shown on the cover are given in the Photo Cover Gallery on page 196

Contents

Introduction - The July Crisis 1914

The events of July 1914 did more to shape the modern world than any others. Several dozen men from a handful of European countries brought about World War One.

The results of the war include: the collapse of the Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet Union; the rise to world power of the United States; the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, the abolition of the Caliphate, and the foundation of the modern Middle East, whose problems we read about daily; and the formation of five new European nation states one of which collapsed in bloody civil war as recently as 1991.

All this, and the deaths of nine million soldiers and at least six million civilians.

It also produced the Versailles Treaty which laid the entire blame for the war on Germany and created conditions there which led to the rise of the Nazis and eventually World War Two, and 60 million more dead.

Which country or countries is to blame, or most to blame, is still debated today, a 100 years later.

Long-Term Causes versus Immediate Causes

Most books about the causes of World War One examine the underlying or long-term causes; the rival alliances*, the armaments race, imperial ambitions, domestic issues, cultural trends, and overseas and economic competition.

This is not to say that underlying causes are more important than immediate causes. One type of cause works with the other. If there are no immediate causes the underlying or long-term causes don't cause anything, they remain potential causes of trouble that may change or eventually fade away as has happened many times in history.

Equally, a political misjudgement, a foolhardy decision, might not have such disastrous consequences without there being a larger issue.

US-Soviet rivalry did not bring about World War Three in October 1962, during the "Cuban Missile Crisis". Kennedy and Khrushchev and their advisors made the right decisions. If they hadn't, we might now be discussing how the Cold War or the alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) "caused" World War Three, that is, if there was anyone left to have such a discussion.

The immediate causes bring out more clearly the human factors; miscalculation, ignorance, poor information, attitudes, temperament, and even bad organisation. And, these were greatly present in July 1914. This book concentrates on the immediate causes. In this sense it is a true guide to what caused that terrible war; the human actions and decisions that decided the fate of Europe and much of the wider world.

*The Triple Entente (The Franco-Russian Alliance and Britain) and the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy)

Who Started It? - What History Says (So Far)

Germany

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies. [*Article 231, Treaty of Versailles*]

Nobody

How was it that the world was so unexpectedly plunged into this terrible conflict? Who was responsible? . . . The nations slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war without a trace of apprehension or dismay. [*David Lloyd George. British Prime Minister, 1916-1921*]

Russia and France
The chief objects of Russian and French foreign policy, seizure of the Straits and the return of Alsace-Lorraine, could be realized only through a general European war…. In estimating the order of guilt of the various countries we may safely say that the only direct and immediate responsibility for the World War falls upon Serbia, France and Russia, with the guilt about equally divided. [*Harry Elmer Barnes. American historian*]

Everybody
The outbreak of war in 1914 is not an Agatha Christie drama at the end of which we will discover the culprit standing over a corpse in the conservatory with a smoking pistol. There is no smoking gun in this story; or, rather, there is one in the hands of every major character. Viewed in this light, the outbreak of war was a tragedy, not a crime. [*Christopher Clark. Australian historian*]

Austria-Hungary
… Austria-Hungary made the conscious decision to launch a Balkan war in order to reduce Serbia to the status of at best a semi-protectorate, and to appeal to its ally in Berlin for support in case the Austro-Serbian conflict escalated into a general European war. Unfortunately, Austria-Hungary's culpability for the start of the First World War has been overshadowed for far too long … [*Holger H. Herwig. Canadian historian*]

Inflexible Military Plans
When cut down to essentials, the sole cause for the outbreak of war in 1914 was the Schlieffen plan …. Yet the Germans had no deliberate aim of subverting the liberties of Europe. No one had time for a deliberate aim or time to think. All were trapped by the ingenuity of their military preparations, the Germans most of all. [*A J P Taylor. British historian*]

Germany
As Germany willed and coveted the Austro-Serbian war and, in her confidence in her military superiority, deliberately faced the

risk of a conflict with Russia and France, her leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of general war in 1914. [*Fritz Fischer. German historian*]

Germany and Austria-Hungary

War had been no accident … it was the consequence of decisions taken in Berlin and Vienna, and the result of attitudes which regarded war not as the ultimate catastrophe, but a necessary, or even desirable evil and as a way of continuing foreign policy by other means. [*Annika Mombauer. British historian*]

Important People

The important people whose names appear most often in the text are listed below. It is worth memorising as many as you can. Job titles are present in the text but usually on only the first occurrence of a name in a chapter or section. Annex 1 gives a full list of all the people mentioned.

In Vienna
Berchtold - *Austro-Hungarian Imperial Foreign Minister*
Conrad - *Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff*
Hoyos - *Berchtold's chef de cabinet*
Shebeko - *Russian ambassador in Vienna*
Tisza - *Hungarian Prime Minister*
Tschirschky - *German ambassador in Vienna*

In Berlin
Bethmann - *German Chancellor*
Falkenhayn - *German Minister of War*
Goschen - *British ambassador in Berlin*
Jagow - *German Foreign Minister*
Jules Cambon - *French ambassador in Berlin*
Moltke - *German Chief of the General Staff*
Stumm - *German Foreign Ministry Political Director*
Szögyény - *Austro-Hungarian minister in Berlin*
Zimmermann - *German Under Secretary of State Foreign Ministry*

In St Petersburg
Buchanan - *British ambassador in St Petersburg*
Paléologue - *French ambassador St Petersburg*
Pourtalès - *German ambassador in St Petersburg*
Sazonov - *Russian Foreign Minister*
Sukhomlinov - *Russian Minister of War*
Szápáry - *Austro-Hungarian ambassador in St Petersburg*
Yanushkevich - *Russian Chief of the General Staff*

In London
Crowe - *British Assistant Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs*
Grey - *British Foreign Secretary*
Lichnowsky - *German ambassador in London*
Nicolson - *British Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs*
Paul Cambon - *French ambassador in London*

In Paris
Izvolsky - *Russian ambassador in Paris*
Joffre - *French Chief of the General Staff*
Messimy - *French Minister of War*
Poincaré - *President of France*
Schoen - *German ambassador in Paris*
Viviani - *French Prime Minister & Foreign Minister*

PART 1

Setting the Scene

28 June - 22 July / 25 Days

From the assassination at Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife to the day before Austria-Hungary gave its ultimatum to Serbia. How the great powers reacted.

Chapter 1.1

The Assassination, 28 June

1.1.1 The Reasons

The plot that led to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife was not a one-off. It did not come out of the blue. There were six attempts by discontented Austro-Hungarian Slav citizens to assassinate a senior Austro-Hungarian figure in the four years before the killings in Sarajevo.

There was discontent with Austro-Hungarian rule throughout the Slavic provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire - Slovenia, Croatia, Dalmatia and Bosnia Herzegovina - caused by the inferior political status of Slavs compared with the Austrians and Hungarians who held power. Bosnia also suffered from a land ownership system inherited from the Ottomans that held the large Serb peasant population in servitude to a small number of landowners.

Societies, some of them secret, sprung up, especially amongst students, which promoted Slav culture and interests, and produced plotters and would-be assassins. An important objective for the younger generation and the politically aware was the creation of a new independent state, "Yugoslavia", of all southern Slavs including Serbia. It would bring together people of different beliefs, Catholic Croats, Orthodox Bosnians, Muslim Bosnians and Orthodox Serbs.

The plotters also believed the assassination of a high Austro-Hungarian personage such as a provincial governor would hasten the break-up of the Empire and the achievement of this objective.

Another powerful threat to the integrity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire came from Serbia its independent southern neighbour. Serbia had societies working for a Greater Serbia, which would incorporate Bosnia and other Austro-Hungarian territories with large Serb populations. One of these was the secret

society "Unification or Death" also known as the "Black Hand" which had spies, cells and agents disseminating Serb propaganda in Bosnia and other parts of the Empire.

1.1.2 The Assassins

Three young men, all Bosnian Serbs who lived in Sarajevo, formed and led the plot to assassinate the Archduke; Gavrilo Princip, a nineteen year old student, Danilo Ilić, a twenty-four year old former teacher working at a local newspaper, and a long-time friend of Princip, and another nineteen year old, Nedeljko Čabrinović, a typesetter, and also a friend of Princip.
Princip became involved in anti-Austro-Hungarian demonstrations early in 1912 and was injured and arrested. It was at this time he first thought of assassinating an Austro-Hungarian dignitary. Like many of his contemporaries he hero-worshipped Bogdan Zerajić who in 1910 had tried to assassinate the Governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina but failed and then killed himself.

In the spring of 1913 a new Governor, General Potiorek, introduced a state of emergency to quell support for Serbia which was involved with other Balkan states in a war with the Ottoman Empire which still occupied parts of the Balkans. The state of emergency was used to suppress Serb cultural and educational societies, trade unions and political organisations. Civil courts were suspended and military courts introduced. Newspapers from Serbia were seized at the border.

In response to these measures Ilić decided he would make an assassination attempt against Potiorek. He went to Switzerland for a short while to see at his invitation Vladimir Gaćinović a leading member of the Black Hand who was studying at Lausanne University and who had recruited Ilić to be the organiser of a Black Hand cell in Sarajevo. Gaćinović was well known for his essays and was the chief ideologist inspiring young Bosnians in their struggle against Austro-Hungarian rule.

The second Balkan war broke out and Ilić volunteered for the Serbian army. The war was over quickly and he returned to

Sarajevo in the autumn where he was in continuous contact with Princip and they resolved that one of them would make an attempt to assassinate Potiorek. Although Ilić still favoured an assassination attempt he now also spoke about the need to first build a political party.

Princip went to Belgrade in Serbia to further his studies arriving there on the 13 March 1914. Towards the end of the month he met Čabrinović who had received a press cutting from friends in Sarajevo about Archduke Franz Ferdinand's forthcoming visit to Bosnia. His friends knew he was interested in an assassination and at one time that he had had a revolver. Čabrinović showed the press cutting to Princip who himself had seen such a newspaper report soon after he arrived in Belgrade. At first Princip said nothing but later that day when they met again he invited Čabrinović to join him in assassinating the Archduke. Čabrinović accepted. Princip suggested his room-mate in Belgrade, Trifko Grabež, another nineteen year old Bosnian Serb, should join them.

To obtain weapons they made contact with Milan Ciganović who Princip knew from an earlier stay in Belgrade, and told him of their plan. Ciganović had been a guerrilla fighter in the Balkan wars and Princip had discovered he had kept bombs for himself when the wars ended. Ciganović was a member of the Black Hand and he discussed the plan with a fellow Black Hand member, Major Vojislav Tankosić, a Serbian army officer in charge of guerrilla training.

Ciganović had fought with Tankosić against the Bulgarians. Tankosić spoke to his boss, Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević, the leader of the Black Hand who approved and supported the plot. Dimitrijević was the Head of Serbian Military Intelligence, and commonly known as Apis (his bull-like physique recalled the ancient Egyptian god).

Through Ciganović, Tankosić supplied the cell with six bombs, four semi-automatic pistols, ammunition, money, and directions and credentials for a safe route used by the Black Hand to infiltrate

arms and agents into Austria-Hungary. Ciganović and two other former guerrilla fighters trained them in the use of the weapons.

Once he knew that they were able to obtain arms Princip wrote in allegorical form to Ilić in Sarajevo to tell him what was planned and to ask him to recruit a second cell of assassins in Sarajevo. The cell consisted of Vaso Čubrilović, Cvjetko Popović, two Serb youths, seventeen and eighteen years old, and Mehmed Mehmedbašić, a Muslim carpenter, twenty seven years old, and another member of the Black Hand, who had been planning to assassinate the Governor of Bosnia, General Potiorek.

Princip, Čabrinović and Grabež set out from Belgrade on the 28 May with the weapons for all the assassins and arrived in Sarajevo on the 4 June and met up with Ilić who took over co-ordination of the plot.

1.1.3 The Journey

Their first stop was at Sabac which they reached by river steamer service. [See: Map 1 – The Assassins Route to Sarajevo in Maps Section] On showing him the credentials given them by Ciganović, a captain of the Border Guard told them the best place to cross the border with their load of weapons without being seen. This was over the River Drina close to Loznica.

They reached Loznica by train and went to see another border guard whose name had been given to them at Sabac. While in Loznica Čabrinović sent post cards to friends mentioning his delight at returning to Bosnia. This caused an argument with Princip who wanted to keep everything secret. He and Grabež took Čabrinović's weapons, and asked him to make his own way to Tuzla, the main Bosnian town on their route, using Grabež's identity card.

The next part of the journey was the toughest. With guides provided by their contact they crossed the Drina into Bosnia and made their way on foot about 30 km across fields and through forests to the village of Priboj. There another contact, a teacher, recruited a trusted farmer to take the two students and their

weapons by cart to Tuzla. In a twist of fate the teacher was the older brother of Vaso Čubrilović, one of the assassins recruited by Ilić in Sarajevo.

Their contact in Tuzla provided a safe house and hid the weapons until they would be needed for the assassination. Čabrinović had already reached Tuzla and the three of them then set off by train for Sarajevo. Čabrinović again alarmed his colleagues by talking to a policeman on the train who knew his father. He learnt Sunday, the 28 June, was the date of the Archduke's visit to Sarajevo.

1.1.4 Did the Serb Government Know About the Plot?

A number of the Black Hand contacts and guides on the route to Sarajevo were also members of Narodna Odbrana (National Defence) another Serbian society. Unlike the Black Hand, Narodna Odbrana had an official public presence and good relations with the Serbian government.

Through one of these contacts information reached Nicholas Pašić, the Serbian Prime Minister. Students with six hand grenades and four revolvers were being smuggled into Bosnia. Their purpose was not stated but it did not take much imagination to realise they might be targeting the Archduke. The report also mentioned that a Serbian agent, Rade Malobabić, was involved in organising the transport of grenades and weapons into Bosnia.

According to Ljuba Jovanović, the Serbian Minister of Education, Pašić told the Serbian cabinet at the end of May or beginning of June *"there were people who were preparing to go to Sarajevo to kill Franz Ferdinand"* and the cabinet decided the border authorities should be ordered to stop them.

The Minister of the Interior issued orders against the illegal traffic of weapons across the border and Pašić ordered an investigation by the civil authorities at the border but this was obstructed by the Serbian border guards. The chief of the border guards was a member of the Black Hand central committee.

Pašić also ordered an investigation by the military authorities of Colonel Dimitrijević (Apis). In a written response Apis said nothing about the students. He said Malobabić was a Serb patriot and an excellent intelligence agent and he permitted him to arm his secret agents in Austrian territory so they could defend themselves. He also complained that Narodna Odbrana people were interfering with the work of his men. Pašić was not satisfied with this reply.

All this couldn't have happened at a worse time. The Serbian military in disagreement over the government of territories recently seized in the Balkan wars had forced Pašić to resign and call a general election. As the head of a caretaker government in June 1914 facing elections in a few weeks Pašić was in a very weak position to take forceful action to stop the plot. In Serbia it was dangerous to show any sign of sympathy for Austria-Hungary or to oppose Serb nationalist organisations especially any strongly represented amongst the Serbian military.

1.1.5 Was a Warning Given to the Austro-Hungarian Government?

Colonel Lešanin, the Serbian Military Attaché in Vienna in June 1914, told a journalist in 1915 *"…. a telegram from Pašić reached the Serbian Legation at Vienna in the first fortnight of June asking Jovan Jovanović, the Serbian Minister in Vienna, to let the Austrian Government know that, owing to a leakage of information, the Serbian Government had grounds to suspect a plot was being hatched against the life of the Archduke on the occasion of his journey to Bosnia and the Austro-Hungarian Government would be well advised to postpone the Archduke's visit."*

Lešanin also stated that Jovanović met Leon Bilinski, the Austro-Hungarian Finance Minister, on 21 June and *"…stressed in general terms the risks the Archduke might run from the inflamed public opinion in Bosnia and Serbia. Some serious personal misadventure might befall him. His journey might give rise to incidents and demonstrations*

that Serbia would deprecate but that would have fatal repercussions on Austro-Serbian relations."

After the meeting Jovanović told Lešanin *"…. Bilinski showed no sign of attaching great importance to the total message and dismissed it limiting himself to remarking when saying goodbye and thanking him: 'Let us hope nothing does happen.'"*

Jovanović choose to see Bilinski rather than Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, because he was on bad terms with Berchtold.

Bilinski never spoke publically on the subject, but his press department confirmed a meeting had taken place and included a vague warning.

1.1.6 In Sarajevo

The recruitment of the second cell, the arrival of the three from Belgrade, and the approaching date of the Archduke's visit did not stop Ilić from pursuing his political interests. He was making preparations for the creation of a political party. He also launched a weekly paper the first issue appearing on the 15 May.

He was having doubts about the wisdom of assassinating the Archduke and he argued with Princip that the present time was not favourable. It was best to first build up a political organisation. Princip did not give way and he later told the investigating judge that *"…. I was not in agreement with the postponement of the assassination because a certain morbid yearning for it had been awakened in me."* Ilić also tried to persuade Grabež to put off the attempt but with no success.

Whatever his thoughts Ilić in his role as plot co-ordinator collected the weapons from the safe house in Tuzla where they had been left by Princip and Grabež and brought them to Sarajevo. He also made a separate journey to nearby Bosanski Brod and some sources have suggested he went there to meet a Black Hand contact from Belgrade where they were having second thoughts about the assassination possibly triggered by the arms smuggling investigations initiated by Pašić.

After handing out the weapons on the day before the Archduke's visit Ilić visited the grave of Bogdan Zerajić's, the assassin who failed in his attempt in 1910. He was followed shortly afterwards by Čabrinović and then Princip.

1.1.7 Sunday, 28 June 1914, the Assassination

On Sunday morning the 28 June Ilić placed the six assassins at intervals along the Appel Quay, a boulevard alongside the Miljacka River through the centre of Sarajevo, the route the Archduke's motorcade of six cars would take that morning on their way to Sarajevo Town Hall. The Archduke and his wife were in the third car, a convertible with its top folded down.
The first assassin, Mehmedbašić, failed to act as the cars passed. The second, Čabrinović, threw his bomb but it hit the back of the Archduke's car and was knocked under the following car blowing a hole in the road and injuring passengers and bystanders.

The Archduke stopped his car to check the passengers in the bombed car were cared for and then ordered continuation of the motorcade to the Town Hall.

Čabrinović took his cyanide which didn't work and jumped into the river alongside the road. The river was low and he was pulled out by bystanders and police officers and arrested.

Amazingly, the speeches and ceremonies for the Town Hall visit went ahead more or less as planned. It was only after this that a change of plan in response to the assassination attempt was decided. The Archduke wanted to first visit the injured in hospital and the Duchess by her own wish instead of following her programme stayed with him.

This meant driving back along the Appel Quay. The driver of the lead car had not been told of the change of plan and took the turning off the Appel Quay into Franz Joseph Street the way to the Museum which the Archduke had been going to visit. The Archduke's car followed round the corner but was immediately stopped by General Potiorek passenger with the Archduke who realised the mistake.

The next few minutes decided the fate of Europe.

One assassin had stayed on the scene. Princip had heard the detonation of Čabrinović's bomb and rushed over in time to see Čabrinović being arrested and know that the attempt had failed. He decided to remain on the Archduke's publicised route in the unlikely hope he might be able to make a second attempt.

The Archduke's car stopped and started to reverse just a few feet from where Princip was standing. He didn't have time to unpack his bomb but stepped forward, drew his pistol and shot the Archduke and the Duchess at close range.

He was seized and badly beaten by the crowd before being taken away by the police. The Archduke and Duchess were sped to Konak Palace, the Governor's residence for medical treatment. Sophie was dead on arrival and the Archduke died shortly after. It was about 11.30 AM.

Princip later said he didn't mean to shoot the Duchess. He meant to shoot General Potiorek.

1.1.8 What Happened to the Assassins?

Nearly all the conspirators and assassins and most of those in Bosnia involved in getting them to Sarajevo were brought to account. Mehmedbašić was the only assassin to escape. He fled to neighbouring Montenegro.

At the trial in October 1914 in Sarajevo the authorities tried to show the assassins were young men led astray by pan-Serb propaganda emanating from Belgrade. They also tried to hide the fact that Croats and Muslims were involved in the plot and suggested the arms had been obtained from Narodna Odbrana in Belgrade. There was no mention of the Black Hand.

During the investigation and the trial Princip and the others made clear their objective was Yugoslav unity. *"I am a Yugoslav nationalist, aiming for the unification of all Yugoslavs, and I do not care what form of state, but it must be free from Austria,"* Princip told the court. He stated that Ilić was a Yugoslav nationalist like himself, dedicated to the unification of all South Slavs.

The idea for the assassination had been their own, that they had not been influenced by anyone in Belgrade, except that they had asked for weapons from former Bosnian Serb guerrillas in Belgrade, and had obtained their help in crossing the border into Bosnia.

Čabrinović who was the most talkative of the accused admitted that Ciganović, Djulaga Bukovac (a Muslim friend of Princip), Djuro Šarac (another friend of Princip and former guerrilla who helped with the weapons training) and Tankosić and a friend of Tankosić knew about the plot. When the judge asked Čabrinović who this friend was and he said he didn't know, Princip interrupted and said it was a man called Kazimirović. Kazimirović was a schoolmaster at Belgrade where Princip had studied. Princip probably mentioned the name to stop the line of questioning leading to Apis.

When asked if he had anything to add in his own defence, Princip said: *"As far as suggestions are concerned that somebody talked us into committing the assassination, that is not true. The idea for the assassination grew among us, and we realized it. We loved our people. In my own defence I have nothing to say."*

Though there was no proof the Court decided that Serbian military circles were implicated in the outrage. The verdict stated:

The Court regards it as proved by the evidence that both the Narodna Odbrana and military circles in the Kingdom of Serbia in charge of the espionage service, collaborated in the outrage. . . . There is no doubt that both the Narodna Odbrana and military circles on the active list in the Kingdom of Serbia knew of the aims of the outrage and were prodigal of all possible assistance and all possible protection to the perpetrators for whom they actually procured the means of carrying out the assassination.

Princip, Grabež and Čabrinović were each given 20 years jail. Čubrilović was given 16 years and Popović 13 years. Under Austro-Hungarian law capital punishment could not be applied to anyone under 20 years of age. Ilić was hanged.

Princip died in prison of tuberculosis in April 1918 aged 23.

1.1.9 The End of Apis

In late 1916 the outcome of the World War was in doubt with stalemate on the Western Front, Germany still occupying large parts of northern France, and revolution in Russia. All of Serbia had been overrun and the army had retreated to Salonika. Serbia was in a weak military position.

The Serbian government decided to rectify what might have been an obstacle in reaching a peace agreement; the failure to identify and punish the Serbian agents and military involved in the assassination of the Archduke. Pašić and Prince Alexander, the Serbian Regent, also had reasons to eliminate Dimitrijević (Apis) who had been dismissed as Head of Serbian Military Intelligence. Consequently, Apis and other Black Hand leaders were falsely charged with plotting to assassinate the Prince Regent.

During the trial that started in April 1917 it is believed that Apis was told he would not suffer the worst consequences if he admitted to his role in the assassination of the Archduke and he made the following written statement:

"As the Chief of the Intelligence Department of the General Staff, I engaged Rade Malobabić to organize the information service in Austria-Hungary. …. Feeling that Austria was planning a war with us, I thought that the disappearance of the Austrian Heir Apparent would weaken the power of the military clique he headed, and thus the danger of war would be removed or postponed for a while. I engaged Malobabić to organize the assassination on the occasion of the announced arrival of Franz Ferdinand to Sarajevo. …. Malobabić executed my order, organized and performed the assassination. His chief accomplices were in my service and received small payments from me."

Mehmedbašić was also involved in the trial and given 15 years jail. Tankosić had been killed in the war in late 1915.

Apis and Malobabić were found guilty of the trumped up charges and shot by firing squad.

Chapter 1.2

Reaction, 29 June – 22 July

1.2.1 Austria-Hungary Decides to Put an End to the Serb Problem

Immediately after the Sarajevo assassinations a strong belief emerged in Vienna that they were plotted in Belgrade and involved the Serbian government. They were the result of the Serb movement for a Greater Serbia. Austro-Hungarian decision-makers and senior officials concluded that diplomatic action would not solve the underlying problem and only a military invasion of Serbia would put a stop to the agitation for a Greater Serbia.

There had been bad relations between Austria-Hungary and Serbia since 1903 when Serbian officers in a military coup murdered the Serb royal family which had been friendly to Austria-Hungary and replaced it with one friendly to Russia. Austria-Hungary had annexed Bosnia in 1908, up to then part of the Ottoman Empire. Bosnia contained many Serbs and they and their fellow Serbs in Serbia had expected the Ottoman Empire to retreat from the Balkans and facilitate the unification of Bosnia's Serbs with those in Serbia. The Austro-Hungarian annexation now stood in their way.

A desire to be seen to be firm also influenced many in the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry. Firmness would counteract the perception of Austria-Hungary as a multi-national empire in decline. Firmness too, had worked in the past, regarding Bosnia, whereas negotiations had led to a loss of face and prestige.

Another factor was Austria-Hungary's position in the Balkans as a result of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. It had become weaker and the Empire had less influence. Serbia and the other Balkan states had ejected the Ottoman Turks from all but the small south-east corner around Constantinople. Serbia was now considerably

larger in area and population, and potentially a much greater military threat.

Conrad, the Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff, wanted immediately to attack Serbia without any diplomatic moves or warning. Berchtold told him time was needed to prepare and to assess the situation. Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, had a reputation for a conciliatory approach to Serbia which had not been successful in the past and he was thought not to be a firm-willed character, but though initially he expressed caution to Conrad, he took a very firm position for action throughout the rest of the crisis. Berchtold saw the Emperor who also believed in strong action against Serbia but told Berchtold he must get the agreement of Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister, and a very important and powerful man in the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy.

Tisza was the only Austro-Hungarian leader against immediate extreme measures. He wanted Austria-Hungary to take all the necessary diplomatic steps in its confrontation with Serbia so it was seen as behaving correctly and won international support, and to leave the way open for a diplomatic solution with Serbia. He was against any acquisition of Serbian territory and risking war while Austria-Hungary had yet to achieve satisfactory alliances with its other Balkan neighbours, Romania and Bulgaria. Tisza put his views in a memorandum to the Emperor.

The Hungarian part of the Empire itself was also multi-national and included Transylvania with a large Romanian minority. Tisza believed if there was war Romania would side with Russia hoping to take control of Transylvania. The Hungarian Magyar elite were also in a privileged political position and that would be threatened if more Slavs such as the Serbs became part of the Empire. Ironically, the assassinated Archduke had been in favour of giving more political power to the Slavs in the Empire to match that of the Austrian Germans and Hungarian Magyars.

Mindful of the need for German support, Berchtold also made it a priority to update Tschirschky, the German ambassador in

Vienna, and told him a *"final and fundamental reckoning with Belgrade"* was necessary. Tschirschky at this early stage had no instructions from Berlin and reported the views in Vienna to Berlin adding that *".... I take opportunity of every .... occasion to advise quietly but very impressively and seriously against too hasty steps"*. This was not well received by the Kaiser.

The Kaiser was on his yacht, the Meteor, at the Kiel regatta when he received the news of the assassination and immediately returned to his palace at Potsdam, near Berlin. On reading Tschirschky's report that he had been advising the leaders in Vienna *"against too hasty steps"* he irately demanded to know *"Who authorised him to do so? This is utterly stupid! It is none of his business since it is entirely Austria's affair what she intends to do. .... Will Tschirschky be so kind as to stop this nonsense! It was high time a clean sweep was made of the Serbs"*. The Kaiser believed *".... The Serbs must be disposed of, and that right soon"*. Tschirschky was soon told of this rebuke and thereafter encouraged the Austro-Hungarians to take a very strong line.

Even though Tschirschky's initial advice was cautious, the Austro-Hungarians should not take hasty measures, they received encouragement from an unofficial German quarter. Viktor Naumann, a well-known German journalist visiting Vienna just after the assassinations on the 1 July told Hoyos, Berchtold's chef de cabinet, that the German leadership would support Austria-Hungary in a strike against Serbia even if it brought in Russia. Naumann had no official status but he was known to be closely connected to Jagow, the German foreign minister, and Stumm, the political director at the German foreign office.

What Russia would do if Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia, Russia's fellow Slav nation located close to the Turkish Straits, an area of great strategic importance to Russia accounting for nearly half of Russian trade, was the big question. Austria-Hungary turned to Germany, its partner in the Triple Alliance.

The Triple Alliance was an alliance involving Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy dating from 1882. Germany and

Austria-Hungary together were also known as the Central Powers. Italy was in an odd position. Italian unification had involved the expulsion of the Habsburgs, the rulers of Austria-Hungary, from northern Italy, and the Italians harboured the ambition of acquiring other Italian speaking provinces of the Empire, such as Trieste. Italy was considered a potentially disloyal member of the Triple Alliance.

1.2.2 The Hoyos Mission and a German Blank Cheque

German support was essential. Berchtold decided to consult officially, but secretly, the German leadership and get their backing for Austria-Hungary's desire to deal with Serbia once and for all. His officials modified a recently prepared memorandum discussing what must be done to strengthen the position of Austria-Hungary and Germany in the Balkans and to prevent Russia building on the success of Serbia and its allies in the recent Balkan wars. In addition he asked the Emperor to write a personal letter to the Kaiser. Neither of these documents explicitly called for war against Serbia, but that extreme measures, including war, were intended, was clear.

To ensure these two documents were understood and had the greatest influence they were taken to Berlin by Hoyos who was strongly in favour of military action against Serbia and who could give an additional verbal brief to the leaders in Berlin and answer questions.

Tisza suggested changes to the documents. Instead of the phrase *"eliminated as a power factor in the Balkans"* he wanted it to say Serbia was to be *"required to give up its aggressive tendencies"*, but Hoyos had already left for Berlin and no changes were made.

Hoyos arrived in Berlin early Sunday morning, the 5 July, one week after the Sarajevo assassinations, and first briefed Szögyény, the Austro-Hungarian minister in Berlin, on the Emperor's letter to the Kaiser and the revised memorandum. As the senior Austro-Hungarian representative Szögyény took the two documents to

the Kaiser in Potsdam. Hoyos went to see Zimmermann, under-secretary of state at the German foreign office.

After reading the documents the Kaiser first expressed some caution mentioning the possibility of *"a serious European complication"* and that he needed to hear the opinion of the chancellor, but, according to Szögyény, after lunch he said he was sure the chancellor would agree with him and *".... action should not be delayed. Russia's attitude will be hostile in any event, ... we should be confident that Germany will stand by our side with the customary loyalty of allies. .... if we had truly recognised the necessity of a military action against Serbia, then he would regret it if we failed to exploit the present moment, which is so advantageous to us"*. The Kaiser thought that as things stood today, Russia was not prepared for war and would think long and hard over whether to issue the call to arms.

At the foreign office Hoyos was keen to convince Zimmermann that Austria-Hungary was firm in its purpose and had a plan. He said Serbia was to be invaded and strategic border areas annexed by Austria-Hungary. Most of the country would be partitioned between Bulgaria and Albania and what remained turned into a client state of Austria-Hungary.

Speaking unofficially Zimmermann agreed with military action saying Austria-Hungary could no longer tolerate Serbian provocation. He also told Hoyos he thought there was a 90 percent probability of a European war.

At the end of the afternoon Bethmann, the German chancellor, who was at his estate, but who knew what was happening, and Zimmermann, were summoned to Potsdam to join the Kaiser already in conference with the available German military leaders. The Kaiser briefed them on the documents from Vienna. He said *"Emperor Franz Joseph must be assured that even in this critical hour we shall not abandon him"*. The prevailing opinion of the meeting was *"the sooner the Austrians make their move against Serbia the better, and that the Russians - though friends of Serbia - will not join in"*.

Falkenhayn, the German minister of war, asked if any preparatory measures should be taken. The Kaiser was clear. No

preparations were necessary. A war with France and Russia was unlikely though it was something to keep in mind. Germany's top military men Moltke, the German Chief of the General Staff, and Tirpitz, German navy minister, were on holiday but they were kept informed. Waldersee, deputy to the German Chief of the General Staff, who was also away, later expressed a grimmer view than the Kaiser saying to a military colleague that Germany could become *"involved in a war from one day to another"*. He thought everything depended on the attitude of Russia to the Austro-Serbian business. Some in the German military thought the situation was very serious and believed a war with Russia now was much preferable to one later as Russian military strength in a few years would outstrip that of Germany.

The next morning, Monday, the 6 July, the Kaiser left for his annual North Sea cruise on his yacht. All were agreed it was best to give the appearance that everything was normal. In Berlin, Bethmann met with Jagow, the German foreign minister, Zimmermann and the two Austro-Hungarians, Szögyény and Hoyos, to formalise the discussions and decisions of the previous day. Szögyény summarised the results of the various meetings as follows. *"It is the view of the German government that we must judge what ought to be done to sort out this relationship [with Serbia]; whatever our decision turns out to be, we can be confident that Germany as our ally and a friend of the Monarchy will stand behind us. .... the Chancellor and his Imperial master view an immediate intervention by us against Serbia as the best and most radical solution of our problems in the Balkans. .... the present moment as more favourable than a later one"*.

Germany had given Austria-Hungary a "blank cheque". They also wanted them to act quickly. The Emperor soon after thanked the Kaiser for being *"..... now entirely of our opinion that a decision must be made to put an end to the intolerable situation in regard to Serbia"*.

What did Germany Expect? It has been argued, and still is, that Germany wanted war. The intention had been there for some time and planning started as early as 1912, and the Sarajevo crime was

simply an ideal opportunity to start the war which would enable Germany to expand its boundaries and make it the master of Europe and a world power. This is the view put forward by Fritz Fischer, the Hamburg historian, though most of the evidence for it comes from what was said and done by German leaders during the war, and the war itself must have had an enormous impact on their ideas.

In addition to any imperial ambition there were two issues of great concern to the German leaders; the great power status of its only reliable ally, the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire which was seen as an empire in decline, and the growing military might of Russia.

Russia had undertaken a vast military modernisation and expansion programme following its defeat in a war with Japan in 1905. The part of this programme concerning strategic railways to concentrate troops in the event of mobilisation was being funded by loans from France. In 1914 the programme was at least another three years from completion. For many in the German leadership especially the military, this meant a war now with Russia - a preventive war - was better than one later, when Germany could never match the Russian masses. On their part the Russians always thought they could never match German superiority in weapons technology.

It was worth taking the risk that Russia would come to the aid of Serbia if it was invaded by Austria-Hungary, and in the case of the Kaiser, as seen at Potsdam on the 5 July, he thought the risk was very small. Russia was not ready, and the Tsar would not support regicides, and those who murdered royals.

If Russia did not defend Serbia, as the German leaders thought most likely, and Serbia was taken under the wing of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it would be an enormous boost for Austria-Hungary, and Germany which would then have greater influence in the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East in those days. And, if Russia failed to act because it was held back by France and Britain it could lead to the breakup of the Triple

Entente, the Franco-Russian alliance (formed in 1894) linked with Britain through the Entente Cordial with France (1904) and the Anglo-Russian Convention (1907).

Bethmann and some of the others while agreeing wholeheartedly with the course of action decided at Potsdam might also have had another justification in mind. It was a test of what Russia really intended. If Russia was rational, that is rational as these Germans understood rationality in this case, it would not go to war over Serbia. Russia was still militarily weaker than Germany, and it would not risk revolution at home, that a long destructive war might bring about. If it did go to war, it meant Russia wanted war all along, and Germany should accept the challenge. Again, it was better now than later.

This explanation can be viewed as one side of a coin, the "calculated risk" theory of German responsibility for the war on one side, and "testing for a threat" on the other. Germany was creating the situation in which Russia sees an opportunity for war. Why create the opportunity if you want to avoid war? It looks like "calculated risk" by another name.

There is a third way to look at the course the German leaders took. Rather than the outcome of a rational attempt to meet or protect German ambitions it was more the result of a dysfunctional government led by personalities unsuited to leadership. It surely is incredible that while the Kaiser was counting the chance of war with Russia as very unlikely, just something to keep in mind, the top official of the German foreign office, Zimmermann, was telling Hoyos, the envoy of their major ally, that there was a 90 percent probability of war as a result of the policy they had chosen. There was no coherent German view of what to expect or what Germany might gain.

1.2.3 Austria-Hungary Prepares an Ultimatum

On his return to Vienna on the 7 July Hoyos immediately met Berchtold, Tisza, Stürgkh and Tschirschky and told them about the unqualified support the German leadership had given Austria-

Hungary and his meeting with Zimmermann. Tisza was furious on hearing for the first time the proposal to partition Serbia.

Tschirschky left the meeting so the others could hold a Joint Ministerial Council.

Berchtold asked the Council *"whether the moment had not arrived to render Serbia innocuous once and for all by a display of force?"* now they had the full and unconditional support of Germany. He added that intervention in Serbia makes war with Russia very likely. Immediate military action was ruled out because of Tisza's objections and the fear it would isolate Austria-Hungary diplomatically. They agreed the first step should be the presentation of an ultimatum to Serbia, but with the exception of Tisza, they all wanted the ultimatum to be so harsh that it would be rejected and open the way *".... to a radical solution by means of military intervention"*. It would give them an excuse to invade Serbia.

They believed a purely diplomatic success, even the *"sensational humiliation"* of Serbia, would be worthless. Tisza agreed the note could be stiff but it must not be obviously unacceptable. He said he would resign if he was not consulted over its contents.

Rapid action from Vienna, as desired by the Germans, was now highly unlikely. As well as the need to persuade Tisza to agree to an unacceptable ultimatum, the leaders, including Conrad, discovered many regular troops were on harvest leave. Future leave was cancelled but those already on leave were not recalled because of the negative economic impact it would have and the public alarm it might create. Also, by coincidence the French president was due to make a state visit to Russia from the 20-23 July and it was best to deliver the ultimatum after he had left so the Russians and French did not have the chance to co-ordinate their plans and reinforce each other's negative reactions.

Tisza prepared another memorandum for the Emperor setting out his objections to the majority view in the Joint Ministerial Council. He did not agree with the proposed action because he believed it would bring Russian intervention and a world war.

After giving the memorandum to Berchtold to present to the Emperor Tisza returned to Budapest and was away from the centre of decision taking until the 14 July.

Berchtold told Tschirschky about the Joint Ministerial Council meeting and said even if the Emperor accepted Tisza's view it was still possible to make the note unacceptable to Serbia. Tschirschky gave Berchtold the latest message from Berlin that *"an action of the Monarchy against Serbia is fully expected and that Germany will not understand why we should neglect this opportunity of dealing a blow"*. The Emperor himself on hearing the results of the Council meeting said he believed Berchtold's and Tisza's positions could be reconciled and *"concrete demands should be levelled at Serbia"*.

On the 13 July, now two weeks after the assassinations, Berchtold received the results of a three-day investigation in Sarajevo by a legal counsellor from the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry. In a strict legal sense there was *"nothing to prove or suppose that the Serbian Government is accessory to the inducement for the crime"* but there was evidence suggesting that elements in the Serbian government were responsible. General Potiorek added his comment to the report that it was the *"alternative government"* in Serbia, made up of elements in the army, that was responsible for the assassinations. In this respect, he was not wide of the mark.

Burián, the Hungarian representative in Vienna, a close colleague of Tisza, and a Hungarian like him, had come to the same view as the majority in the Council and volunteered to go to Budapest to try to persuade Tisza to drop his objections. This had the desired effect and Tisza changed his mind and returned to Vienna.

He now accepted the ultimatum to Serbia should be designed to be rejected but he wanted two conditions, that special defensive measures should be taken on the Hungarian border with Romania and that Austria-Hungary itself would not annex any Serbian territory except for minor border modifications. This latter point met his objection at having more Slavs in the Empire as that would dilute the influence of the Hungarians.

Now there was agreement the Austro-Hungarians set about drafting the ultimatum. They also wanted to give the rest of Europe the impression that nothing alarming was about to happen and Conrad and Krobatin went on leave and the newspapers were told not to comment on Serbia.

On the 19 July the Joint Ministerial Council met in secret to agree the final wording of the ultimatum and decide the diplomatic steps to be taken against Serbia. The ultimatum was to be presented to Serbia on the 23 July at 6.00 P.M. after the French leaders had left Russia. There was a forty-eight hour time limit for a response. Tisza got the meeting to agree that Vienna would announce in due course that Austria-Hungary did not intend to annex any Serbian territory. He hoped this would keep the Russians out of the conflict. It left open other possibilities for the dismemberment of Serbia involving its other neighbours.

The ultimatum began by accusing the Serbian government of breaking the promises it made in March 1909, following the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia in 1908, when Serbia recognised the annexation and made a declaration it would live with Austria-Hungary on a *"footing of good neighbourliness"*. Instead, the Serbian government had encouraged subversive movements whose purpose was to separate portions of territory from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

It went on to say that the confessions of the assassins had proved the Sarajevo crime had been planned and prepared in Belgrade, though it avoided accusing the Serbian government itself of direct involvement. It demanded the King of Serbia should issue an army order of the day, and the Serb government publish a notice across the Kingdom, condemning all propaganda against the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the ultimate aim of which was to detach territories from the Monarchy. The ultimatum gave the text to be used.

The ultimatum then made 10 further specific demands.

(1) To suppress publications carrying propaganda against the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and threatening its territorial integrity.

(2) To dissolve all organisations involved in such propaganda.

The ultimatum mentioned Narodna Obrana, but not the more sinister Ujedinjenje ili Smrt (Union or Death, also known as the Black Hand) which had been involved in the assassinations and had links to the Serbian army and government.

(3) To eliminate such propaganda from school books and remove teachers hostile to Austria-Hungary.

(4) To remove from military service and the government administration all those involved in propaganda against Austria-Hungary. The names and actions of those involved would be supplied by the Vienna government.

(5) To accept the collaboration in Serbia of officials of the Austro-Hungarian government in the suppression of the subversive movement directed against the integrity of the Monarchy.

(6) To take judicial proceedings against accessories to the Sarajevo crime who were on Serbian territory and to accept the participation of officials of the Austro-Hungarian government in related investigations

(7) To proceed immediately with the arrest of Major Voija Tankosic and of a Milan Ciganovic, a Serbian State employee implicated by the findings of the preliminary investigation at Sarajevo.

(8) To prevent the involvement of Serbian officials in the smuggling of weapons and explosives across the frontier into Austria-Hungary and to dismiss and punish severely members of the Serbian Frontier Service who helped the assassins.

(9) To explain the statements of senior Serbian officials both in Serbia and abroad, since the 28 June, expressing hostility towards the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

(10) To notify the Austro-Hungarian government without delay of the implementation of the measures given above.

The Serbian government had 48 hours to reply. If there was no reply or it was unsatisfactory, the Austro-Hungarian government would sever diplomatic relations.

1.2.4 German and Austro-Hungarian Liaison

Though the German leaders left it entirely to Austria-Hungary to decide what needed to be done, they continued to exert diplomatic pressure on the leadership in Vienna. On the 11 July Tschirschky called on Berchtold to impress upon him once more that quick action was called for. Berchtold explained how the French president's visit to St Petersburg meant the ultimatum would not be presented before the 23 July after he had left, so there would be no opportunity for the Russians and French to co-ordinate their response to the ultimatum at a high level.

Berchtold also told Tschirschky that he would be glad to know what Berlin thought regarding the demands that should be made on Serbia. Jagow replied saying that it was a matter for Austria-Hungary though it seemed desirable that Vienna should collect enough material to prove that in Serbia pan-Serb agitation exists and is a danger to the Monarchy.

During the war in 1915 in a conversation with a leading German newspaper editor Bethmann said *"I deliberately avoided acquaintance with its contents [the ultimatum]. I did not want to make any amendments in it - if one makes amendments it always proves afterwards that the mistake that was made was one's own, and I had no desire for that. We simply felt that Austria's hand must be strengthened, that at the moment when at last she was determined to act with firmness she must not be left in the lurch"*.

Jagow began a press campaign for "localisation" with an article in the semi-official North German Gazette. It said *"... more and more*

voices are heard admitting that the desire of Austria-Hungary to bring about a clarification of her relations with Serbia is justified". To maintain the European peace *"... the settlement of differences which may arise between Austria-Hungary and Serbia should remain localised"*.

Localisation, keeping other powers out of the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia even if it led to war between them, was the lynchpin of German policy.

The German military attaché in Vienna kept Moltke and Waldersee, Moltke's deputy, informed about Vienna's intentions, even though Moltke was on holiday and Waldersee away from Berlin. An Austro-Hungarian staff officer told the attaché Austria-Hungary would send an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia and war was certain. He had the date of the ultimatum so Moltke and Waldersee both knew when to return to Berlin.

As the day of the delivery of the ultimatum approached Bethmann sent instructions to the German ambassadors in St Petersburg, Paris and London. They were to support strongly the Austro-Hungarian position and say that unless Austria-Hungary wished to renounce its position as a great power it must press its demands on Serbia and if necessary enforce them with military measures of its choosing. They were to stress that Germany *"…. anxiously desires the localisation of the conflict, as any intervention by another Power might in consequence of the various alliances bring incalculable consequences in its train"*.

Though they were fully informed of what the Austro-Hungarians intended and had backed them without qualification the German leaders did not see the final ultimatum until the 22 July, the day before it was to be delivered to Serbia. In memoirs written after the war both Jagow and Bethmann claimed they thought the ultimatum was too strong.

1.2.5 Diplomatic Intelligence

After the initial shock of the assassinations, European politics, business and leisure continued as usual. Assassination of a public figure was not such an unusual crime.

Both the Austro-Hungarian and German leadership were careful to avoid any hint that serious and extreme steps against Serbia were being prepared. The Kaiser went on his annual North Sea cruise, top military personnel such as Moltke stayed on holiday, and others such as Conrad took holidays as planned. But behind the scenes diplomacy and intelligence did their work.

A early as the 8 July, Czernin, the Austrian chargé d'affaires in St Petersburg, mentioned to Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, the possibility that the Austro-Hungarian government might demand the support of the Serbian government in an investigation within Serbia of the assassinations. Sazonov said this would make a very bad impression in Russia. The Austrians should drop this idea *"lest they set their foot upon a dangerous path"*.

Russian intelligence had broken the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic code and not long after Czernin's comment it learned that Vienna was asking its embassy in St Petersburg when the French president would be leaving the city after his state visit. The Russians had also broken the Italian diplomatic code and they knew the contents of the message sent by the Italian foreign minister to the Italian ambassador in St Petersburg telling him Austria-Hungary intended to take strong action against Serbia.

On the 16 July Bunsen, the British ambassador in Vienna, wired an alarming report to London. Count Lutzow, a former Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Rome, who had been in conversation with Berchtold and Forgách at the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry, had told him the Austro-Hungarians would demand the Serbian government adopt measures to stop nationalist and anarchist propaganda, and the Austro-Hungarian government was in no mood to parley and would insist on immediate compliance, failing which force would be used. Germany was in

complete agreement with this plan. Lutzow asked Bunsen if he realised how grave the situation was.

Bunsen also informed Shebeko, the Russian ambassador in Vienna, who then reported to St Petersburg that the Austro-Hungarian government was planning to make demands on Serbia that would be unacceptable to any independent state. Sazonov showed Shebeko's report to the Tsar who commented that a state should not present any sort of demands to another unless it was bent on war.

Carlotti, the Italian ambassador, gave his impression to Schilling, the Russian foreign ministry head of chancery, that Austria-Hungary was capable of taking an irrevocable step in regard to Serbia in the belief that Russia would not take any forcible measures to protect Serbia.

In London, a few days later on the 20 July Bunsen's information was corroborated when Haldane, the British Lord Chancellor, received a letter from Hoyos trying to justify the action Austria-Hungary was about to take. Haldane forwarded the letter to Grey, the British foreign secretary, with the comment: *"This is very serious. Berchtold is apparently ready to plunge Europe into war to settle the Serbian question. He would not take this attitude unless he was assured of German support"*. And on the 22 July the day before the delivery of the ultimatum, a letter arrived from Rodd, British ambassador in Rome, saying San Giuliano, the Italian minister for foreign affairs, who was in constant touch with the Austro-Hungarian embassy, feared the communication to be made to Serbia had been drafted in unacceptable terms. He was convinced a party in Austria was determined to take the opportunity of crushing Serbia.

1.2.6 French and Russian Leaders Meet in St Petersburg

The subject did not entirely disappear from public view as the press, especially the Serbian and Austro-Hungarian press, continued to publish theories and accusations concerning the

assassinations, and on the 13 July, Pourtalès, the German ambassador in St Petersburg, reported a conversation with Sazonov to Berlin in which Sazonov denied the Austro-Hungarian press claims that the Sarajevo outrage was the result of a pan-Serb plot. He said there was not the slightest proof that the Serbian government was involved and it was unjust to hold it responsible for the acts of a few callow youths. This was a good summary of the line emerging in St Petersburg.

Szápáry, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in St Petersburg, was in Vienna for the first two weeks of July because of his wife's illness. When he returned to St Petersburg he immediately called on Sazonov who had also just returned to St Petersburg after a short break to rest before the arrival of the French, and said his government was interested only in putting an end to terrorism and was convinced that the Serbian government would be accommodating with respect to its demands. In light of this apparently reasonable attitude Sazonov gave Szápáry no warnings about how Russia might react. But, Sazonov was obviously mindful of graver possibilities as shortly after this conversation with Szápáry he told Buchanan, the British ambassador in St Petersburg, that anything in the shape of an ultimatum at Belgrade could not leave Russia indifferent and she might be forced to take precautionary military measures. Buchanan wired this information to London.

That the Russian leadership foresaw the possibility of an ultimatum is also confirmed by remarks Sazonov made to Pourtalès just before the French arrived in St Petersburg. He told Pourtalès he had the *"most alarming reports"*. If Austria-Hungary was determined to break the peace she would have to reckon with Europe. Russia would not be able to tolerate Austria-Hungary using threatening language to Serbia or taking military measures.

On the 20 July at 2.00 P.M. the French presidential party arrived at Kronstadt the naval harbour close to St Petersburg. Poincaré, the French president, had a one-to-one conversation with the Tsar on his yacht as they went ashore. They discussed matters concerning

the alliance between the two countries including the French efforts to maintain a large army. Both men were keen to reaffirm the diplomatic and military solidarity of the alliance.

The next day the Tsar and Poincaré met again. They talked about the tension between Britain and Russia in Persia. They believed local interests were the cause and neither Britain nor Russia could be blamed.

Russia, France and Britain were known as the Triple Entente. There was a formal defence alliance between Russia and France, and Britain had separate understandings, "ententes", with Russia and France respectively. The one with France was well established and discussions were underway to expand the Russian one especially concerning naval matters. Both France and Russia were keen that Britain would become more formally involved in an alliance involving the three countries and this was the reason the Tsar and Poincaré were keen to avoid any friction between Russia and Britain.

According to Poincaré, the Tsar was concerned by what Austria-Hungary might do regarding Serbia and said *"…. that under the present circumstances, the complete alliance between our two governments appears to him more necessary than ever"*.

During a diplomatic reception Buchanan took the opportunity of telling Poincaré his fear that Austria-Hungary would send a very stiff note to Serbia and suggested it would be a good idea if Russia and Austria-Hungary held direct talks in Vienna. Poincaré rejected this as *"very dangerous"* and suggested instead a joint Anglo-French demand for moderation in Vienna.

Two incidents indicated what was on the minds of the leaders assembled in St Petersburg and what must have taken up a significant part, if not the greater part, of their discussions.

Szápáry was introduced to Poincaré at a public diplomatic reception. After expressing his sympathy concerning the assassinations in Sarajevo Poincaré asked about the Austro-Hungarian judicial inquiry. As if to imply the results would be suspect he mentioned two earlier Austro-Hungarian inquiries into

other violent protest incidents that had produced false evidence. He pointed out to Szápáry that if demands were made on Serbia that Serbia had a friend in Russia, and Russia had an ally, France. Szápáry was deeply offended by these remarks made in public and in his report to Vienna referred to the *"tactless, almost threatening demeanour"* of the French president.

During a dinner held by Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, the commander of the Imperial Guard and a first cousin once removed of the Tsar, for the French visitors, his wife and sister-in-law, both daughters of the King of Montenegro, talked openly and enthusiastically about war with Germany and Austria and the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine by France, lost in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71.

The sister-in-law, Militza, had even when travelling in France a few years before sent someone over the border into Lorraine to collect some soil, and she now proudly pointed out to the French ambassador the Lorraine thistles on the table of honour that had been grown in soil mixed with that sample from Lorraine itself.

On the last day of French visit, the 23 July, the Tsar and Poincaré watched a military review of 70,000 men and Viviani, the French prime minister and foreign minister, and Sazonov agreed instructions to be sent to their ambassadors in Vienna. The ambassadors were instructed to recommend moderation to Austria-Hungary and express the hope she did nothing to compromise Serbian independence. These instructions arrived too late. The Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia had already been delivered.

Despite the efforts of the Austro-Hungarians and Germans to carry on as normal and to allay fears that a crisis was in the offing, the Russians and French had a good idea that severe measures were in the pipeline and had the opportunity to discuss and agree how they would respond.

As to how far they would go we know the answer. Russia was willing to defend Serbia and France was willing to come to the aid of Russia under their military alliance. What we don't know or can

only speculate about is exactly how they felt about this. Were they reluctantly standing up for Serbia or did they also respectively seize the opportunity, given to them by Germany and Austria-Hungary, to achieve their long-term objectives, control of the Turkish Straits and the return of Alsace-Lorraine.

The Turkish Straits had enormous importance for Russia. Something near a half of Russian exports passed through the Straits, and the figure was even higher, around 75 percent for wheat and rye exports which generated vital cash needed for Russia's big industrialisation effort. The impact on Russia of any disruption to this trade had been demonstrated during the Italian-Turkish war in 1912, when the Turks briefly closed the Straits to shipping.

1.2.7 Serbs Deny Everything

The Serbian government quickly made its position clear. The crime did not involve Serbia. It had occurred on Austro-Hungarian territory and involved only Austro-Hungarian citizens of Bosnia. When the Austro-Hungarian chargé called at the Serbian foreign ministry two days after the Sarajevo assassinations to ask unofficially if the Serbian government did not consider it advisable to investigate possible Serbian involvement in the assassinations he was told *"nothing had been done so far and the matter did not concern the Serbian Government"*.

Soon after this the Serbian minister in Vienna warned the Serbian government that Austria-Hungary might take strong action and an announcement was made in Vienna that Austria-Hungary was planning a demarche with the Serbian government following the close of the Sarajevo preliminary inquiry to secure the pursuit of the criminals shown to be on Serbian territory.

Pašić, the Serbian prime minister, told the German minister in Belgrade of his horror and indignation at the crime in Sarajevo and mindful of the accusations being levelled at Serbia added *".... that a civilised government could not possibly be held responsible for the excesses of callow and overwrought lads"*. He also claimed the

surveillance of nationalistic associations at home and abroad was most difficult for a liberal and democratic government such as Serbia's.

Nationalistic associations were indeed at the heart of the problem. There were several very active in Serbia including the "Black Hand" controlled by elements in the army who had been behind the assassinations. When the Serbian minister in Vienna was told of the possibility that Austria would ask the Serbian government to dissolve various nationalist associations. He responded saying *"…. the whole of Serbia will have to be dissolved. Not one of us but cherishes the hope of a union of all Serbs"*.

The months prior to the assassinations had seen a political crisis in Serbia over how the territories taken during the recent Balkan wars should be ruled. It was a power struggle between the army which wanted greater influence in Serbian affairs and a more forceful Greater Serbia policy, and the civilian government led by Pašić. He had prevailed and called a general election for the 14 August but now during the election campaign he could not afford to be seen to be giving in to Austro-Hungarian demands.

In an interview published on the 17 July by a leading German newspaper Pašić denied any Serbian involvement in the assassinations and spoke of Austro-Hungarian oppression of Serbs. He said if Serbia was attacked by a great power then other states would come to its aid. Pašić later disavowed the interview.

News of Bunsen's report also reached Belgrade where it was now realised that Austria-Hungary might demand a mixed commission of inquiry which would imply foreign intervention in Serb domestic and legislative affairs. Bunsen's information made it clear Austria-Hungary was planning *"momentous pressure"* on Serbia which could develop into an armed attack.

Crackanthorpe, the British chargé in Belgrade, who had a copy of Bunsen's report asked Gruić, Serbian foreign ministry secretary-general, if it might be a good idea for Belgrade to launch an independent investigation into the alleged South Slav conspiracy on Serbian soil. Gruić said they must wait for the findings of the

Austro-Hungarian investigation in Sarajevo. The Serbian government would comply with *"whatever request for further investigation the circumstances might call for and which would be compatible with international usage"*.

On the 20 July now three weeks after the assassinations Pašić sent an instruction to the Serbian ministers to the great powers to say since the Sarajevo outrage the Austro-Hungarian press has been putting the blame on Serbia and the pan-Serb idea. The Serbian government was concerned that Austria-Hungary might use the occasion to humiliate Serbia. Serbia could not accept demands which no other country that respects its own independence and dignity would accept. He the left Belgrade for an election campaign tour of southern Serbia.

1.2.8 British Diplomacy

At the time of the assassinations Lichnowsky, the German ambassador in London, had been in Berlin and on returning to London on the 6 July called on Grey. He said there were feelings of anxiety and pessimism in Berlin. It was known that the Austrians intended to do something and might take military action against Serbia. In response to Grey, he added there would be no annexation of territory. He made the point that Germany was very worried about the attitude of Russia, and added that a possible Anglo-Russian naval agreement was also a cause for German concern. There was a feeling in Germany that it might be better not to restrain Austria-Hungary as trouble now would be better than trouble later.

The prospective Anglo-Russian naval agreement was meant to be secret but a German spy in the Russian embassy in London had revealed to Berlin that talks between the British and the Russians were taking place. Grey ignored this reference but said he would talk to the Russians about the German concerns.

Two days later Grey saw Benckendorff, the Russian ambassador in London, and repeated the substance of Lichnowsky's remarks. Grey said that discoveries made during the

inquiry into the assassination might give the Austro-Hungarians cause to act against Serbia. Benckendorff believed that would arouse Russian public opinion and he hoped Germany would restrain Austria-Hungary. He noted Grey's comment that the Germans felt threatened by Russian armaments and might therefore support Austria-Hungary and said he would write to Sazonov about this.

When Grey saw Lichnowsky the next day he mentioned first the military talks between the British and the French and the Russians to confirm they had been on the basis that the hands of the British government were completely free. Britain was not part of an anti-German alliance. He went on to report the Russian ambassador's statement that the Russian leaders in St. Petersburg had no hostility toward Germany. If Austria-Hungary's action was reasonable and didn't provoke pan-Slav feeling it would be comparatively easy to encourage patience in St. Petersburg.

Grey followed this up wiring Buchanan saying if Austria-Hungary's demands were reasonable every effort should be made to prevent any breach of the peace. To this end it would be a good idea if Austria-Hungary and Russia had direct talks if things became difficult. He could suggest this if occasion demanded.

Lichnowsky reported to Berlin that the British government would use its influence for Serbia to accept Austro-Hungarian demands provided they were moderate and reconcilable with the independence of Serbia. It was vital that the Austro-Hungarian government was in a position to prove beyond doubt the connection between the Sarajevo murders and political circles in Belgrade.

Thus the wheels of diplomacy turned but one of Grey's senior officials picked up the signs of the trouble to come. A report from Rumbold, British chargé in Berlin, said Jagow had admitted he practically drafted an article in a leading German newspaper stating any conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia should remain local. He insisted the issue between those two countries should be settled by those two countries alone without

interference from outside. That being his view, he had considered it not appropriate to try to influence the Austro-Hungarian government.

Crowe, the British assistant under-secretary for foreign affairs, added a comment to Rumbold's report. *"It is difficult to understand the attitude of the German government. On the face of it, it does not bear the stamp of straightforwardness. If they really are anxious to see Austria kept reasonably in check, they are in the best position to speak at Vienna"*.

The next day, 23 July, Austria-Hungary delivered its ultimatum to Serbia.

PART 2

Ultimatum

23-27 July / 5 Days

Reaction to the ultimatum, Serbia's reply, Germany's ambiguous stance, first attempts at mediation.

Chapter 2.1

Austria-Hungary – Takes German Advice

On the morning of the 24 July, the day after the delivery of the ultimatum to Serbia, Austria-Hungary immediately took steps to counter Russia's likely reaction to the document. Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, asked Kudashev, Russian embassy counsellor in Vienna, to call on him. He explained the purpose of the ultimatum was to stop Serbia supporting the Greater Serbia movement and to enable Austria-Hungary to check that it was doing so. Austria had no intention of taking territory from Serbia.

Kudashev reported to St Petersburg that Vienna considered her demands could be met and was prepared to risk armed conflict in the event of rejection. Berchtold had said Austria-Hungary had to give proof of her stature as a great power, essential to the balance of power in Europe.

Berchtold also sent instructions to Szápáry to tell Sazonov Austria-Hungary did not covet Serbian possessions or intend to infringe the sovereignty of Serbia. If this did not persuade Russia to give Austria-Hungary a free hand in dealing with Serbia he was to make it clear that Vienna would go to *"extreme lengths"* to obtain fulfilment of its demands and it would not recoil from the possibility of European complications, a euphemism for war.

Mensdorff, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in London, gave a message from Vienna to the British Foreign Office. It said the note to Serbia was not an "ultimatum" but a demarche with a time limit. If it was rejected, Austria-Hungary would break off relations and begin military preparations, though not military operations. This seemed to give time for diplomacy to work.

Early the next day, Saturday, the 25 July, acting on instructions from St Petersburg Kudashev asked for an extension of the time limit. He saw Macchio, an Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry

senior official, who conducted diplomatic conversations Berchtold did not handle or did not want to handle. Macchio said there was no possibility of extending the time limit and also rejected any idea that the other powers could be involved in the dispute.

Not satisfied with this response Kudashev telegramed Berchtold demanding an extension of the time limit. Berchtold had already left Vienna for Bad Ischl where the Emperor resided to be with the Emperor when the Serbian reply was received. Berchtold replied to Macchio that he agreed with his earlier statements to Kudashev and he could also tell him that *"even after the breaking-off of diplomatic relations the unconditional acceptance of our demands could bring about a peaceful solution"* though Serbia would then have to pay all of Vienna's costs.

Berchtold also telegramed Szápáry saying he was to reassure Sazonov that the demand for Austro-Hungarian officials to operate in Serbia was not an infringement of its sovereignty. The idea was to establish a "Security Bureau" in Belgrade similar to the Russian bureaux in Paris and Berlin, where Russian officials monitored the activities of the Russian revolutionaries in exile.

News that the Serbian reply to the ultimatum had been taken as a rejection by Giesl, the Austro-Hungarian minister in Belgrade, reached Berchtold at Bad Ischl at 8.00 P.M. He went to see the Emperor. Krobatin, the Austro-Hungarian minister of war, was also present and the three men agreed to continue the plan agreed in early July. There would be war with Serbia. The Emperor ordered mobilisation of seven army corps against Serbia, Plan-B, to begin on the 28 July. They agreed there would be no military deployment along the frontier with Russia in Galicia and a central reserve would be maintained until it was clear how the crisis was developing.

The Austro-Hungarian army had a total of forty-eight divisions. In Plan-B (Balkans) twenty of those divisions would be mobilised and sent south to invade Serbia. If there was war with Russia, Plan-R (Russia) would be implemented. In Plan-R all divisions would be mobilised and forty would be concentrated in the north

facing Russia leaving eight divisions to form a defensive screen against Serbia. If after implementing Plan-B, Plan-R had to be implemented twelve of the divisions moving south would have to be diverted north to fight Russia. It was vital that Conrad, the Chief of the General Staff, knew as soon as possible if those divisions would be needed in the north before committing them to battle in Serbia.

Also, late that Saturday Vienna received a report from Szögyény that was to have far reaching consequences. Berlin believed Austria-Hungary should declare war and start military operations immediately if the Serbian reply was unsatisfactory. Any delay gave other powers the opportunity to intervene. It was best to present the world with a *fait accompli*.

On Sunday after digesting this news Berchtold called in Conrad and said he wanted a declaration of war as soon as possible. Conrad did not want to conduct military operations until the 12 August when the Austro-Hungarian army would have completed its mobilisation but Berchtold believed the diplomatic situation wouldn't hold that long. The army chief preferred to wait and see how the diplomatic situation developed and gain a better understanding of Russia's attitude before deploying the army. No final decision was made but preparations were put in hand for a declaration of war.

Berchtold also saw Giesl, the Austro-Hungarian minister in Belgrade, who had now returned to Vienna that afternoon and told him breaking-off diplomatic relations with Serbia did not necessarily lead to war. He thought Serbia, in a weak military condition following the Balkan wars, would accept the ultimatum unconditionally once Austria-Hungary made a limited military demonstration, perhaps involving the occupation of Belgrade which was undefended. For Berchtold an early declaration of war was simply another way of increasing the pressure on Serbia and showing resolve to Germany. If he had any idea of the military implications and how they would affect Russia, he ignored them. The Russians immediately took military steps fearing Austria-

Hungary would invade immediately and overrun Serbia before Russia could do anything.

Telegrams were sent to Vienna's ambassadors in Berlin, Rome, London and Paris saying war was imminent because Austria-Hungary faced with *"the necessity of enforcing on Serbia by the sharpest means a fundamental change"* in its attitude.

Early Monday, 27 July, Berchtold decided it was time to act. He sent Hoyos to see Conrad who gave way and agreed to a declaration of war before the army was fully mobilised and able to act, if diplomatic considerations made it necessary.

Berchtold could now respond to the German pressure for military action and declare war on Serbia. He had in mind the reports from St Petersburg that Sazonov recognised Austria-Hungary had legitimate claims to make on Serbia and Russia would only mobilise if and when Austria-Hungary assumed a hostile attitude towards Russia. He also wanted to pre-empt Grey's mediation proposals and Sazonov's desire for direct talks. A draft declaration of war with Serbia was forwarded to the Emperor at Bad Ischl.

In light of optimistic reports - Britain and France working to restrain Russia, Britain likely to be neutral, French government against war, Russian reservists had not been called up - Berchtold also saw no reason to soften his diplomatic stand. He wired Szápáry instructing him not to mention Austria's *"territorial disinterest for the time being"*. This contradicted the Germans who were making Austria's *"territorial disinterest"* the centre of their diplomatic campaign.

But in reality the outlook was far from safe as the latest military intelligence demonstrated. During Monday afternoon reports arrived in Vienna from the military attaché in St Petersburg indicating that Russia was beginning extensive military preparations. Conrad worried about the safety of attacking Serbia if the reserves were needed against Russia. At a meeting with Berchtold and Tschirschky, he suggested if Russia mobilised against Austria-Hungary, the Germans should tell the Russians it

constituted such a threat to Germany on its southern and eastern frontier corresponding German measures would have to be taken. Bethmann replied saying rumours of Russian military measures had not been confirmed and it was premature to threaten Russia with military counter-measures.

This also showed Conrad had a severe misapprehension of his ally's war plans. If Germany mobilised, it inevitably meant war and an attack on France with only minimal forces left against Russia. Also Conrad did not know that Jagow had already stated on two occasions that Germany would not mobilise if Russia only mobilised against Austria-Hungary.

Chapter 2.2

Germany – Plays a Double Game

The German leaders were quick to claim they had no part in the ultimatum to Serbia. On the 23 July Jagow wrote to the Kaiser that Lichnowsky, the German ambassador in London, was being sent instructions to say *"…. we had no knowledge of the Austrian demands and regarded them as an internal question for Austria-Hungary in which we had no competence to intervene"*. The Kaiser underlined this statement.

On the following day when Jules Cambon, the French ambassador in Berlin, called on Jagow he told him Germany was not aware of the terms of the ultimatum before they were published though it supported them, and he pushed the German view the problem had to be localised between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and not involve other powers. He said Serbia's friends should give her *"wise advice"*. Cambon responded by saying Germany should give similar *"wise advice"* in Vienna.

Cambon told his diplomatic colleagues, including Rumbold, the British chargé in Berlin, he believed the Austro-Hungarians were going to use the assassination to salvage their position in the Balkans and Berlin would support them because Germany did not want Austria-Hungary weakened any further. Vienna and Berlin *"are playing a dangerous game of bluff, and they think they can carry matters through with a high hand"*.

Later in the day following warnings from Lichnowsky and Schoen, the German ambassadors in London and Paris respectively, that London and Paris believed the German government was behind the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia, Jagow wired Paris, London, and St. Petersburg declaring that Germany had nothing to do with the ultimatum and knew nothing of its contents.

Nevertheless, Germany and Austria-Hungary were allies and members of the Triple Alliance, and Berlin was a channel of

communication to Vienna and on Saturday, the 25 July, Rumbold saw Jagow to ask Germany to support a British request to extend the ultimatum's time limit. Jagow said he had already asked the German ambassador in Vienna to do this. Jagow also told Rumbold that he thought Serbia could not accept the ultimatum but he believed the dispute could be localised because Austria-Hungary had promised Russia it wouldn't annex Serbian territory. He also said Germany would support Grey's four-power mediation proposal if relations between Vienna and St Petersburg became *"threatening"*.

In Vienna the request for an extension of the time limit was refused though it might be asked how serious Berlin was in associating itself with such a request.

The German military had so far played no part in affairs except briefly advising the Kaiser when Hoyos visited Berlin to seek German support, and those on leave or away from Berlin had stayed away to give the impression everything was normal, but Moltke returned on the evening of the 25 July from his month-long holiday and held a meeting the next day on the preparations the army should make. Army commanders were recalled to Berlin.

The German general staff was also planning for all eventualities. It prepared an ultimatum to be given to the Belgian government in the event that Germany implemented its military plan and attacked France through Belgium. And, with Russian military preparations underway Berlin received numerous reports on Russian military activities. Especially disturbing was news that some reservists had been called up and the general staff decided to initiate its own intelligence gathering and within 24 hours the intelligence committee concluded Russia was beginning to implement its "Period Preparatory to War".

The Germans now gave a warning to Russia. On Sunday the 26 July Bethmann instructed Pourtalès to tell Sazonov continuation of Russian military preparations would force Germany to mobilise. He again stressed Austria-Hungary did not want Serbian territory.

On Monday morning the British idea for a four-power conference was known in Berlin and Jules Cambon called on Jagow to give French support to the British proposal. During their conversation Jagow told Cambon how worried he was by early signs of Russian military preparations and told him *"We shall mobilise at once either if Russia mobilises on our frontier or if Russian troops invade Austrian territory"*. Cambon immediately passed this information to the Russians who took it to mean Germany would accept Russian partial mobilisation which only threatened Austria-Hungary. Jagow repeated this to Goschen, the British ambassador in Berlin, later in the day. This was another of those statements that though probably said in good faith was not sound and led to further dangerous complications. Jagow failed to take account of Germany's alliance obligations with Austria-Hungary.

The German response to the British idea for a four-power conference was given in a telegram sent by Bethmann to Lichnowsky before Berlin had officially been told of it by Goschen who had been in London and only got back to Berlin that Monday afternoon. Bethmann told Lichnowsky that Germany would not take part in a conference which would make it appear as if Austria-Hungary was being brought before a European tribunal in her conflict with Serbia. He thought that Sazonov's suggestion for direct talks between Russia and Austria-Hungary was a better idea.

On his return from London Goschen saw Jagow who again said regarding Russian mobilisation *"if Russia only mobilises in the south [i.e. against Austria-Hungary only] Germany will not mobilise"*. And, perhaps now more mindful of the military implications of what he was saying, he added, that the Russian system was so complicated it might be difficult to judge what was happening and Germany could not allow Russia to gain a head start.

Monday was the day the Kaiser returned to Potsdam from his North Sea cruise. On hearing of Serbian mobilisation he had ordered the German fleet cruising off Norway to return to Kiel. Also, the fact the chancellor advised him against an early return of

the fleet made him angry and perhaps keen to get more in touch with events. After receiving the latest reports he summoned Bethmann and the German military chiefs to meet him in Potsdam at 3.10 P.M. No specific decisions were taken. Though there were unanswered questions and uncertainties, matters seemed to be moving in the right direction.

General Plessen, Adjutant-General to the Kaiser, who was present at the meeting, noted in his diary that it was hoped to localise the war and Britain had declared she meant to be neutral. He even said he had the impression things would blow over. Admiral Muller, the Chief of the Kaiser's Naval Cabinet wrote that German policy was to remain calm, let Russia put herself in the wrong, and not to shrink from war if it was unavoidable.

Diplomacy took a new twist. Lichnowsky's telegrams arrived recording his talk with Grey that morning. Britain thought Germany held the key to Vienna's actions and should use its influence to have the Serbian reply regarded either as satisfactory or as a basis for negotiation. Localisation of the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia was not possible and, in Lichnowsky's opinion, Britain would support France and Russia even joining them in a European war.

At this stage the Berlin leaders did not believe Lichnowsky's warnings that Britain would not be neutral but later that evening Bethmann decided Germany should not reject the latest mediation proposal out of hand as they had rejected the British four-power conference proposal and another rejection would alienate Britain, and Germany would be blamed for any conflict. He wired Tschirschky, the German ambassador in Vienna, and asked him to obtain Berchtold's views on the latest British suggestion that Germany should mediate in Vienna on the basis of the Serbian reply, and on Sazonov's desire to negotiate directly with Vienna.

On the face of things this was a move in the right direction that might lead to a peaceful solution, especially if Germany as well as forwarding the British proposal to Vienna also supported it. But,

there was no such support, and indeed, it was deliberately undermined.

Earlier that day Jagow had seen Szögyény who that evening reported to Vienna Jagow had told him the German government was against any British mediation proposal that it might forward to the Austrian government in the immediate future. It only passed it on to conform to the British request as it was vital to ensure that Britain did not side with France and Russia.

Thus, Bethmann made his first but false mediation effort. Very late that evening Bethmann wired Lichnowsky *"We have at once inaugurated a move for mediation at Vienna along the lines desired by Sir Edward Grey"*.

Historians who defend Germany against blame for starting the war claim Szögyény was mistaken. He had not understood what he had been told and gave a misleading report. The facts and other events do not support this. By late Monday afternoon Bethmann and Jagow knew from Tschirschky that Austria-Hungary had decided to send out the declaration of war on Serbia the next day, Tuesday, 28 July, or the day after at the latest, to frustrate any attempt at mediation. In their communication with Vienna in forwarding the British proposal there was no mention of this, no attempt to delay it. And, of course, they had both had a big part in pushing Austria-Hungary to make this game changing move.

Another sign of their priorities and desire for Austria-Hungary to act was the fact that it was only now late Monday they bothered to obtain a copy of the Serbian reply. Jagow sent a copy to the Kaiser at Potsdam by special messenger at 9.30 P.M. This delay in obtaining a copy of the reply and sending it to the Kaiser had a major impact on the development of the crisis.

Chapter 2.3

Serbia – Wins the War of Words

At 4.30 P.M. on Thursday, the 23 July, Giesl, the Austro-Hungarian minister in Belgrade, telephoned the Serbian foreign ministry to say he had an important note to deliver to Prime Minister Pašić at exactly 6.00 P.M. Pašić was away outside Belgrade making election speeches and the senior minister available, Lazar Paču, immediately phoned him. Pašić realised Giesl would be delivering demands about Sarajevo but not knowing of the forty-eight-hour time limit he wanted to play for time while the Serbian government consulted its friends. He refused to return to Belgrade.

The Austro-Hungarians referred to their written demands on Serbia as a *"note with a time limit"*. In effect it was an ultimatum and was called that by nearly everyone else.

At 6.00 P.M. Giesl came to the foreign ministry and handed the note to Paču who had taken on the task of receiving the Austro-Hungarian minister in Pašić's absence. The Serbs had forty-eight hours to reply. If it was unsatisfactory or there was no reply Giesl said he had orders to break off diplomatic relations and leave Belgrade immediately.

The six available Serbian ministers met. They were shocked by the severity of the note and studied it in silence. The first to speak was Jovanović, the minister of education. He said *"we have no other choice than to fight it out"*. Paču dispatched a circular to Serbia's foreign legations stating the demands set out in the Austrian note were *"such as no Serbian government could accept them in their entirety"*.

Naturally the Serb leaders turned to those they believed likely to give support and help, their fellow Slavs and Orthodox Christians, the Russians. Paču called on Strandtmann, the Russian counsellor in Belgrade, to ask for Russian help and Strandtmann telegramed St Petersburg with the request. Crown Prince

Alexander also called on Strandtmann to discuss the crisis and said acceptance of the note was *"an absolute impossibility for a state which has the slightest regard for its, dignity"* and added that he placed his trust in the magnanimity of the Tsar of Russia *"whose powerful word alone could save Serbia"*.

The Serb leaders expected Austria-Hungary to attack as soon as the time limit on the note expired so the minister of war and the Serbian military decided to initiate preliminary measures for mobilisation.

Further updated by telephone Pašić realised the seriousness of the situation and returned to Belgrade at 5.00 A.M. the next morning, Friday, 24 July. He saw Strandtmann and said he thought it was *"not possible either to accept or reject the Austrian note"* and more time was needed for diplomatic action. He added *"if war is unavoidable we shall fight, though Belgrade would not be defended"*.

The Serb cabinet met. Pašić believed no decisions should be taken until the Russians were officially consulted and he cabled Spalajković, the Serbian minister in St Petersburg, asking him to ascertain the views of the Russian government. Crown Prince Alexander made a direct appeal to the Tsar saying the Austro-Hungarian note was humiliating but Serbia might agree to terms that were consistent with its sovereignty or any which Russia advised them to accept. This, of course, recognised how much Serbia depended on Russia.

The Serbian cabinet also asked Crown Prince Alexander to send a personal telegram to his uncle the King of Italy to ask Austria-Hungary to extend the time limit. The cabinet also agreed further military measures and put in hand arrangements for the evacuation of the government from Belgrade to Niš, the second largest city in Serbia.

The cabinet discussion continued all day and they agreed on two of the points of the note, that Narodna Odbrana would be dissolved and that officials accused of anti-Austro-Hungarian propaganda would be dismissed subject to them being found guilty. Cabinet members realised Serbia was in a very weak

position. So far, there was little foreign diplomatic feedback from friendly countries and it had not been very encouraging and the Serbian army's weak condition following the Balkan wars meant she could not resist an Austrian attack. A defiant response was not appropriate and a policy developed of agreeing to the demands in the note except the two that infringed on Serbian sovereignty.

During the night and the morning of the next day, the 25 July, three telegrams arrived from Spalajković in St Petersburg. The first was of no consequence. The second arrived in two parts, one at 4 A.M. and one 10.00 A.M., but gave only general expressions of Russian support for Serbia. There was no clear advice apart from accepting as much of the ultimatum as possible. It seemed Russia thought Serbia should not offer any resistance to the expected Austro-Hungarian attack, should give up Belgrade and then appeal for international support.

The third telegram from Spalajković arrived at 11.30 A.M. and reported that the Russian Council of Ministers had decided to take energetic measures, even mobilisation, and that it would issue an official announcement supporting Serbia. The prospect of Russian help was now clearer.

The preparation of the reply was chaotic as changes were made up to the last moment. By all accounts the Serbian reply was masterpiece accepting most of the Austro-Hungarian demands with caveats which would lead to lengthy discussions and enable Serbia to avoid implementing many of them. Only one demand was rejected outright but overall it gave the impression Serbia was being contrite and reasonable.

The Serbian reply began by saying it would remove any misunderstandings that impaired good relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary. It claimed since its 1909 declaration, Serbia had made no attempts to change the status of Bosnia and had given several proofs of its pacific and moderate policy during the Balkan crisis (during the Balkan Wars).

It went on to say, the Serbian government had been pained and surprised by the Austro-Hungarian accusations, as the

government could not be *"held responsible for manifestations of a private character, such as articles in the press and the peaceable work of societies - manifestations which take place in nearly all countries in the ordinary course of events, and which, as a general rule, escape official control"*. It agreed that the Serbian government and the King should issue a statement along the lines of the one demanded by Austria-Hungary.

The reply then dealt with the 10 specific demands of the ultimatum. Two were accepted without qualification or conditions, Points 8 and 10 of the ultimatum, concerning the smuggling of weapons into Austria-Hungary and the punishment of guilty Serbian frontier officials, and the requirement to report to the Austro-Hungarian government on the implementation of the demands.

Six demands were accepted but with qualifications or rewording which could be used to delay or entirely prevent the implementation of a demand. For example, the response to Point 3 said the government would remove anti-Austrian propaganda from Serbian public education whenever the Austro-Hungarian government supplied facts and proofs of propaganda, and it ignored the demand to remove teachers who propagated this material.

The two demands touching on Serbian sovereignty were rejected or in effect rejected.

On Point 5 the Serbian government said it did *"not clearly grasp the meaning or the scope of the demand"* that Austro-Hungarian officials participate in suppressing propaganda movements. It would however accept collaboration *"as agrees with the principle of international law, with criminal procedure, and with good neighbourly relations"*.

Point 6 was rejected outright. The Serbian government would not accept the participation of Austro-Hungarian officials in the prosecution of suspects *"as it would be a violation of the constitution and of the law of criminal procedure"*. It would, of course, open an

enquiry against all persons on its territory implicated in the 28 June plot.

The reply ended with the statement that if the Austro-Hungarian government was not satisfied with the reply the Serbian government was ready to have any issues decided by the International Tribunal of The Hague, or the great powers that took part in the drawing up of the declaration made by the Serbian government on 31 March 1909.

Pašić sent another circular to Serbia's foreign legations saying *"…. the reply would be quite conciliatory on all points and the Serbian Government would accept the Austro-Hungarian demands as far as possible"*.

The two texts of the reply (in Serbian and French) were ready by 5.45 P.M. Most government officials had left their offices to catch the train for Niš due to leave at 6.00 P.M. Pašić took the reply to the Austro-Hungarian legation arriving at 5.55 P.M. and handed it to Giesl.

Giesl read the reply. It was not an unconditional acceptance. He signed an already typed note telling the Serbian government they had not accepted the Austro-Hungarian demands and diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken off. Giesl said he and his staff were leaving Belgrade that evening. The note was taken by messenger to Pašić.

That evening the Serbs expected Austria-Hungary to invade at any moment and Belgrade emptied. The Government was moving to Niš. Crown Prince Alexander signed the order for general mobilisation. It was the first mobilisation of the crisis.

By Monday, 27 July, the Serb government was in Niš. The cabinet agreed, in view of the promise of Russian support, they did not need to take any further action. Pašić wrote *"We have made our last concession - further we will not go, nor will we seek mediation, for that would suggest that we are ready to yield even more. Russia is resolute. Italy neutral"*. There was further news of Russian support. There was no prospect of Serbia changing course and unconditionally accepting the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. Pašić

believed too much has been conceded and he would not have gone as far as he had if had been sure of Russian support earlier.

Chapter 2.4

Russia – Stands by Serbia

Early Friday morning, the 24 July, on learning the details of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum Sazonov declared angrily to his senior official *"C'est La guerre Européenne!"* He told the Tsar by phone that he thought the ultimatum was designed to be rejected, that Vienna intended to attack, and they must have been given prior German approval. In this Sazonov was essentially correct. He later expanded on this in a memorandum for the Tsar saying the real purpose of the Austrian action, supported by Germany, was to annihilate Serbia and to upset the balance of power in the Balkans. The Tsar ordered him to call a Council of Ministers for that afternoon to recommend a course of action.

He summoned Szápáry, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, to the foreign ministry. Szápáry tried to read from the document summarising the evidence linking Serbia with the assassination but Sazonov interrupted him. *"You mean to make war on Serbia and this is just a pretext"*. Both men were angry. Sazonov said *"You want to go to war with Serbia; You are setting fire to Europe"*.

Immediately after this heated exchange acting on what had been on his mind for a while Sazonov called in General Yanushkevich, Russian Chief of the General Staff, and told him the Russian army should be ready for partial mobilisation, that is mobilisation against Austria-Hungary, but not Germany.

On this critical day it so happened that Sazonov had a lunch appointment at the French embassy with Paléologue, the French ambassador in St Petersburg, and Buchanan, the British ambassador. Paléologue said France would give full diplomatic support to Russia and would fulfil all its alliance obligations. In this he was reflecting the results of the discussions during the French state visit to St Petersburg. Buchanan pointed out Britain had no direct interest in Serbia. Sazonov said if there was war Britain would be drawn in and if Britain did not support France

and Russia from the outset it rendered war more likely and Britain would not have played a *"beau role"*.

The Russian Council of Ministers met at 3.00 P.M. Like the meeting at Potsdam on the 5 July when Germany gave her unconditional support to Austria-Hungary and the meeting of the Austro-Hungarian Joint Ministerial Council that decided military action against Serbia was the only answer, this meeting defined the July Crisis. The tone of the meeting was set by Sazonov and Krivoshein, the Russian minister of agriculture.

Sazonov was the first to speak. He said Germany had long been systematically furthering its international ambitions without concern for other powers. Russia had always responded with moderation but that hadn't worked. It encouraged Germany to be more demanding. He was sure Germany had connived with Austria-Hungary to threaten Serbia the object of which was to turn Serbia into a protectorate of the Central Powers. Russia should not abandon its historic mission to enable the Slavs of the Balkans to obtain independence. If it did it would lose all influence. He noted that a firm policy would run the risk of war and he was still unsure of what Britain would do.

Krivoshein, the most influential member of the Council, was also in favour of a firm Russian response. Even though the Russian rearmament programme wasn't complete the country was in a much better position than previously and it would be difficult for the government to explain to the public and the Duma why it was reluctant to act boldly. He also noted that Russia's careful attitude on previous international issues had not been effective. A firmer and more energetic attitude to the unreasonable claims of Germany and Austria-Hungary was the best policy.

The German support given to Austria-Hungary in 1909 which forced Russia to agree to Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia may have been one of the previous incidents concerning Germany that both Sazonov and Krivoshein had in mind.

Sukhomlinov, the minister of war, said there was no reason for Russia to hesitate even though the military modernisation and expansion programme wasn't complete.

The meeting agreed:

(1) Jointly with other powers to seek an extension of the deadline so each country could take a view on the Austro-Hungarian case.

(2) To advise Serbia that if they were not able to resist the expected attack they should offer no resistance and instead appeal to the great powers for help.

(3) To ask the Tsar the next day to approve partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary, that is mobilisation in those military districts facing Austria-Hungary, if Austria-Hungary took military action against Serbia.

(4) To speed up the completion of army equipment supplies.

(5) To immediately reduce the amount of Russian funds deposited in Germany and Austria-Hungary.

That evening Sazonov saw Spalajković, the Serbian ambassador, and condemned the ultimatum saying no sovereign state could accept parts of it. He said Serbia could rely on Russian help but did not say what that help might be.

Then Sazonov saw Pourtalès. Sazonov disagreed with the Austro-Hungarian and German view that the dispute should be localised as it concerned only Vienna and Belgrade. There should be some form of international arbitration. He also said *"If Austria-Hungary devours Serbia, we will go to war with her"*. Pourtalès took this to mean Russia would only take military steps if Austria attempted to acquire Serbian territory. This was another critical exchange in which one side was not really clear what the other might or would do.

Sazonov made a point of keeping Paléologue informed and updated him on the decisions taken by the Council of Ministers. Paléologue telegramed Paris but did not mention the Russians were considering partial mobilisation. He spoke of the need for

solidarity with Russia and said *"M. Sazonov will endeavour to win the day for ideas of moderation"*.

On Saturday, 25 July, at Krasnoe Selo, just outside St Petersburg where the Tsar was attending the annual army review, the Council of Ministers met again this time chaired by the Tsar. Also present were Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, the commander of the Imperial Guard, who would become Commander-in-Chief in the event of war and General Yanushkevich, Chief of the General Staff.

The meeting approved the recommendations and decisions taken at the Council meeting the day before including partial mobilisation, that is, to mobilise in those military districts facing Austria-Hungary, if it took action against Serbia. The meeting also agreed that the general staff should immediately implement the measures for the "Period Preparatory to War" in all European military districts including those facing Germany. This was a far reaching move.

All fortresses in the Warsaw, Vilna, and St Petersburg Military Districts were to be placed *"in a state of war"*, frontier posts brought up to strength and fully manned, harbours mined, horses and wagons assembled for army baggage trains, depots prepared for the reception of reservists, troops in training at locations remote from their bases recalled immediately, around 3,000 officer cadets promoted to officer rank to bring the officer corps up to wartime strength, and many other preparations and precautions implemented so that when the order came for mobilisation it would be implemented speedily.

All this activity was noticed by the diplomats of other countries and by German military intelligence. And, it was not possible to know for sure that all this activity was not the actual start of a general mobilisation. Even senior Russian military figures saw it as the start of mobilisation. The Chief of the Mobilisation Section of the Russian General Staff, General Dobrorolski thought so. He later said *"The war was already a settled matter, and the whole flood of*

telegrams between the Governments of Russia and Germany represented merely the stage setting of a historical drama".

In the afternoon Sazonov saw Paléologue and Buchanan again and informed them of the measures approved by the Tsar including if necessary partial mobilisation which would involve 1.1 million men. Paléologue repeated that France was unreservedly at Russia's side. Sazonov said Russian policy was not to allow Austria to crush Serbia and become the predominant power in the Balkans. Sazonov also pointed out the Serbian obligations mentioned in the ultimatum were to the powers and not to Austria alone. Were Serbia to appeal to the powers Russia would stand aside and leave the question in the hands of Britain, France, Italy and Germany. This comment gave the British the idea of suggesting a conference.

In his report of this meeting sent to London Buchanan said Sazonov thought Berlin was gambling on British neutrality. If Britain took a stand with France and Russia there would be no war. If Britain did not give Russia active support now then Britain would not be able to rely on Russia's friendly co-operation in Asia involving the protection of India and other imperial interests.

Paléologue wired Paris that the Council of Ministers had agreed to partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary and other preparatory measures were being taken.

The Russian military involved from the start of the crisis that evening quickly got on with their work. General Yanushkevich chaired a general-staff conference about the preparatory measures to be taken. He said that it was permissible to go further than the regulations specified to ensure that the preparations were successful. In the very early hours of the next day he issued the orders for the "Period Preparatory to War"

Sukhomlinov warned General Chelius, the German military representative at the Tsar's court, that Russia would stand by Serbia and an indiscrete Russian general told Chelius Russian troops were to be mobilised. Chelius also noticed manoeuvres were cancelled and regiments returning to their barracks. He

wired Berlin saying he believed Russia was starting partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary.

The news for Serbia was good. Spalajković wired Belgrade that the Council of Ministers had shown the greatest warlike spirit and decided to go to the limit in defence of Serbia. The Tsar surprised everyone with his decisiveness.

The next morning, Sunday, 26 July, Sazonov met by chance Pourtalès, the German ambassador, on a train from Tsarskoe Selo to St Petersburg. They both had summer houses near Tsarskoe Selo. They discussed the dispute and mediation options. Sazonov said Russia could not tolerate the reduction of Serbia to a vassal state of Austria-Hungary. On his own initiative, as he had no instructions from Berlin for such a proposal, Pourtalès suggested direct talks between Russia and Austria-Hungary even though this would require some modification of Vienna's position.

Shortly after, acting on word from Pourtalès, Szápáry went to see Sazonov and the two men met in a much friendlier mood. Sazonov said he was pleased to see Szápáry as he had been about to call him. He wanted to pursue the idea of direct talks between St Petersburg and Vienna. Sazonov thought Austria-Hungary's aims were legitimate but not pursued in the right way. He wanted to review the ultimatum to Serbia. Szápáry was happy to do this but reminded Sazonov he had no instructions from his government to go beyond the ultimatum. They studied the ultimatum point by point. Sazonov said he thought many points could be made acceptable with minor amendment. Szápáry said he would report Sazonov's views to Vienna.

Pourtalès reported Sazonov's views to Berlin, that the ultimatum could be made acceptable. If Vienna modified its demands direct talks between Austria-Hungary and Russia should take place and if they succeeded then St Petersburg would be ready to *"advise"* Belgrade to accept the revised document.

That afternoon Sazonov telegramed the Russian embassy in Vienna suggesting that the government there authorised Szápáry

to start talks with him for a *"joint revision of some articles of the ultimatum"*.

Sunday also saw less positive developments. The German military attaché, Major Eggeling, asked Pourtalès to tell Berlin he regarded it *"as certain mobilisation ordered in Kiev and Odessa; Warsaw and Moscow doubtful, the rest probably not yet"*.

Later in the evening Pourtalès saw Sazonov again to give him the warning from Berlin that Russian military measures directed at Germany might easily call forth German countermeasures. Sazonov was startled. He tried to reassure Pourtalès and told him mobilisation would only be ordered if Austria-Hungary took a hostile attitude to Russia. He also told him about what he saw as the satisfactory talk with Szápáry.

Sazonov asked Sukhomlinov to see the German military attaché to give further assurances and the next day Sukhomlinov sent for Major Eggeling and gave him his word of honour no order for mobilisation had been issued. Purely preparatory measures were being taken. If Austria crossed the Serbian frontier there would be mobilisation in the districts facing Austria. Eggeling said even mobilisation against Austria must be regarded as dangerous.

On Monday morning Buchanan called on Sazonov to put forward London's idea for an ambassadors' conference. Sazonov preferred the direct talks which he believed he had arranged with Austria-Hungary on the modification of the ultimatum. He said if they failed he was willing to accept the British proposal if accepted by other powers or any other proposal that would resolve the conflict.

Sazonov had also now studied the Serbian reply to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. He wired all Russian ambassadors saying it *".... exceeds all our expectations in its moderation and readiness to offer Austria the fullest satisfaction. We cannot understand in what Austria's demand can still consist unless she seeks a pretext for a campaign against Serbia"*.

Sazonov was in a good mood when he saw Pourtalès. He thought the Serbian answer was a way forward. He told him *"the*

moment has come to seek the means by an exchange of views among the Powers" and to *"build a golden bridge"* for Austria. He was confident the Austrians would negotiate. Pourtalès did not know if Vienna was prepared to modify its demands but said it was time to put an end to Serbian provocations. Sazonov seemed to agree saying it must be possible to give Serbia a well-merited lesson while respecting her sovereign rights.

The above was at least positive, and to Sazonov's credit despite his early turn to military possibilities he was trying to find a peaceful solution. He had also received a report from Bronevski, the Russian chargé in Berlin, saying that Jagow had said Germany would only mobilise if Russia mobilised on their common border. But then a development took place showing how dangerous it was for civilians to propose military measures.

General Danilov, the Russian army Quartermaster-General and the man in charge of mobilisation plans, arrived back in St Petersburg on Sunday evening from an inspection tour in the Caucasus. He was strongly opposed to partial mobilisation. He was not alone as other Staff generals were opposed but did not have the authority or were unable to influence Yanushkevich who had been in his post only a few months and was not familiar with the mobilisation plans. Danilov persuaded Yanushkevich to call a staff conference that Monday. There were two enormous problems.

Though a plan for partial mobilisation could be improvised, such a mobilisation would seriously upset the plans for general mobilisation that might have to follow. Transport especially would be in the wrong place.

Danilov also realised that Austria-Hungary would respond to a Russian partial mobilisation on its northern borders by moving to general mobilisation. It could not leave the northern half of its territory unprotected while the army was attacking Serbia in the south. Under the Austro-Hungarian and German alliance such a Austro-Hungarian mobilisation in answer to a threat from Russia

obliged Germany to mobilise which almost certainly would lead to war.

From a practical military point of view the choice was between general mobilisation and no mobilisation at all. Yanushkevich was convinced by all the arguments and decided to order the preparation of two Imperial ukazes (orders), one for general mobilisation, one for partial mobilisation, and to report to the Tsar.

Chapter 2.5

Britain - Sits On the Fence

On the morning of the day the ultimatum was to be delivered to Serbia the Austro-Hungarians took the trouble of keeping Grey informed. Mensdorff, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador, gave him an outline of the ultimatum. Grey remarked everything depended on convincing Russia of the justice of Austria's demands and on whether the demands could be accepted by Serbia. He also told Mensdorff it would be terrible if the four great powers - Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia and France - were involved in a war. This implied Britain would remain neutral in a European war.

The next day, Friday, 24 July, Mensdorff gave Grey the full text of the ultimatum. Grey commented point five compromised Serbian sovereignty. According to Mensdorff, he called the note *"the most formidable document that was ever addressed from one state to another"* but admitted what it said on the guilt of Serbia in the crime of Sarajevo and some of the demands were fully justified. He told Mensdorff he was worried by the situation the ultimatum had created and by the danger it could lead to a European war. Again he mentioned a four-power war excluding Britain.

British politicians, the media, and the public in general, after the initial shock of the Sarajevo assassinations paid little attention to the emerging confrontation between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia. They were focussed almost entirely on domestic issues especially the Irish problem.

The House of Commons had introduced an Irish Home Rule bill in May but it had been rejected by the House of Lords. The subject generated deep controversy and even officers of the British Army threatened to refuse to follow orders if called to maintain public order in Ireland between Catholic Irish nationalists and Protestant unionists. There was the risk of armed conflict between the two sides. A particular issue was which counties might be

excluded from home rule and remain part of the United Kingdom. The Liberal government was also dependent on Irish nationalist votes in the House of Commons and they were trying to circumvent the House of Lords and push the bill through by Royal Assent.

Grey was one of the few British politicians who appreciated the potentially dangerous consequences of the Sarajevo outrage.

Grey attended a cabinet meeting late that afternoon. At the very end of the meeting he mentioned the European situation and told his colleagues it was *"the gravest event for many years past in Europe"*. Grey read from a copy of the ultimatum the Austro-Hungarians had given to Serbia. This moment was described in a famous passage by Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, as follows: *"This note was clearly an ultimatum; but it was an ultimatum such as had never been penned in modern times. As the reading proceeded it seemed absolutely impossible that any State in the world could accept it, or that any acceptance, however abject would satisfy the aggressor. The parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone faded back into the mists and squalls of Ireland, and a strange light began immediately, but by perceptible gradations, to fall and grow upon the map of Europe."*

After the meeting Grey saw Lichnowsky, the German ambassador. He said he was only concerned if the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia led to trouble between Austria and Russia and he suggested mediation at both Vienna and St Petersburg by the four powers (Britain, Germany, Italy and France) not directly involved if relations between Austria and Russia became threatening. This was the first of a number of mediation proposals put forward by Grey to solve or defuse the crisis. Grey again commented on the dangers of a war between the four nations, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany and France.

That evening the Foreign Office asked Bunsen in Vienna to seek an extension of the time limit in the ultimatum.

Early the next morning, 25 July, Benckendorff, the Russian ambassador, saw Grey to reinforce Sazonov's view that Britain should back Russia and France in the crisis. He suggested Britain

should tell Germany it might not be neutral if there was a European war. Grey replied he *"has given no indication that we will stand aside"*.

Buchanan's report of his conversation with Sazonov and Paléologue in St Petersburg lunchtime the day before was now in London and he made a similar suggestion. Britain should point out to Germany that an invasion of Serbia would force Russia to come to the aid of Serbia and if Germany, and then France, Russia's ally, became involved it would be difficult for Britain to remain neutral. Sazonov also believed if a general European war did break out sooner or later Britain would be dragged in and by not stating the British position now Britain made war more likely.

Grey saw Lichnowsky again. Grey said he thought Russia would probably mobilise and it was then there should be four-power (Britain, Germany, Italy and France) mediation in the dispute. Grey repeated his comments of the previous day that Britain did not wish to intervene in a purely Austro-Serbian dispute, though he added Britain would not be indifferent to European complications.

Lichnowsky received a telegram from Berlin declaring Germany had nothing to do with the Austrian ultimatum and Germany could not ask Vienna to modify its demands because *"Austria-Hungary's prestige, both internal and external, would be completely lost"*. He wired back that the general belief in London was *"without our encouragement such a note would have been unthinkable ... if we do not participate in mediatory action, confidence in us and in our peaceable sentiments will be destroyed for good and all"*.

Grey telegramed Buchanan in response to his report. He said British public opinion would not sanction going to war over the Austro-Serbian quarrel. He thought Russian mobilisation almost inevitable and he would only launch his idea for four-power mediation after both Vienna and St Petersburg mobilised. To believe that mobilisation would allow a situation in which diplomacy could proceed as normal without there being new and

threatening military complications was an enormous misjudgement.

After lunch Grey left for his fishing lodge at Itchen Abbas in Hampshire where he normally spent his weekends.

Late that evening a telegram arrived from Buchanan recording Sazonov's remarks that afternoon including the threat to Anglo-Russian co-operation in Asia and the Persian Gulf if Britain failed to stand by Russia.

On Sunday, as in other countries, events continued at a quick pace. Prince Henry, the Kaiser's brother, had breakfast with his cousin King George. According to a report sent that afternoon by the German naval attaché in London the King told the Prince *"England would maintain neutral if war broke out between the Continental Powers"*. This remark, reported accurately or not, was to carry special weight with the German leadership. The naval attaché also told Berlin the British fleet, which had been taking part in the annual Royal Navy Review at Spithead, was now being dispersed and crews departing on leave. In fact, later in the day the First Sea Lord stopped the dispersal.

That this information regarding British policy was taken very seriously by the German leadership is demonstrated by Jagow's remarks to Jules Cambon, the French ambassador in Berlin. Cambon had called on Jagow and during their talk expressed his belief that Britain would stand by France and Russia. Jagow replied *"You have your information. We have ours which is quite to the contrary. We are sure of English neutrality"*.

As soon as he returned to Germany on the 28 July Prince Henry himself wrote to the Kaiser and reported King George had said *"we shall try all we can to keep out of this—and shall remain neutral"*.

Nicolson, permanent under secretary for foreign affairs, in charge in Grey's absence studied the latest information including the possibility of a Russian partial mobilisation and Sazonov's threat about Britain's position in Asia if it did not cooperate with Russia. Noting Sazonov's remark that Russia might stand aside and leave the question in the hands of Britain, France, Italy and

Germany, he decided to suggest to Grey he called a four-power ambassadors' conference in London similar to one that Grey had chaired to defuse problems arising from the first Balkan war in 1912 - 1913.

This now became the second British mediation proposal.

Grey telephoned his agreement to Nicolson's suggestion of a conference. Telegrams were sent to the British ambassadors in Paris, Vienna, St Petersburg, Berlin and Rome and the minister in Niš, instructing them to ask their respective foreign ministers if they would agree to a conference of ambassadors in London to prevent complications. While the conference was meeting, all sides were asked to suspend *"active military operations"*.

During the afternoon in the absence of Churchill, who was spending the weekend with his family in Cromer, Prince Louis of Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, decided in the light of the deteriorating European situation, to stop the dispersal of the fleet and maintain its crews at full strength. Churchill confirmed the order when he returned to London late that evening.

Earlier in the day Lichnowsky had had a message from Bethmann saying Russia might be calling up reserves without declaring a mobilisation. *"We therefore request Sir Edward Grey to use his influence at St Petersburg"*. Lichnowsky prepared a note for Grey saying if Russia calls up reserves Germany would mobilise. *"My Government ... instructs me to request you to use your influence in St. Petersburg"*. He also said *"My government accepts your suggested mediation à quatre"*. This mediation suggestion had now been overtaken by Nicolson's four-power ambassadors' conference proposal.

That evening Lichnowsky took his note to the Foreign Office and saw Nicolson and Sir William Tyrrell, Grey's private secretary. In Grey's absence the two British diplomats updated Lichnowsky and told him about the proposed conference. They also warned him if Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia European war was inevitable. The localisation of the conflict as hoped for in Berlin was wholly impossible. Lichnowsky was delighted by the

conference idea and wired Jagow urging him to support it. He also reported the British did not think the conflict could be localised.

By Monday morning, 27 July, Grey had seen the Serbian reply to the ultimatum. He saw Lichnowsky and told him he thought the Serbian reply agreed with the Austro-Hungarian demands *"to an extent such as he would never have believed possible"*. If Vienna now invaded it proved it intended all along to inflict a military defeat on Serbia and this was a challenge to Russia. Grey asked Germany to use its influence in Vienna to have the Serbian reply regarded either as satisfactory or as a basis for negotiation. This, in effect, was Grey's third mediation proposal.

Lichnowsky reported Grey's views and his interpretation of them in a series of telegrams to Berlin. Lichnowsky thought if war came now Germany could no longer count on British support since the Austrian action would be regarded as showing a lack of goodwill. The whole Serbian question was becoming a trial of strength between the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) and the Triple Entente (France, Russia and Britain).

Crowe, assistant under secretary for foreign affairs, wrote *"If Russia mobilises, we have been warned Germany will do the same, and as German mobilisation is directed almost entirely against France, the latter cannot possibly delay her own mobilisation for even the fraction of a day". ".... within twenty-four hours His Majesty's Government will be faced with the question"* of whether to *"stand idly aside, or take sides"*.

Later that afternoon Grey told Benckendorff about his conversation with Lichnowsky. Benckendorff said he hoped Grey's warnings would open the eyes of the German government, who appeared to believe Britain would in all circumstances remain neutral. Grey thought he had been sufficiently frank with Lichnowsky to dispel German confidence in British neutrality.

Shortly after this Grey attended a cabinet meeting. He asked them if they would support intervention if France were to be attacked by Germany. The cabinet was badly divided. The great majority were against intervention and some members indicated they would resign if Britain took sides. Grey said if Britain

remained neutral he was not the man to carry out such a policy. However, they endorsed the decision to keep the fleet at full strength.

Belgium also now became an item for discussion. Based on information from French military intelligence and a look at the map it was very likely Germany would attack France by passing through Belgium. This would breach the 1839 international treaty guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality of which Britain and Germany (then Prussia) were signatories. During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 the British government took the view that a response to any breach of the treaty could and should be the responsibility of each power acting individually. Some cabinet members now believed the obligation to uphold the treaty fell on all signatories collectively and not individually. A complicating factor was if Britain acted on its own to defend Belgium without being invited to by the Belgian government, it could be seen as the party breaching the 1839 treaty. Nevertheless the cabinet agreed to discuss Britain's policy regarding Belgium at their next meeting.

Chapter 2.6

France – Mixed Messages then Firm Steps

Poincaré, Viviani and Margerie were crossing the Baltic Sea on the battleship France bound for Stockholm when the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum was delivered. Communications were difficult and through fragmentary messages they learned of the ultimatum and its contents. They did not get back to Paris until Wednesday, 29 July.

On Friday, 24 July, in Paris in the absence of Viviani the French foreign ministry was in the hands of Bienvenu-Martin, the minister of justice. He had no diplomatic experience. Szécsen, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Paris, called on Bienvenu-Martin to explain the note to Serbia. He said it was an act of self-defence. Though Bienvenu-Martin made critical comments calling the note *"virtually an ultimatum"* containing demands that would probably be *"unacceptable"* he gave a positive impression to Szécsen who reported to Vienna that Bienvenu-Martin had said *"energetic action"* by Austria-Hungary *"can be understood"* and *"it is Serbia's duty to take energetic steps against possible accomplices of the murderer of Sarajevo"* and expressed the hope *"…. the dispute will be peacefully settled in a manner agreeable to our wishes"*.

Schoen, the German ambassador in Paris, also called on Bienvenu-Martin who had been joined by Philippe Berthelot, the deputy head of the French foreign ministry. Bienvenu-Martin repeated his view that Austria-Hungary could make legitimate demands on Serbia but Berthelot added Russia might be unable to resist the pressure to defend Serbia and he hoped Austria would discuss any demands to which Serbia could not agree.

Schoen gave a positive report to Berlin saying the French minister was *"visibly relieved at our idea that Austro-Serbian conflict is one to be settled exclusively by the two participants. French Government sincerely shares the wishes that conflict remain localised"*. These early

reports from Paris had the unfortunate effect of making the German leadership think their policy of localising the conflict, keeping it between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, was working.

Later, Vesnić, the Serbian minister in Paris, called on Berthelot who gave only his personal opinion that *"Serbia should try to gain time"*. It should also offer *"immediate satisfaction"* on most points, ask for proof of the Austro-Hungarian allegations and offer to submit the dispute to great power mediation

By Saturday the French presidential party had reached Stockholm and Poincaré and Viviani got the report of what the German ambassador had said in Paris the previous day. They concluded if Germany was insisting the dispute between Austria-Hungary was localised, then Germany was supporting Austria-Hungary.

Viviani telegramed Paris saying France should work with Russia and Britain and if Austria-Hungary insisted on taking part in an investigation on Serbian territory to call for a conference similar to the 1904 Rome conference to combat European anarchists which would widen the inquiry to include other powers. They decided to continue with their Swedish visit.

On Sunday afternoon Schoen again called on Bienvenu-Martin and Berthelot to ask if France was willing to advise Russia to keep out of the conflict as Vienna had said it would not annex Serbian territory. The two Frenchmen said Germany should also exercise restraint in Vienna because Serbia had accepted most points of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. Schoen telegramed Berlin saying Bienvenu-Martin *"is most willing to exercise a quietening influence in St Petersburg now that, by the Austrian declaration that no annexation is intended, the conditions for doing so had been created"* and he considered Sazonov's idea that all the powers acting together could pass judgement on Serbia was *"juridicially hardly tenable"*.

Such a French view was at odds with what the French had said to the Russians during the state visit and the strong support for Russia being expressed by Paléologue in St Petersburg.

During the day military information began to arrive. In a message to the French ministry of war the French military attaché in St Petersburg said that the Russians were mobilising in the military districts of Kiev, Odessa, Kazan and Moscow and secretly making preparations in the military districts of Warsaw, Vilna and St Petersburg. The Russian minister of war had said he was determined to leave to Germany the eventual initiative of an attack on Russia.

After telegraming Berlin Schoen returned to the French foreign ministry where he saw Berthelot as Bienvenu-Martin had left. He suggested a joint press statement saying Germany and France were *"acting in an identical spirit of peaceful co-operation"* to find ways of preserving peace.

Berthelot refused and told Schoen he thought Vienna would not be acting the way it was without German approval and Germany was not trying to change Vienna's stance. Schoen said Austria-Hungary had only rejected formal mediation and a conference where it might be arraigned before what could be seen as a European tribunal. He added Germany would not refuse to give advice to Vienna in all circumstances. Berthelot later gave his opinion to Sevastopula, Russian counsellor in Paris. He thought Austria-Hungary and Germany *"are aiming at a brilliant diplomatic victory but not at war at any price, although in the extreme case they would not recoil from it"*.

That Sunday evening Paris advised the presidential party, somewhere in the Baltic Sea, to abandon the state visits to Denmark and Norway and return home as soon as possible. And during the day Adolphe Messimy, the French minister of war, took the first French military measures of the crisis. Following the news of the recall of German officers from leave he ordered the recall of French officers. As more negative news came in during the evening he ordered the recall of other ranks from harvest leave and initiated security restrictions on the railways.

The presidential party agreed to return to Paris as quickly as possible. The journey would take two days. Monday morning they

heard of Paléologue's message to Paris that Russia had decided to order partial mobilisation if Austria-Hungary threatened Serbia with military force and secret military preparations were underway. If mobilisation was ordered troops would concentrate on the border with Austria-Hungary but would not take the offensive so as not to give Germany the reason to come to the aid of Austria-Hungary. In response to this news Viviani wired instructions to Paléologue which asked him to tell Sazonov that France "*.... is ready, in the interests of the general peace, whole heartedly to second the action of the Imperial Government"*.

Back in Paris the French cabinet agreed further precautionary military measures including the recall of troops from Algeria and Morocco and full protection of railways. The French military urged their counterparts in St Petersburg if hostilities broke out to immediately take the offensive in East Prussia despite the slowness of Russian mobilisation. A Russian attack in the east would draw German forces away from the expected big German attack against France in the west. They knew German military strategy was to first defeat France then to turn on the slower mobilising Russia.

PART 3

Mobilisation

28 July - 1 August / 5 Days

Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia, Russia decides to mobilise, the failure of mediation, military factors become paramount, France stands by Russia, Germany declares war on Russia.

Chapter 3.1

Germany – Civilian Leaders Lose Control

3.1.1 Tuesday, 28 July – The Kaiser Thinks There Is No Need for War

Early Tuesday morning, 28 July, at Potsdam the Kaiser finally had the opportunity to study the Serbian reply obtained and sent to him so belatedly, two and a half days after it was published. He thought it was a great moral victory for Vienna and with it every cause for war dropped away. The few reservations that Serbia made in regard to individual points could be settled by negotiation. He thought Austria should take Belgrade as a guarantee until the Serbs carried out their promises. This became known as the "halt in Belgrade" proposal. The Kaiser sent a note to Jagow saying these views should be transmitted to the Austrians. It got to Berlin by courier about lunchtime but was not acted on until the evening.

Also that morning in Berlin Bethmann and Jagow, who both knew that Austria-Hungary was about to declare war on Serbia, sent a circular to the Associated Governments of the German Empire declaring the Serbian reply was not made in good faith and Austria-Hungary had no choice *"but to enforce its demands by the use of heavy pressure, or, if need be, by resort to military measures"*.

The Kaiser's assessment of the Serbian reply and what he now proposed were not exactly in line with this circular and it illustrates an alarming weakness in the German decision making process during the crisis. He also did not know that Austria-Hungary was about to declare war on Serbia. The left hand didn't always know what the right hand was doing or intended. And, in the case of Bethmann and Jagow it seems they might not have wanted to keep the Kaiser fully informed for fear his sudden changes of mind might upset their policy.

During the afternoon German military intelligence reported Russian partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary was underway in two military districts - Odessa and Kiev. However, the "Period Preparatory to War" was being implemented across the whole country, including the border with Germany.

In Potsdam the Kaiser received a letter from Prince Henry reporting his talk with King George two days earlier. He said the King had given him an assurance the he and the British government would *"leave no stone unturned"* to localise the war between Austria and Serbia. The King thought Europe was near to a major war and Britain would try all it could to keep out of it and remain neutral.

At 6.39 P.M. news of the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia arrived in Berlin and as the evening wore on Bethmann took further ominous and unhelpful steps. He wrote to the Kaiser in Potsdam suggesting he should send a personal message to the Tsar. It would make clear Germany was backing direct talks between Austria-Hungary and Russia. He said *"A telegram of this kind would if war were to come about, place the guilt of Russia in the strongest light"*. This became the first from the Kaiser in a series of telegrams between the German and Russian emperors.

Finally at 10.15 P.M., Bethmann made his second mediation effort which like the first was done in such a way as to almost encourage the Austro-Hungarians to continue on their dangerous path. He acted on the Kaiser's message to Jagow and the "halt in Belgrade" proposal. One reason he may have been so tardy in acting on such an important proposal, a proposal that could have avoided war, was he spent time that afternoon in discussions with members of the German Socialist party as he, the civilian leader, wanted to ensure there was cross-party support for a policy that might end in war. Support of the Socialists would be vital as they were the largest party in the Reichstag. Also, he may have wanted to wait until after the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia.

Bethmann wired Tschirschky in Vienna (Telegram 174) first complaining about the lack of information from Vienna regarding its true intentions for Serbia. During the afternoon a message had arrived from Lichnowsky who had been told by Mensdorff and his staff at the Austro-Hungarian embassy in London that Austria-Hungary intended to partition Serbia among other Balkan states and turn the rump into a client of Austria-Hungary. Though Austria-Hungary itself might not take territory such a policy rather weakened the claim of territorial disinterest. Since the beginning of the crisis Bethmann had been telling the other powers that Austria-Hungary had no territorial ambitions with regard to Serbia but Bethmann softened the impact of his complaint about this "contradiction" by telling Tschirschky he was only to indicate to Berchtold that it was *"advisable to take precautions to avert mistrust of his declarations to the Powers on the subject of Serbian integrity"*.

He then went on to give his version of the Kaiser's proposal. Berlin now felt the Serbian reply largely met Vienna's demands and if Austria-Hungary continued an uncompromising attitude it would be held responsible for a world war even in the eyes of the German people. The responsibility for any war should fall on Russia. He said it was vital for Vienna to make clear its military preparations were solely aimed at a temporary occupation of Belgrade to ensure Serbia complied with Austro-Hungarian demands. He didn't mention there could be negotiations on the precise interpretation of some of these demands.

Tschirschky was instructed to discuss this with Berchtold but to avoid giving rise to the impression Germany wished to hold Austria-Hungary back. He did not communicate the Kaiser's emphatic view that "halt in Belgrade" was the right policy and war was now unnecessary. His main concern seemed to be avoiding blame if war broke out rather than avoiding war.

3.1.2 Wednesday, 29 July – Moltke Predicts Events - Bethmann Changes His Tune

On Tuesday Moltke wrote a memorandum entitled "Assessment of the Political Situation" and gave it to the Kaiser. He sent a copy to Bethmann Wednesday morning.

Moltke predicted how events would unfold and the consequences for Germany. He said:

(1) Austria could not go to war against Serbia without also mobilising against Russia. If she did not do this she would be vulnerable to a Russian attack while most of her army was occupied in Serbia.

(2) Austrian mobilisation would make an Austro-Russian clash inevitable.

(3) This clash would bring in Germany under her alliance with Austria-Hungary. Germany would have to mobilise.

This said, in effect, that an invasion of Serbia would bring about a European war.

In contrast the German government had been working on the assumption that a Russian partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary would not bring in Germany. That would only be necessary if Russia attacked Austria-Hungary or declared general mobilisation, which threatened Germany as well as Austria-Hungary. This scenario also meant it would look as if Russia was to blame for the outbreak of hostilities.

Moltke also warned that Russia and France were making military preparations (which was true) and if they were allowed to get ahead it could have fatal consequences for Germany. The German military position was growing worse day by day.

As blunt as this was it did not spell out the key fact that must have been in Moltke's mind. He knew German military strategy depended on the success of an immediate surprise attack in the west to seize the Belgian forts blocking the invasion route to France, as soon as German mobilisation started. Any defensive preparations by the Belgians or the French would lessen the

chances of success. Germany might not be able to wait. Time was running out

Moltke's memorandum might be viewed as military interference in political matters, to push the civilian government into war based on military considerations only. It might also be considered he was simply pointing out the military consequences of the situation created by the misjudgements of the politicians, in which case it was a shame he did not make his views known earlier.

It is also remarkable, that Moltke was totally honest in describing the consequences of the course of action he now saw as necessary. He said:

"Germany does not want to bring about this terrible war. But the German Government knows that it would fatally wound the deeply rooted sentiment of allied loyalty, one of the finest traits of the German spirit, and place itself at variance with all the feelings of its people, if it were unwilling to go to the help of its ally at a moment which must decide that ally's fate. . . . This is the way things will and must develop, unless, one might almost say, a miracle takes place to prevent at the eleventh hour a war which will annihilate the civilization of almost the whole of Europe for decades to come".

Bethmann then met with Falkenhayn and Moltke. Falkenhayn wanted Germany to proclaim Kriegsgefahrzustand ("State of Imminent Danger of War"). Bethmann was against this as it would escalate the crisis. Despite the concerns expressed in his memorandum Moltke agreed with Bethmann. They needed to know more about Russian and French intentions.

In light of the mounting military information and intelligence arriving in Berlin Bethmann sent instructions to Pourtalès to impress on Sazonov *"further continuation of Russian mobilisation measures would force us to mobilise, and in that case a European war could scarcely be prevented"*. He also asked Schoen to warn the French that their military measures will force Germany to proclaim "State of Imminent Danger of War" which would heighten tension.

Late that afternoon Bethmann, Falkenhayn, Moltke, and Lyncker met with the Kaiser in Potsdam to review the military position. The Kaiser supported Bethmann and Moltke in not proclaiming "State of Imminent Danger of War". It was important to get Austria-Hungary's response to Telegram 174 concerning the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" proposal. It was also better Russia made the first move and appeared as the aggressor.

Bethmann proposed that Germany made a bid for English neutrality. In the event of Germany attacking France, Germany would guarantee the territorial integrity of France and offer England a naval agreement that would end the naval race. The Kaiser rejected the naval proposal. They agreed to implement military protection of the railways. This was Germany's first military measure.

While this meeting took place in Potsdam, Sverbeev, the Russian ambassador in Berlin, implemented his instructions of the previous day and called on Jagow to tell him Russia was going to mobilise against Austria-Hungary. While they talked a wire arrived from Pourtalès confirming that news. Jagow said this was the end of diplomacy. Sverbeev protested that Jagow had earlier said Russian partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary would be accepted by Germany.

In Potsdam, the Kaiser replied to a message from the Tsar, the first of the Tsar's "Willy-Nicky" telegrams, that he had received that morning. The Tsar warned he might have to take extreme measures and appealed to the Kaiser to *"do what you can to stop your ally from going too far"*. The Kaiser said he thought an agreement was possible between the Russian government and Vienna but Russian military measures were jeopardising his position as mediator which on the Tsar's appeal he had readily accepted.

He also saw Prince Henry who briefed him on his discussions in London with King George who had said, according to Henry, that Britain would be neutral. A little later the Kaiser saw Tirpitz and the other naval chiefs. Tirpitz had reports from the German

naval attaché in London about developments there, and thought the news did not correspond with King George's comment about British neutrality. The Kaiser was not concerned because he had *"the word of a King"*.

Back in Berlin early in the evening Bethmann, Jagow, Moltke and Falkenhayn met to decide what to do about the Russian partial mobilisation. Moltke and Bethmann were still against German mobilisation and even the proclamation of "State of Imminent Danger of War". Russian partial mobilisation did not necessarily mean war. Nevertheless, they dispatched the ultimatum to Belgium to the German embassy in Brussels so it would be available if needed.

Bethmann also had Lichnowsky's report of his talk with Grey that morning. Grey asked if it might be possible to bring about an understanding as to the extent of Austro-Hungarian military operations and demands, an idea similar to the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" proposal, and to involve other powers in mediation.

Shortly after 10.00 P.M. Bethmann wired Tschirschky demanding to know by return of the discharge of Telegram 174 setting out the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" proposals sent nearly 24 hours earlier.

He then saw Goschen to make the bid for British neutrality agreed at the Potsdam meeting. If Britain remained neutral in a war between Germany and France, Germany would not acquire French territory. Goschen asked about French colonies and Belgium. The Chancellor's replies were unsatisfactory. Goschen said he thought Britain would want to keep its options open but he immediately telegramed the proposal to London.

Immediately after Bethmann received another report from Lichnowsky recounting what Grey said to him that afternoon. Grey repeated his proposal that Austria-Hungary limited its military operations but he made it clear that Britain would join France and Russia if a European war broke out. If Germany and France were involved in the war, Great Britain would not be able *"to stand aside and wait for any length of time"*.

Over the next few hours in response to the alarming news, Russia was mobilising and Britain was likely to support its Entente partners, and the failure of his localisation policy, Bethmann sent a series of telegrams to Tschirschky in Vienna which in contrast to previous German encouragement to press on appeared genuinely to seek to hold Austria-Hungary back from triggering a European war.

Two went about midnight. Bethmann wanted Vienna to consider Grey's proposal that Austria-Hungary limited its military operations. Vienna must also renew its conversations with St Petersburg. Two more went about 3.00 A.M. He sent Lichnowsky's report of Grey's warning and added *"if Austria rejects all mediation, we are faced with a conflagration in which England will go against us"*. The last telegram repeated the need to reopen discussions with Russia and ended by saying "*Germany will fulfil its alliance obligations but must decline to be drawn into a world conflagration by Vienna, without having any regard paid to our counsel"*.

While his telegrams were being encoded Bethmann received one from Tschirschky saying Vienna wanted more time to consider the "halt in Belgrade" proposal. It was not very encouraging.

3.1.3 Thursday, 30 July – Bethmann Loses Control to the Military

The day started with an event demonstrating how aloof and out of touch, or badly advised, were the men at the very top in Germany and Russia.

In Potsdam the Kaiser received a wire from the Tsar mentioning his *"military measures"* started five days before aimed at Austria-Hungary. It was a mistake to talk about military measures started five days before. Wilhelm thought he had been tricked by the Tsar. Russia was mobilising even when the Tsar had asked him to speak to Vienna, and Russia was now that much ahead of Germany. He said "*I must mobilise too! ... I regard my mediation action as brought to an end...."*.

And, in any case, German intelligence had a good measure of what was happening in Russia from the very beginning when Chelsius, the Kaiser's representative at the Russian Court, reported unexpected military steps in St Petersburg on the 25 July but the information had not registered or been given to the Kaiser.

Very soon after at 11.00 A.M. Bethmann received a copy of the Tsar's telegram from Potsdam with the Kaiser's comments. Bethmann wrote back advising the Kaiser not to end mediation while there was still no answer from Vienna and he drafted a telegram for the Kaiser to send to the Tsar saying that it was Russian mobilisation that endangered his mediation efforts. He remarked to the Kaiser that *"…. this telegram will become a particularly important document for history"*.

News of the Kaiser's outburst probably leaked out because at 1.00 P.M. an extra edition of the Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, a semi-official publication, claimed the Kaiser had ordered mobilisation of the German army and navy. It was immediately withdrawn but a few hundred copies were sold.

The Kaiser had Prince Henry wire King George saying Wilhelm was *"trying his utmost to fulfil Nicky's appeal to him to work for peace,"* but Nicky *"today confirms news that military measures have been ordered by him"*. France was taking military measures as well. Germany had taken none, *"but may be forced to do so at any moment"*. Germany and England should work together *"to prevent a terrible catastrophe"*. Henry begged the King to use his influence *"on France and also Russia to keep neutral"*.

Shortly after the Kaiser was shown Lichnowsky's report of Grey's warning received the previous evening that Britain would join its Entente partners if war broke out between them and Germany. The Kaiser had another angry outburst and wrote his comments on the report including *"England shows her hand when she thinks we are cornered"*. If that wasn't enough later that evening the Kaiser saw Pourtalès' report received early that morning that Sazonov said Russian partial mobilisation could not be revoked.

The Kaiser vented his feelings in a long footnote even accusing his dead uncle, King Edward VII, of plotting against Germany.

At 11.50 A.M. an urgent telegram arrived in Berlin from Pourtalès announcing Russia was mobilising in its military districts facing Austria-Hungary. Bethmann, Falkenhayn, Moltke and Tirpitz met to discuss the latest information. This time Moltke strongly supported Falkenhayn's demand that Germany proclaim "State of Imminent danger of War".

Moltke had undergone a dramatic change of attitude. Only that morning he had told the Austro-Hungarian liaison officer Russian partial mobilisation was no reason for Germany to mobilise. It would only happen if Russia was at war with Austria-Hungary.

Moltke now wanted immediate action. They knew Belgium was making military preparations and the Liége forts were operational. This could have been the vital factor in his mind because if Belgium was ready, and resisted, it directly threatened Germany's military strategy of starting its invasion of France through Belgium with a surprise attack immediately on mobilisation. Moltke might also have heard privately of the Kaiser's outburst that morning in favour of mobilisation. Up until then he and many in the military were not sure that the Kaiser would really go to war when faced with that decision. However, Bethmann still insisted on waiting developments and was not ready to declare "State of Imminent danger of War".

Moltke also learned from the Austrian liaison officer that Conrad was still implementing Plan-B, the main army deployment against Serbia rather than, Plan-R, the main deployment against Russia. He was greatly alarmed and told the Austrian military attaché that Austria-Hungary should immediately mobilise against Russia. The only hope for Austria-Hungary was a European war and English mediation proposals should be rejected. These views were wired to Conrad.

As if to make sure the message was understood Moltke himself a little later wired Conrad saying *"Stand firm against Russian mobilisation. Austria-Hungary must be preserved, mobilise at once*

against Russia. Germany will mobilise". This was in completely the opposite sense to what Bethmann was trying to achieve, and shows how the German military reporting directly to the Kaiser were independent of the civilian leaders.

Jagow saw Jules Cambon who reminded him he had said Germany would not mobilise if Russia mobilised only against Austria-Hungary and not in the districts facing Germany.

Jagow admitted this but now said the German army chiefs were insisting on action as any delay was a loss of strength for Germany. In any case his previous statement was not a binding engagement.

Berlin learned by a phone call to Tschirschky that the leaders in Vienna were waiting for Tisza to return to the city so that they could get his views but it was very unlikely that Austria-Hungary would limit its military operations as required by the "halt in Belgrade" proposal.

Bethmann received Pourtalès' report outlining the formula that Sazonov had drafted for Pourtalès in the early hours of Thursday morning, that, if Austria would recognize the European character of its dispute with Serbia and would declare its readiness to eliminate those points in its note that infringed upon Serbia's sovereignty, Russia would suspend its military preparations. But this news made no difference.

Some light is thrown on Bethmann's state of mind in a brief he gave at the end of the afternoon to the Prussian cabinet *"the greatest importance must be attached to presenting Russia as the guilty party"*. He was still against the proclamation of the "State of Imminent Danger of War" because he didn't want to abandon hope or give up his attempts to keep the peace, *"as long as my demarche in Vienna has not been rejected"*. He also said *"the situation has got out of hand and the stone has started to roll"*.

The telegram from Lichnowsky arrived about his conversation with Grey that afternoon. Grey was still trying to bring about an understanding between Vienna and St Petersburg and Bethmann made one more effort to influence Vienna.

He telegramed Tschirschky (Telegram 200). He said *"while Vienna declines everything, Vienna will be giving documentary evidence that it absolutely wants a war"* and Russia would be *"free of responsibility"*. If this happens it *"would place us, in the eyes of our own people, in an untenable position"*. Tschirschky was to see Berchtold, and if necessary Tisza, *"at once"* and in the *"most emphatic language"* put these points to the Vienna government.

After this Bethmann had heated discussion with Moltke and Falkenhayn. Both generals believed mediation efforts in Vienna would fail. They wanted to proclaim the "State of Imminent Danger of War" immediately. Bethmann still wanted Russia to be seen to make the first move but promised to make a decision by noon the next day.

At Potsdam at 11.00 P.M. the Kaiser received King George's reply to Prince Henry's message saying Britain was trying to get St Petersburg and Paris to suspend military activities if Vienna agreed to limit its military actions in Serbia.

Then it seemed Bethmann gave in to the demands of the German military. At 11.20 P.M. Zimmermann prepared an unencoded telegram for Bethmann to send to Tschirschky telling him not to carry out the instructions of Telegram 200. It was unencoded so it would be seen by the recipient as soon as possible, and of course it didn't say anything about the contents of Telegram 200. Zimmermann then drafted a second telegram for encoding for Bethmann to send Tschirschky. It said *"I have suspended execution of Telegram 200"* because the General Staff say *"the military preparations of our neighbours, especially in the East, expose us to surprises"* and they urgently need to know what military decisions are being taken in Vienna. The message assumed the worst was about to happen.

But then in another amazing about turn Bethmann did not send the second telegram prepared by Zimmermann. Instead he telegramed Tschirschky saying *"I have suspended the execution of Telegram 200 in consideration of the following telegram from the King of England. You should communicate the telegram immediately to Count*

Berchtold and hand him a copy for possible submission to Emperor Francis Joseph. A definite decision from Vienna today is urgently requested".

3.1.4 Friday, 31 July – Ultimatums Sent to Russia and France

By Early morning German military intelligence had reports Russian general mobilisation was underway. Moltke asked for firm evidence and by noon the Germans had a copy of the Russian red mobilisation notices posted up in Russian villages and a telegram from Pourtalès confirmed Russia had begun general mobilisation.

Now well into the most intense period of the crisis, possibly past the point of no return, the Kaiser decided to leave Potsdam and join the civilian and military leaders in Berlin. Before leaving he wrote telegrams for the Tsar and King George. He told the Tsar that Russia's measures on Germany's eastern frontier forced him to take preventive measures, and the threatened disaster would not be his responsibility. Russia could avert the disaster if it stopped its military measures.

In Berlin Bethmann met with Moltke and Falkenhayn. Moltke wanted to order immediate German mobilisation and opening of hostilities. Instead, it was decided to first send an ultimatum to Russia to cease its mobilisation, and to proclaim the "State of Imminent Danger of War". When the Kaiser joined them he approved these measures and shortly after Germany proclaimed "State of Imminent Danger of War". Bethmann telegramed this news to Tschirschky telling him *"After the Russian total mobilisation we have proclaimed imminent danger of war, which will probably be followed within forty-eight hours by mobilisation. This inevitably means war. We expect from Austria immediate active participation in the war against Russia"*.

The German military appeared pleased with developments. Russia could be blamed. According to General von Wenninger, in the afternoon he found in the war ministry *"…. everywhere beaming*

faces, people shaking hands in the corridors, congratulating one another on having cleared the ditch".

A telegram from the Tsar to the Kaiser arrived mid-afternoon promising him though Russian mobilisation could not be stopped Russian troops would *"not make any provocative action"*.

At the 3.30 P.M. the ultimatum to Russia was sent to Pourtalès. He was instructed to tell the Russian government that German mobilisation must follow *"unless within twelve hours Russia suspends all war measures against ourselves and Austria-Hungary and gives us a definite assurance to that effect. Please notify M. Sazonov of this at once and wire hour of notification"*. It did not make clear for Germany mobilisation meant immediate military action and war.

At the same time an equally ominous demand was sent to France. Schoen was instructed to *"ask the French Government if it intends to remain neutral in a Russo-German war"*. If France was to be neutral Germany required the handing over of the fortresses of Toul and Verdun as a pledge of neutrality. The French were given until 4.00 P.M. next day to reply.

A series of exchanges now took place highlighting a remarkable lack of planning and foresight in the leadership in Berlin and Vienna. The Kaiser telegramed Emperor Franz Josef telling him Germany was preparing to mobilise. He said Germany would fulfil its alliance obligations and it was of the *"greatest importance that Austria directs her chief force against Russia and does not split it up by a simultaneous offensive against Serbia"*. This message was probably partly prompted by one arriving a bit earlier at 2.45 P.M. from the Franz Joseph saying the threatening attitude of Russia would not stop Austria-Hungary acting against Serbia.

A telephone message from Conrad also arrived. He said *"Austro-Hungarian mobilisation against Russia is only for the purpose of taking precautions against attack from Russia, without any intention of declaring or beginning war"*. This was most alarming for Moltke whose responding telephone message to Conrad said *"Germany will proclaim mobilisation of entire military forces probably 2 August*

and open hostilities against Russia and France. Will Austria leave her in the lurch?"

During the late evening and early hours of next day after more telephone messages Conrad informed Moltke that Austria-Hungary would go to war with Russia as well as Serbia.

And the next day at 10.00 P.M., a day later, Szögyény delivered a message for the Kaiser from Franz Joseph. The Emperor assured Wilhelm that as soon as he heard Germany was *"determined to commence war against Russia ... we here came to the firm determination, too, to assemble our principal forces against Russia"*.

Ever mindful of Britain Bethmann telegramed Lichnowsky explaining that Russia's general mobilisation *"cut short Austria's pending reply to our mediation proposal. ... We have told Russia we should have to mobilise, which would mean war, unless, within twelve hours, the military preparations against Austria-Hungary and ourselves are suspended .... Please use every means to ensure this course of events is duly recognised in the English press"*.

And late that Friday evening Goschen saw Jagow to urge him to accept Grey's peace ideas. He also asked if in the event of war Germany would respect the neutrality of Belgium. A similar question had been asked of France. Jagow said he could not answer such a question as it would reveal Germany's intentions.

3.1.5 Saturday, 1 August – Germany Mobilises and Declares War on Russia

There was no official Russian response to the German ultimatum. Berlin prepared a declaration of war. As Russia was not attacking either Austria-Hungary or Germany the declaration said *"His Majesty the Emperor, my August Sovereign, accepts the challenge in the name of the Empire, and considers himself as being in a state of war with Russia"*. Shortly after 1.00 P.M. the German declaration of war was sent by telegram to the German embassy in St Petersburg. It was to be given to the Russians at 5 P.M. Berlin time, 7 P.M. St Petersburg time.

Just after 2.00 P.M. the Kaiser had another message from the Tsar saying he understood why the Kaiser was obliged to mobilise but he wished to have the same guarantee that he gave the Kaiser *"that these measures do not mean war and we shall continue negotiating"*. Later that evening the Kaiser replied saying that as Germany had not yet received a reply to the noon deadline demand that Russia stopped mobilising he could not discuss the Tsar's telegram.

At 5.00 P.M. The Kaiser signed the mobilisation order.

Immediately after the signing a telegram arrived from Lichnowsky that led to one of the strangest episodes of the crisis and illustrated starkly the human factors. Lichnowsky reported that Grey was suggesting that if Germany did not attack France, Britain would remain neutral in a Russo-German war and also guarantee the neutrality of France. It was not an actual proposal, only a suggestion that one might be made along those lines, but the Kaiser took it as real proposal. He was delighted and even ordered champagne. He declared that Germany must now deploy all its forces in the east. Moltke said this was impossible and a very heated argument ensued.

They finally agreed the British proposal should be accepted, but mobilisation along the French frontier would continue, and they would study the possibility of redeploying forces to the east. The Kaiser sent a personal message to King George supporting the British proposal. During this meeting without reference to Moltke who was very upset the Kaiser ordered the halting of the 16th Division which was about to invade Luxembourg.

While this drama played out, at 6.10 P.M. Berlin received news from Schoen that in response to definite and repeated requests, Viviani had *"stated to me, hesitatingly, that France would act in accordance with her interests"*.

Finally, late that evening King George replied to the Kaiser's telegram. There must have been *"some misunderstanding as to a suggestion that passed in friendly conversation between Prince Lichnowsky and Sir Edward Grey this afternoon when they were*

discussing how actual fighting between German and French armies might be avoided while there is still chance of some agreement between Austria and Russia". The Kaiser told Moltke he could now do whatever he wanted. All hope of peace had gone. Moltke immediately telegramed the army to resume the attack in the west on France.

Chapter 3.2

Austria-Hungary – Carries on Regardless

3.2.1 Tuesday, 28 July – Austria-Hungary Declares War on Serbia

Just before 11.00 A.M. at Bad Ischl the eighty-four-year-old Emperor Franz Joseph signed the declaration of war on Serbia. Shortly after at midday it was telegrammed to Niš.

Once that was done Berchtold saw Shebeko, the Russian ambassador, who he had been deliberately avoiding because he didn't want to discuss Sazonov's proposal for direct talks between the two countries before Vienna had declared war. Berchtold told Shebeko that Austria-Hungary refused to enter into any negotiations on the Serbian reply, which had already been rejected as unsatisfactory. He was thinking of Grey's proposal that the Serbian answer served as a basis for negotiation. This was not what Russia was proposing. The Russian proposal was that Sazonov and Szápáry review the original Austrian ultimatum to make it unconditionally acceptable to Serbia. Shebeko compounded the confusion reporting to Sazonov that Austria-Hungary *"cannot retreat and enter into a discussion of its note"* which Sazonov took to mean Berchtold rejected any talks between Austria-Hungary and Russia rather than discussion of the text of the ultimatum.

The Austrian leaders discussed the military situation following the declaration of war on Serbia. Berchtold asked whether war with Russia could be carried on if the army was attacking Serbia. That Berchtold now asked such a question shows his disregard or ignorance of the military consequences of the policy he had chosen. It seemed for him the declaration of war was a diplomatic move designed to increase the pressure on Serbia and had no military implications. This was a disastrous miscalculation and ignored the impact the declaration of war would have in St

Petersburg and the steps that might be taken there. Conrad told the meeting that with Austro-Hungarian mobilisation against Serbia due to start the next day he needed to know by the 1 August whether there was going to be a war with Russia so he could decide where to send his reserves.

They again looked to Germany for help. They believed that if Austria-Hungary was engaged in operations against Serbia, then even if Russia only mobilised against Austria-Hungary, Germany should mobilise too, even though this made European war inevitable. They telegramed Szögyény telling him to ask Germany to consider sending *"a friendly reminder"* to Russia along those lines by the 1 August at the latest. The next morning when Szögyény saw Jagow to ask Germany to mobilise if Russia carried out partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary Jagow was in a bind. He had previously told the Russians that Germany would not mobilise in those circumstances. He asked Szögyény to put the request into writing.

That evening, a day after it had been sent, Tschirschky finally acted on Bethmann's late Monday evening telegram, Bethmann's first but false mediation effort, asking for Berchtold's opinions on Grey's suggestion that Berlin mediate in Vienna and Sazonov's desire to have direct talks. Berchtold said he would let Tschirschky have his views very soon though he thought the British move came too late. Berchtold claimed Serbia had already opened hostilities. Berchtold also asked Szögyény to thank Jagow for his message regarding any British proposals that Berlin might forward to Vienna. (Jagow had said the German government was against any British mediation proposal that it might forward to the Austrian government in the immediate future. It only passed it on to conform to the British request as it was vital to ensure that Britain did not side with France and Russia.)

The claim that Serbia had opened hostilities was based on a false report from the Austro-Hungarian military that Serbian troops had attacked an Austro-Hungarian army detachment.

Berchtold used the report without checking it but issued a rectification when it was found to be untrue.

3.2.2 Wednesday, 29 July – Vienna Shows Little Interest in Mediation

During the day Austro-Hungarian river-monitors on the Sava river shelled Belgrade even though no invasion could start for at least another two weeks and Austro-Hungarian military intelligence detected signs of Russian military preparations along the border with Galicia, the province bordering Russia.

Bethmann's second but unconvincing mediation effort, Telegram 174, concerning the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" proposal and direct talks on this with Russia had been in Vienna since 4.00 A.M. but Tschirschky talked to Berchtold about it much later in the day, probably late evening. Berchtold was willing to repeat to Russia that Austria-Hungary would make no territorial acquisitions at the expense of Serbia but he needed time to consider the "halt in Belgrade" idea. This response didn't get to Berlin until early next day. It is doubtful that Tschirschky presented these proposals with any conviction.

In the early hours of the next day Berchtold received news of Russia's partial mobilisation. He instructed Szögyény to tell the German government *"for military reasons our general mobilisation must be put in hand at once if the Russian measures for mobilisation are not immediately suspended"*. The ambassador was also told although diplomatic action continued in St Petersburg and Paris *"we shall naturally not allow ourselves to be dissuaded from our military action against Serbia"*.

3.2.3 Thursday, 30 July – Vienna Worried German Support Might be Changing

The first of Bethmann's 29-30 July late night telegrams, his third mediation effort, arrived early in the morning. The tone was different from previous messages and it was clear Berlin now really wanted Vienna to pursue the "halt in Belgrade" proposal and associated mediation, as now proposed by Grey, and to have

direct talks with St Petersburg. Tschirschky informed Berchtold of their content.

Now very concerned that Germany was pulling back from its policy of total support for Austria-Hungary's plan to deal with Serbia, and seeking a peaceful solution, Berchtold decided Austria-Hungary should declare general mobilisation without waiting for German approval or warning the Russians. He sent Hoyos to ask Conrad to be ready to see the Emperor later that day to discuss ordering general mobilisation. Conrad too was in favour of general mobilisation and he had already prepared a draft statement saying Austria-Hungary was extending its mobilisation without any intention to attack or threaten Russia but to make provision against an attack by Russia.

Berchtold also took steps to appear to follow Berlin's advice. He wired Szápáry telling him to see Sazonov immediately and explain he was ready to elucidate any points in the ultimatum to Serbia and amicably discuss relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia. This was not what Russia was asking. It wanted to change the ultimatum so it could be accepted by Serbia.

Tschirschky reported back to Berlin. He said Austria-Hungary was willing to discuss with Russia all questions directly affecting the two countries, but not the Serbo-Austrian conflict. In the case of Serbia now that a state of war existed Austria-Hungary's terms would be different. Berchtold had instructed Szápáry to talk to Sazonov and would himself talk to Shebeko. Tschirschky did not mention that Austria-Hungary intended to order general mobilisation.

By the early afternoon the later and more desperate of Bethmann's telegrams arrived. Tschirschky now had the one warning Britain would not be neutral. *"... we should be two against four Great Powers. Germany, as the result of England's hostility, would have to bear the brunt of the fighting. .... we must urgently and emphatically recommend to the consideration of the Vienna Cabinet the acceptance of mediation on the honorable terms indicated"*. He showed it to Berchtold who appeared shocked. Berchtold said he would

have to talk with the Emperor and left for his meeting with Franz Joseph. Tschirschky continued talking with Berchtold's colleagues. They did not believe that Austria-Hungary's military operations could be restricted.

Stumm, the political director at the German foreign office, phoned Tschirschky. He told Stumm that the Austrians were so far unwilling to limit their military action against Serbia. Tschirschky went again to talk with Berchtold's colleagues.

Berchtold, Conrad and Krobatin met the Emperor who had come from Bad Ischl to Vienna to see them, and briefed him on the messages from Berlin and the military position. They agreed Serbia must meet the demands of the note in full and now pay the cost of the mobilisation and military operations against her. Despite German pressure they resolved to continue the war against Serbia, to give a courteous reply to the English proposal without accepting it, and to order general mobilisation. They agreed to discuss matters the next day when Tisza would be back in Vienna before formalising their decisions.

Later in the afternoon Berchtold talked to Shebeko. He said he had not intended to break off direct talks with Russia. Szápáry had been instructed to give Sazonov any explanations he required regarding the demands of the ultimatum, and to explore ways of maintaining friendly relations with Russia. Shebeko reported to St Petersburg he thought Berchtold really wanted to arrive at an understanding.

At 5.00 P.M. Tschirschky wired Berlin saying his *"Instructions emphatically executed. Count Berchtold will reply by return after receiving Emperor Francis Joseph's commands"*. This terse message still left Berlin in the dark. Stumm again phoned Tschirschky who confirmed Austria-Hungary's determination to reject all compromise and mediation. He didn't mention the Austro-Hungarians were about to order general mobilisation.

In response to Moltke's question that morning of what Austria-Hungary would do in response to Russian partial mobilisation Conrad prepared a reply saying *"On the basis of His Majesty's*

decision the resolve is: to go forward with the war against Serbia. To mobilise remainder of army, assemble in Galicia. First day of mobilisation 4 August. Mobilisation order issued today 31 July. Request intimation of your first mobilisation day".

At 1.35 A.M. next day Tschirschky finally sent a fuller report of his discussions with the Austro-Hungarian leaders before and after his first call with Stumm. He said *"I begged [them] to bear in mind the incalculable consequences of a rejection of mediation"*. In the last paragraph he stated *"Conrad von Hotzendorf this evening was to submit the order for general mobilisation to the Emperor as the answer to the measures already taken by Russia. It was not quite certain whether in the present situation mobilisation was still the right course"*.

3.2.4 Friday, 31 July – Mixed Messages from Berlin but Austria-Hungary Decides on General Mobilisation

During Thursday evening the Kaiser still in Potsdam had telegramed the Emperor saying he would be most obliged to have the Emperor's decision regarding the "halt in Belgrade" proposal. This was another example of the Kaiser being one step behind and out of touch with the leaders in Berlin and it gave the impression he still wanted a peaceful solution and to avoid war.

In Vienna, Friday morning first thing, Conrad and Krobatin went to see Berchtold. Tisza, Stürgkh and Burián were also present. Conrad read out the messages he had from Moltke urging Austria-Hungary to mobilise against Russia. They contrasted starkly with Bethmann's appeals and the Kaiser's latest message. Berchtold exclaimed *"Who runs the government, Moltke or Bethmann?"*. The meeting decided to submit the general mobilisation order to the Emperor for his signature and that Conrad should send his message to Moltke prepared the evening before saying the Austro-Hungarian general mobilisation order was being issued today, the 31 July.

Berchtold then convened a Joint Ministerial Council meeting of those present to formally approve the decisions taken. He reviewed the latest diplomatic exchanges including Grey's

proposal to Lichnowsky for the suspension of hostilities against Serbia and the acceptance of four-power mediation, the British version of "halt in Belgrade", Grey's indication to Lichnowsky that Britain would not be neutral in a European war, and Bethmann's grave comments communicated by Tschirschky that Germany and Austria-Hungary would face at least three great powers if war broke out.

Berchtold told the meeting that when the German ambassador submitted the British proposal he immediately declared that a cessation of hostilities against Serbia was impossible and he would have to obtain the Emperor's commands regarding mediation. The Emperor also declared that cessation of hostilities against Serbia was impossible and it was important to avoid acceptance of the British proposal without causing offense.

The Joint Ministerial Council decided their reply to Germany would be based on three basic principles:

(1) War operations against Serbia must be continued

(2) There could be no negotiation on the British proposal unless Russian mobilisation was suspended, and

(3) Austria-Hungary's terms must be integrally accepted by Serbia. There could be no negotiations on them.

They believed any four-power mediation would inevitably work against them. France, Britain and even Italy would support the Russian view and they could not expect warm support from Lichnowsky representing Germany. Russia would be seen as the saviour of Serbia especially the Serbian army and they were intent on destroying the Serbian army to avoid another problem arising with Serbia in a few years' time.

Tisza suggested replying to the British proposal that Austria-Hungary was ready in principle to examine it further but only on condition that operations against Serbia proceeded and that Russian mobilisation was stopped. In effect, this was an outright

rejection. Austria-Hungary had not modified its original objectives in any way and was prepared to trigger a European war.

Shortly after midday at Bad Ischl the Emperor signed the orders for general mobilisation and they were returned to Vienna. The Emperor sent a message to the Kaiser stating he had ordered general mobilisation following news of Russia's partial mobilisation. The latest British mediation proposal had come too late. The army operations against Serbia *"can suffer no interruption"* and any *"fresh rescue of Serbia by Russian intervention"* would have the *"most serious consequences"* for Austria-Hungary and therefore Vienna *"cannot possibly permit such intervention"*.

Late in the afternoon Vienna received the message from Berlin that Germany had proclaimed its "State of Imminent Danger of War". And, Germany expected immediate participation of Austria-Hungary in the war against Russia that this inevitably meant.

Finally that evening Berchtold wired Austria-Hungary's formal response to Bethmann's urgent messages of the 29-30 July to Szögyény in Berlin. It said *"... we are ... prepared to examine more closely Sir E. Grey's proposal ... The premises of our acceptance, however, are of course that our military action against the Kingdom shall in the meantime take its course and that the British Cabinet shall prevail upon the Russian Government to arrest the mobilisation of its troops directed against us"*. This did not get to Berlin until 3.45 A.M., nearly two days after Bethmann's original communication. There was no meaningful change in Austria-Hungary's position and in any case the reply had been overtaken by events.

3.2.5 Saturday, 1 August – Austria-Hungary Now Has to Face Russia

As war had not yet been declared Shebeko, the Russian ambassador, talked to Berchtold. He argued that Russian military measures *"bare no hostile character"*. Austria-Hungary must *"not solve the conflict with Serbia without consulting Russia"*. He suggested talks in London.

Such exchanges were now completely futile as military events took their course. Vienna now had to abandon its attack on Serbia. Conrad assured Moltke that Austria-Hungary would now *"employ the main weight of our strength in the north"* towards Russia, despite the difficulties in moving troops from the Serbian frontier. Though the redeployment and movement of troops could not be completed until mid-August, under German pressure on the 5 August, Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia.

Chapter 3.3

Russia – One Thing Leads to Another

3.3.1 Tuesday, 28 July – Russia Decides to Declare Partial Mobilisation

As he began a series of diplomatic meetings Sazonov was worried and in a bad mood. It was nearly two days since he had proposed that Austria-Hungary and Russia should hold direct talks to modify the ultimatum so Serbia could accept it, and there had been no response from Vienna. Buchanan called on him and asked if Russia would accept Vienna's assurances on Serbian independence and integrity. Sazonov said *"No engagement that Austria might take on these two points would satisfy Russia"*. He told Buchanan that Russia would mobilise when Austro-Hungarian troops crossed the Serbian border.

Next Sazonov saw Pourtalès and angrily accused him of being part of a joint Austro-Hungarian and German plot to provoke war. He now saw through the whole deceitful policy. Pourtalès took great offence at this and said if Sazonov took the liberty of talking like that, it was useless to continue the conversation and walked out of the meeting. On returning to his embassy he found a note concerning the blocking of the radio communications of a German steamer in St Petersburg harbour and had cause to call back at the Russian foreign ministry and speak to one of Sazonov's assistants. He explained what had happened between himself and Sazonov and suggested if Sazonov made the slightest gesture he would be happy to continue their talk. When he got back to the embassy a second time he found a telephone message from Sazonov asking him to come back to the ministry and Sazonov greeted him flinging his arms around his neck and apologising. They resumed their talk.

Sazonov said the Serbian reply gave Vienna all it could want. If it was not accepted it simply proved Austria-Hungary wanted

war. Pourtalès said he had reports that Russian military preparations were far more advanced than stated in the assurances given the previous day.

His last morning meeting was with Szápáry who still had no instructions from Vienna about direct talks. Szápáry repeated the pledge not to annex Serbian territory. Sazonov also asked to see the full dossier from the Austro-Hungarian government concerning Serbian complicity in the assassination. Perhaps reflecting Sazonov's agitated state of mind Szápáry reported to Vienna that Sazonov clutched at straws and laid stress on Russia's interest that Serbia should not be reduced to a state of vassalage.

Late in the afternoon news of the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia reached St Petersburg.

Paléologue called on Sazonov. Paléologue did not pass on the full message from Poincaré and Viviani of the previous day omitting the part about the two countries working together for a solution *"in the interests of the general peace"*. He told Sazonov of *"the complete readiness of France to fulfil her obligations as an ally in case of necessity"*.

Sazonov talked to Yanushkevich, Chief of the General Staff, who now following the advice of his military colleagues argued strongly for general mobilisation as the only feasible option. Sazonov understood the problem but was still inclined to partial mobilisation as a means of putting pressure on Vienna. Sazonov left to see the Tsar at Peterhof at 6.00 P.M.

Sazonov reported the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia to the Tsar. He also explained the mobilisation problem and proposed the preparation of two ukazes (orders), one for partial, and one for general mobilisation, so that a decision on which to use could be left to the last moment and taken in light of the latest developments. The Tsar agreed to this and based on present assessments, the declaration of partial mobilisation the next day, Wednesday, 29 July. Nothing was to be finally decided without his further approval. He and Sazonov wanted to see the effect of the announcement of partial mobilisation.

After he returned from Peterhof Sazonov telegramed Berlin, repeated to Vienna, Paris, London and Rome: *"In consequence of the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia, we shall tomorrow (the 29 July) proclaim mobilisation in the districts of Odessa, Kiev, Moscow and Kazan. Inform the German Government of this and lay stress on the absence of any intention on the part of Russia to attack Germany"*. He also telegramed Benckendorff in London saying *"It would be necessary for England with all speed to take action in view of mediation and for Austria at once to suspend military measures against Serbia. Otherwise mediation will only furnish a pretext for delay in bringing the matter to a decision and make it meanwhile possible for Austria to annihilate Serbia completely"*.

At Sazonov's suggestion the Tsar telegramed the Kaiser appealing to him to avoid the calamity of a European war by stopping his ally Austria-Hungary going too far. This was the first from the Tsar in an exchange of messages with the Kaiser. It crossed with the first one from the Kaiser who had been similarly prompted by Bethmann to send a message to the Tsar.

3.3.2 Wednesday, 29 July – Russian Leaders Decide War With Germany Is Unavoidable

Early Wednesday morning at 7.20 A.M. on his own initiative, and apparently based on his and the Russian military view of how matters should or would develop, Yanushkevich wired the commanders of all Russia's military districts giving them advance warning that general mobilisation (not partial mobilisation) would be ordered on 30 July. Such a message showed how the Russian military were independent of the civilian leaders as in Germany. Later Yanushkevich took the ukazes for partial and general mobilisation to Peterhof for the Tsar to sign. The Tsar signed both of them.

At 11.00 A.M. Pourtalès called on Sazonov with what he termed an *"agreeable communication"* It was the first of five meetings the two men were to have that critical day. Berlin was still pushing Vienna to talk with St Petersburg and clarify *"the aims and extent"*

of its actions in Serbia. Sazonov said he wanted to talk with Vienna but there was no sign Vienna wanted to talk. He told Pourtalès Russia was about to order mobilisation of the Russian military districts facing Austria and pointed out *"…. in Russia, unlike western European states, mobilisation is far from being the same as war. The Russian Army could, as needed, stand at ease for weeks without crossing the frontier"*. Pourtalès warned him military measures were dangerous. They led to counter-measures by the other side.

Shortly after this Sazonov read Shebeko's report that Berchtold had refused to authorise further direct talks with St. Petersburg. (Shebeko had not communicated clearly that refusal covered only talks on the Austrian ultimatum or the Serbian reply, not other direct talks.)

In the afternoon Sazonov saw Buchanan and told him that Russia was not ordering general mobilisation though that was what the military recommended. He also said Russia now supported Grey's four-power mediation proposal as Vienna was rejecting direct talks with St Petersburg. Sazonov then called back Pourtalès for their second meeting to tell him Berchtold had rejected talks and Russia was now supporting the British proposal. Pourtalès emphasised that Austria-Hungary was not going *"to submit to any kind of European court of arbitration"* and repeated his warning that any form of Russian mobilisation would be *"a grave mistake"*.

Szápáry called on Sazonov. Though Austria-Hungary would not discuss the ultimatum or the Serbian reply, it was ready for a *"far broader basis for the exchange of views"* and did not wish to damage Russian interests. Sazonov said the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum infringed Serbian sovereignty though, oddly, he said it was *"quarrelling over words"*. He also said *"Russian interests are identical with the Serbian"*. While they were talking news arrived Belgrade had been shelled and Sazonov took this to mean the invasion of Serbia had begun. His mood changed completely and he grew angry accusing Szápáry of just wanting to gain time by negotiations *"yet you go ahead and bombard an unprotected city"*. He

told Szápáry there could be no more discussion and ended the meeting. Sazonov attached far more importance to the shelling than it warranted. It did not continue and was really a brief demonstration. In any case, the Austro-Hungarians would not be ready to invade Serbia until the 12 August, two weeks away.

At 7.00 P.M. Pourtalès called on Sazonov for their third meeting that day. He carried out Bethmann's instruction and told Sazonov that *"further progress of Russian mobilisation measures would compel us to mobilise and that then European war would scarcely be prevented"*. Sazonov saw the German message as an ultimatum. It convinced him that Berlin was behind Austro-Hungarian actions. He had thought partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary was a sufficient response. He now thought a European war was inevitable and Russia therefore must start general mobilisation immediately.

Soon after the Tsar phoned Sazonov to tell him about a message from the Kaiser that sounded friendly. It was the Kaiser's first message in the series of messages between him and the Tsar and had been suggested by Bethmann. The Kaiser said how concerned he was that Austria-Hungary's action against Serbia was making such a bad impression in Russia and that both he and the Tsar as sovereigns had a common interest in seeing all those responsible for the murder of the Archduke received their punishment. Politics did not enter into it.

It contrasted with what Pourtalès had just been saying to Sazonov. The Tsar telegramed the Kaiser thanking him for his conciliatory telegram and asked why the ambassador's official message was in such a different tone.

Austria-Hungary's refusal of direct talks, the bombardment of Belgrade, the latest message from Pourtalès, which sounded like an ultimatum, notwithstanding the Kaiser's message which he probably saw as propaganda, together with the military reasons against partial mobilisation, persuaded Sazonov war could not be avoided and Russia must order general mobilisation. He met Yanushkevich and Sukhomlinov and they decided *"in view of the*

small probability of avoiding war with Germany" to recommend immediate general mobilisation to the Tsar. The Tsar approved the decision over the phone. Sazonov telegramed Izvolsky so he could inform the French.

Dobrorolski, chief of the Russian mobilisation section, who had been instructed that afternoon by Yanushkevich to obtain the signatures of the minister for war, the navy minister and the minister of the interior needed to make the ukazes operative, completed the collection of signatures for the mobilisation order and went to the St Petersburg Central Telegraph Office to wire the order across the country. The telegrams were ready shortly after 10.00 P.M.

Meanwhile the Tsar received another message from the Kaiser asking for Russian restraint while he tried to mediate in Vienna. The Tsar decided he could not ignore this appeal and immediately countermanded the order for general mobilisation. Instead, he ordered partial mobilisation. The new order reached Dobrorolski just in time to stop the telegrams going out. He collected them and ordered new ones for partial mobilisation. These went out at midnight.

Paléologue had been told about the decision for general mobilisation and had prepared a telegram for Paris saying the Russian government had decided *".... to order the mobilisation of thirteen corps destined to operate against Austria and secretly to commence general mobilisation"*. At the last minute news arrived of the Tsar's change to partial mobilisation and the words "and secretly to commence general mobilisation" were removed from the message. Paléologue did not tell Paris Russia had first ordered general mobilisation.

Around midnight Sazonov saw Pourtalès for the fourth time to tell him of the Russian decision for partial mobilisation. He did not say Russia had been on the verge of declaring general mobilisation which threatened Germany. He asked Berlin to take part in four-power talks aimed at persuading Vienna to drop demands detrimental to Serbian sovereignty. Pourtalès was not optimistic,

saying that talks were almost impossible *"now that Russia had resolved on the fatal step of mobilisation"*.

The Tsar wired the Kaiser thanking him for his message. He said Russia's military measures started five days before were on account of Austria-Hungary's actions and were defensive. He hoped with all his heart they wouldn't interfere with the Kaiser's role as mediator which the Tsar greatly valued. This message stating that Russia had been making military preparations for five days had a great and unfortunate impact on the Kaiser.

A few hours later, in the early hours of the next day at 2.00 A.M., Pourtalès asked to see Sazonov. This was their fifth meeting in 24 hours. He had a more positive message from Bethmann than the one delivered that afternoon warning that Russian mobilisation would compel Germany to mobilise. Bethmann was trying to get a fresh formal assurance of Austria's *"désintéressement"* in Serbian territory. Sazonov was still very doubtful about Vienna's intentions so Pourtalès asked him to make his own proposal. Sazonov suggested that if Vienna declared that because the dispute had taken on a European dimension it was *"ready to eliminate from its ultimatum those points which infringe on Serbia's sovereign rights"* then *"Russia agrees to suspend all military preparations"*.

It is unlikely that this last minute proposal produced in such circumstances carried any weight or could have worked. The Austro-Hungarians were sticking to their original objectives and, in any case, it was being overtaken by military events.

3.3.3 Thursday, 30 July – The Tsar Changes his Mind Again – Russia Declares General Mobilisation

Sazonov was still in favour of general mobilisation. He met Yanushkevich and Sukhomlinov who continued to argue strongly partial mobilisation would wreck the plans for general mobilisation, and general mobilisation was necessary as war was unavoidable. Yanushkevich phoned the Tsar to try to persuade him of the case for general mobilisation but the Tsar refused to

reverse his decision. Eventually Sazonov spoke to the Tsar and said he had urgent business to discuss with him that could not be delayed and the Tsar reluctantly agreed to see Sazonov at 3.00 P.M. at Peterhof. The Tsar added he had such a busy schedule it was necessary for Sazonov to see him at the same time as he was seeing the Russian general who represented the Tsar at the Kaiser's court and who was about to return to Germany.

Sazonov updated his Entente partners and told Paléologue and Buchanan about the solution he had discussed earlier with Pourtalès. He also said for strategic reasons Russia could not postpone converting partial mobilisation into general mobilisation as she knew Germany was preparing. At this point Germany had not undertaken any significant military preparations.

Despite the proposal he had made to Pourtalès in the early hours that morning, when he got to Peterhof Sazonov told the Tsar there was no hope of peace. Germany was determined on war and was well advanced in its military preparations. Sazonov talked at length, and finally, the Tsar gave way and agreed to general mobilisation. Sazonov asked permission to telephone the news to Yanushkevich immediately. He didn't want to give the Tsar time to change his mind again. The same thought had occurred to Yanushkevich. He had told Sazonov that morning that if he was successful in getting the Tsar to change back to general mobilisation to let him know by phone immediately, in which case he would then smash his phone so no more contrary orders could reach him. *"Now you can smash your telephone"* Sazonov said as he finished the call from Peterhof.

Soon after at 5.00 P.M. Dobrorolski was again at the Central Telegraph Office. He waited until 7.00 P.M. until all military districts confirmed receipt of the mobilisation order. Russian general mobilisation had begun.

That afternoon Paléologue had a wire from Viviani asking him to urge Russia to do nothing to give Germany a pretext for mobilisation. Paléologue responded *"this very morning I have recommended to M. Sazonov to avoid all military measures that might*

furnish Germany with a pretext for general mobilisation". He added in the course of the past night Russia deferred secret precautions that might have alarmed the German general staff. This is an indirect reference to the cancelled Russian general mobilisation.

Later when he had confirmation from Sazonov, he wired Paris that Russia had intelligence that German war preparations were far advanced had decided to proceed secretly to the first measures of general mobilisation.

3.3.4 Friday, 31 July – Russian Mobilisation – No Going Back

Early morning, Friday, 31 July, notices on red paper announcing the mobilisation call-up appeared throughout St Petersburg. These were soon seen by Pourtalès who immediately went to see Sazonov to protest. He pointed out Vienna had agreed to resume direct talks and Germany had been assured by Russia that it would take no military steps. Sazonov tried to explain that the measures were entirely precautionary and that Russia was not making any irrevocable moves. Pourtalès asked to see the Tsar and sent an urgent message to Berlin reporting that Russia had begun general mobilisation.

When Pourtalès saw the Tsar that afternoon he said Russian mobilisation would have a terrible impact in Berlin and would end the mediation efforts and *".... the only thing which in my opinion might yet prevent war was a withdrawal of the mobilisation order"*. The Tsar said on technical grounds a recall of the order issued was no longer possible. He showed Pourtalès a wire he was about to send the Kaiser saying Russian troops would not make any hostile moves.

Paléologue telegramed Paris saying *"An order has been issued for the general mobilisation of the Russian army"*. He had known of the decision to mobilise the previous evening. For security reasons the message went via Sweden and didn't get to Paris until 8.30 P.M.

Despite the momentous decisions and still believing or behaving as if a peaceful solution might be found Sazonov

amended the latest peace proposals from Grey and circulated his new version to the other great powers. If Austria-Hungary agreed to stop its invasion of Serbia, recognised the European nature of the crisis, and agreed the other powers should enquire how Serbia could satisfy Austria-Hungary's demands, *"Russia engages to maintain her waiting attitude"*. He suggested to Buchanan the discussions took place in London.

Szápáry too continued to work for peace. He had first telegramed Vienna saying there was no point in holding discussions with Sazonov but he changed his mind and went to see him. He explained his instructions predated Russian mobilisation. Sazonov again said that as the Russian army would not attack *"mobilisation has no significance"*. Szápáry said that Vienna welcomed talks and was even ready to discuss the text of the ultimatum as far as interpretation was concerned. Sazonov suggested talks in London during which Austria-Hungary should stop military operations *"on Serbian territory"*.

These diplomatic ideas were rapidly over taken by events. At midnight Pourtalès called on Sazonov to deliver the German ultimatum. Unless within twelve hours Russia began to demobilise against Germany and Austria-Hungary, the German Government would be compelled to give the order to mobilise. Sazonov said this was a *"technical impossibility"* and Germany was *"overestimating the significance of a Russian mobilisation"*. He asked Pourtalès if German mobilisation was equivalent to war and Pourtalès replied *".... we should find ourselves on the brink of war"*. Sazonov gave the Tsar's assurance on his *"word of honour"* that the Russian army would not move, though it would continue to mobilise. This assurance was worthless to Germany.

3.3.5 Saturday, 1 August – Russia Says Mobilisation Does Not Necessarily Mean War

Early afternoon the next day the Tsar replied to the Kaiser's latest message which said the Kaiser was being forced to take *"preventive measures"* for the safety of his empire. The Tsar said *"Understand*

you are obliged to mobilise but wish to have some guarantee from you that these measures do not mean war and that we shall continue negotiating for the benefit of our countries and universal peace".

It was well past the 12 hours Germany had specified but at 7.00 P.M. Pourtalès called on Sazonov and asked him whether the Russian government was ready to give a favourable answer to the ultimatum presented the night before. Sazonov replied in the negative and said Russia wanted to continue talks. Pourtalès asked him twice more but to no avail. He then handed over the German declaration of war. Pourtalès was in tears. The two men embraced and Pourtalès asked for his passports.

Later that evening Buchanan delivered King George's urgent message to the Tsar. Even if it would have had some influence it came too late. The Tsar replied reporting Germany's declaration of war and saying he hoped Britain would support France and Russia in fighting to maintain the balance of power in Europe. He also said that he was compelled to mobilise in consequence of Austria-Hungary's complete mobilisation. This is wrong. At the time Russia mobilised Austria-Hungary had mobilised only against Serbia.

Chapter 3.4

Britain – Still Undecided

3.4.1 Tuesday, 28 July – British First Fleet Moves to its War Station

Early afternoon a telegram arrived from Goschen saying a *"conference"* sounded too much like a *"tribunal"*. Britain should ask Germany to put the proposal in another form or suggest a way to work with Britain on mediation. However, this crossed a message already sent by Grey saying he believed the best way forward was a direct exchange of views between Austria-Hungary and Russia and as long as this might happen other suggestions should be suspended. Grey again telegramed Goschen saying he was ready to ask Jagow to make his own suggestions on how to proceed with mediation but he would keep the idea in reserve until they knew how the conversations between Austria-Hungary and Russia were progressing.

Not long after these exchanges news of the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war reached London. Formal confirmation from Crackanthorpe in Niš arrived at 6.45 P.M. And a message from Bunsen informed Grey that Berchtold had said Austria-Hungary could not delay its proceedings against Serbia and therefore could not negotiate on the basis of the Serbian reply. This meant direct conversations between Austria-Hungary and Russia were unlikely to happen.

On the night of the 27 July Churchill had sent all Commanders-in-Chief a secret warning *"This is not the Warning Telegram, but European political situation makes war between Triple Entente and Triple Alliance powers by no means impossible"*. And at 5.00 P.M. on the 28 July, the Admiralty ordered the First Fleet, which was already concentrated at Portland fully manned and armed, following the annual Royal Navy Review at Spithead, to proceed during the night without lights, through the Channel to its North Sea war station at Scapa Flow.

3.4.2 Wednesday, 29 July – The Cabinet Supports an Ambiguous Policy

Before the day's cabinet meeting at 11.00 A.M. Grey asked Lichnowsky if Germany itself could make a mediation proposal as his proposal for an ambassadors' conference had been rejected and direct talks between Russia and Austria-Hungary now seemed unlikely. Lichnowsky repeated the German view that Russia should not interfere in a fight between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Austria-Hungary did not intend to annex Serbia. Grey pointed out it was possible to turn Serbia into a vassal state without annexation. Grey also asked if it might be possible to bring about an understanding on the extent of Austro-Hungarian military operations and political objectives so some reassurance could be given to Russia. This suggestion resembled the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" proposal.

The cabinet discussed what Britain should do if Germany attacked France through Belgium which the military thought the most likely course. Germany might invade the entire country including the Channel ports, which would be a threat to Britain, or it might just pass through the south-eastern corner. British action would be based on policy rather than any treaty obligations Britain might have regarding Belgium. They agreed Grey continue his ambiguous stances with France and Germany. He said he would tell Paul Cambon *"Don't count upon our coming in"* and he would tell Lichnowsky *"don't count on our abstention"*.

Others were more decided. That afternoon the Liberal Foreign Affairs Group wrote to Asquith saying Britain should tell Russia and France *"Great Britain in no conceivable circumstances will depart from a position of strict neutrality"*.

Mensdorff finally gave the British Foreign Office the Austro-Hungarian dossier on Serbian involvement in the Sarajevo assassinations. It was too late to have any influence. Grey pointed out to Mensdorff if the other powers were to ask Russia to refrain from action it was equivalent to giving Austria-Hungary a free hand. Russia would not accept this.

Following what the cabinet had agreed Grey spoke to Paul Cambon. He told him he was going to tell the German ambassador not to be misled by Britain's friendly attitude and think she would stand aside if all efforts to preserve peace failed. But he then went on to say to Cambon, the dispute between Austria and Serbia, even if it brought in Russia, was not one in which Britain felt involved. British policy had always been not to be drawn into a war over a Balkan question. If Germany and France became involved Britain had not decided what to do. France would have been drawn into a quarrel which was not hers. Britain was free from engagements and would have to decide what British interests required.

Grey then sent for Lichnowsky for their second meeting that day. He told him even though it was too late to stop Austro-Hungarian military action it might be possible to have mediation after they occupied Belgrade. This resembled the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" idea even more than Grey's earlier suggestion to Lichnowsky that Austria-Hungary limit its military operations. Grey went on to say he wished to make a private communication to Lichnowsky. He said if Germany and France became involved in a conflict the British government would find itself forced to make up its mind quickly. In that event it would not be practicable to stand aside and wait for any length of time. Grey was finally making it as clear as he could Britain would come to the aid of France, and probably saying more than most of his cabinet colleagues would have wished.

3.4.3 Thursday, 30 July – France Gives Britain a Polite Reminder

At 9.00 A.M. Goschen's dispatch containing Bethmann's proposal for British neutrality reached London, that Britain should remain neutral if Germany promised not to annex French territory. Crowe minuted *"these astounding proposals ... reflect discredit on the statesman who makes them"*. He concluded Germany was practically determined to go to war and the one restraining influence was the

fear that Britain would join in the defence of France and Belgium. Grey was equally aghast at the German proposal. Later that day Grey instructed Goschen to give Britain's formal response to Bethmann's neutrality proposal. He said *"You must inform the German Chancellor that his proposal that we should bind ourselves to neutrality on such terms cannot for a moment be entertained"*.

British political parties were alive to the gathering crisis. The Labour party adopted the resolution if there was a European war Britain should remain neutral in all circumstances. The Liberal Foreign Affairs Group sent a letter to Asquith, the British prime minister, saying they would withdraw their support from the government if Britain went to war. Conservative party leaders suggested to Asquith that legislation on Ulster was put-off in view of the international situation. The Liberal leaders were pleased to agree with this.

A telegram from Goschen said Jagow was asking Britain to do something to restrain St Petersburg while Germany tried to put pressure on Vienna for a "halt in Belgrade". Jagow had also remarked Bethmann would not have made his neutrality proposal if Grey's warning to Lichnowsky had arrived in Berlin earlier.

Lichnowsky called on Grey. Following a telegram from Bethmann he was also trying to get Grey to put pressure on Russia to stop its mobilisation against Austria-Hungary and to persuade France to stop its military preparations at once. Grey told Lichnowsky he believed the French were not making real war preparations such as calling up reservists. He said he was going to talk to Paul Cambon and would also talk to Benckendorff in the sense desired. He hoped that Bethmann's mediation efforts were successful.

Next, Cambon called on Grey. He reminded Grey of their exchange of letters in 1912 which formalised the agreement that Britain and France would immediately discuss whether they should act together if either country or the general peace was threatened. He drew Grey's attention to the French decision to pull its covering forces 10km back from the frontier with Germany. It

was France that was threatened and war could break out at any moment. It was urgent to agree joint action. Grey said he would get a response from the cabinet the next day.

Grey made another effort to solve the crisis. At 7.45 P.M. he telegramed Buchanan saying as Berlin was trying to persuade Vienna to halt military action after taking Belgrade, and wait as the powers arranged for Serbia to satisfy Austrian demands, it was hoped Russia would agree to discussions and suspend further military preparations. He did not yet know that Russia had declared general mobilisation. He also talked to Mensdorff saying he could not intervene in Russia unless Vienna gave him something to offer.

Late evening King George replied to a message from Prince Henry, the Kaiser's brother. Henry told the King he had given William a summary of their talk at Buckingham Palace that Sunday, and he went on to say how hard William was working for peace which was being endangered by the military preparations of Russia and France and asked the King to use his influence to keep Russia and France neutral. The King said he was glad to hear William was working for peace. He repeated Grey's "halt in Belgrade" formula. *"My Government is doing its utmost suggesting to Russia and France to suspend further military preparations, if Austria will consent to be satisfied with occupation of Belgrade ... as a hostage for satisfactory settlement of her demands, other countries meanwhile suspending their war preparations"*.

3.4.4 Friday, 31 July – If Not France, then Belgium?

A report from Bertie, the British ambassador in Paris, arriving early morning said Poincaré believed the preservation of peace was in the hands of Britain. If Britain announced it would come to the aid of France in a conflict between France and Germany, Germany would modify her attitude, and there would be no war. Grey telegramed Bertie rebutting Poincaré's view that Germany believed Britain would be neutral and this was a decisive factor.

He said he had made it clear that Britain might not be neutral and Germany was not counting on British neutrality.

Lichnowsky called on Grey with the news that Berchtold had authorised resumption of talks between Vienna and St Petersburg. Grey assumed Berchtold was sincere. Grey was delighted and added if Germany could get Austria to agree to a reasonable proposal then Britain would support it in Paris and St Petersburg and *"if Russia and France would not accept it His Majesty's Government would have nothing more to do with the consequences"*. Neither man knew about the Russian general mobilisation.

Grey's statement was a potentially momentous development if Germany had acted the way he suggested but it was rapidly being overtaken by military measures and concerns. As happened to so many of the players in the crisis Grey was one step behind and not completely in touch with events.

The morning cabinet meeting discussed the latest situation. They thought public opinion would be against Britain joining a war in support of France, though a violation of Belgium might change that view. The cabinet asked Grey to ask both the Germans and the French their stance on Belgian neutrality. Grey admitted that Britain was not bound by the same obligation of honour to France as bound France to Russia. Some members went away with the impression the cabinet would not join the war. Grey wired Goschen in Berlin and Bertie in Paris saying in view of the existing treaties on Belgian neutrality, he wanted pledges from France and Germany *"to respect the neutrality of Belgium so long as no other Power violates it"*. He wanted an early reply.

After the cabinet meeting Grey updated Paul Cambon telling him the cabinet was unable to guarantee Britain would intervene in support of France at the present time. It could not pledge Parliament in advance. Further issues such as the preservation of the neutrality of Belgium might change attitudes. Cambon said Britain had pledged its support and asked Grey to again put the matter to the cabinet. Cambon knew that Grey himself was very supportive of France.

At 4.30 P.M. news of the Russian general mobilisation reached London and shortly after at 5.00 P.M. a German embassy official delivered a message to the Foreign Office saying as Russia had declared general mobilisation Germany had declared "State of Imminent Danger of War" and if Russia did not withdraw her mobilisation proclamation Germany would mobilise in her own defence. The message did not say for Germany mobilisation meant war.

Very late in the evening Lichnowsky received a wire from Bethmann informing him of the German ultimatum to Russia to stop mobilising and, this time saying if Germany had to mobilise, it meant war. It mentioned the enquiry in Paris asking what the French would do if Germany and Russia were at war. Grey was unavailable and Lichnowsky gave a copy to Tyrrell. Tyrrell took it to Asquith and they prepared a message for King George to send to the Tsar appealing to him to stop Russian mobilisation. They drove to Buckingham Palace and got the King out of bed. He agreed to the message addressing it personally to *"My Dear Nicky"*. It was wired to St Petersburg at 3.00 A.M.

3.4.5 Saturday, 1 August – A "By-Word Among Nations"

Early morning telegrams arrived from Paris and Berlin with the responses to the British enquiry about attitudes to Belgian neutrality. The French said they would respect Belgian neutrality. Jagow refused to reply, saying if he did so it *"could not fail, in the event of war, to have the undesirable effect of disclosing to a certain extent part of the German plan of campaign"*.

King George used a draft provided by Grey to reply to a letter from Poincaré. It maintained Britain's non-committal attitude regarding support for France but the King was as friendly as possible, expressing admiration for the care France was taking not to make provocative military moves and promising Britain would continue discussions on all matters concerning the two countries.

Grey reported the replies from France and Germany on Belgian neutrality to the cabinet. Apart from Grey, Asquith and Churchill, they were against Britain intervening simply to support France. The cabinet recognised that Britain might become involved in a European war but felt even then the British Expeditionary Force should not be sent to the continent. They agreed what Grey should say to Lichnowsky about Belgium. Grey told Lichnowsky that the German position on Belgian neutrality was a matter of *"very great regret"*. The neutrality of Belgium affected public opinion in Britain. In response to a question from Lichnowsky he also said if Germany did pledge not to violate the neutrality of Belgium, Britain could not promise British neutrality.

Grey then told Paul Cambon the cabinet had agreed *"we could not propose to Parliament at this moment to send an expeditionary force to the continent"*. This did not mean under no circumstances would Britain assist France, but it did mean France must take her own decision without reckoning on assistance from Britain. Cambon reminded Grey the French fleet was concentrated in the Mediterranean as a result of understandings with the British, and the French Channel and Atlantic coasts were undefended. Cambon was shocked and distressed. He thought the British were about to abandon France. A discussion with Nicolson helped him recover. Nicolson went to Grey's office and said to him angrily *"you will render us a by-word among nations"*.

Saturday also saw one of the strangest episodes of the crisis. Before the morning's cabinet meeting Grey sent Tyrrell to talk to Lichnowsky and get his reaction to an extraordinary idea. If France was neutral in a war between Russia and Germany, and France's neutrality was guaranteed by Britain, would Germany pledge not to attack France? The ambassador took it upon himself to offer such a pledge that Germany would not attack France in such circumstances. Grey himself phoned Lichnowsky and repeated the question. Grey said he proposed to use the ambassador's statement at the cabinet meeting later in the morning. Lichnowsky telegramed Berlin with this amazing

development where the Kaiser took the idea to be a firm proposal and to Moltke's great alarm ordered a complete change in German military strategy.

In the event, Grey never mentioned the idea or the ambassador's statement to the cabinet and when he saw Lichnowsky after the cabinet meeting he simply wondered, as later reported by Lichnowsky, if France and Germany in the case of a Russo-German war could remain armed without attacking each other. In answer to Lichnowsky's question as to the attitude of France to such an idea Grey said he did not know.

Later that evening Grey was called to Buckingham Palace. The King had received a telegram from the Kaiser saying Germany agreed with the British proposal that Britain and France remain neutral in a war between Germany and Russia, French neutrality being guaranteed by Britain. Grey said there was no such proposal and drafted a message for the King to send to the Kaiser saying there must have been a misunderstanding.

At 11.15 P.M. news of Germany's declaration of war on Russia reached London.

Chapter 3.5

France – Gets Ready

3.5.1 Tuesday, 28 July – Still at Sea

During Tuesday the French presidential party was still at sea on its way back to France. Viviani wired Paris his approval of the British proposal for mediation by a four-power conference and of Bienvenu-Martin's reply to Schoen that Germany should exercise restraint in Vienna.

3.5.2 Wednesday, 29 July - French Presidential Party Returns to Paris

The French presidential party docked at Dunkirk and went by train to Paris. At the quayside and at stations on the way they were met by large cheering crowds expressing support for Serbia and a firm response by the French government. The French public were reacting to the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia which the presidential party now heard about.

Izvolsky, the Russian ambassador in Paris, informed the French government Russian partial mobilisation against Austria-Hungary would shortly be announced. This was not the consultation the Franco-Russian alliance required but it created no immediate alarm because Jagow had told the French ambassador that mobilisation against only Austria-Hungary would not cause German mobilisation. Izvolsky sent Sazonov several telegrams about events in France. He mentioned the attitude of the French press which was very pro-Russian and the very warm welcome given to Poincaré on his return from the French visit to St Petersburg. He also reported, after the cabinet meeting later that day, that Viviani told him of the determination of the French government to proceed in unity with all French parties.

In the afternoon the French cabinet met chaired by Poincaré. They discussed the situation and decided to hold daily meetings. As the meeting started Viviani was called out to see Schoen, the German ambassador, who had a message from Bethmann. Though

France was at liberty to take what measures it believed necessary, continued military preparations would mean that Germany would have to declare a "State of Imminent Danger of War". Viviani said the French preparations were very limited and the best way to decrease tension was to pursue the British mediation proposal.

3.5.3 Thursday, 30 July – French Reaction to Russian Mobilisation

In the very early hours of the morning Izvolsky received the message from Sazonov sent before the Tsar changed general back to partial mobilisation. It explained Germany had warned it would mobilise if Russia did not stop her military preparations. *"As we cannot meet the German wish, all we can do is to speed up our armaments and reckon with the probable inevitability of war"*. Sazonov also thanked the French for the *"declaration which the French ambassador made in his government's name that Russia may count in full measure on the support of France under the alliance"*.

"Speed up our armaments" was Sazonov's way of saying Russia was ordering general mobilisation. It was not clear all the French understood this some thinking it meant preparatory measures such as the French themselves were taking. Izvolsky realised the importance of this message and immediately had its contents communicated to Viviani and Messimy, the minister for war.

Viviani and Messimy woke Poincaré and discussed this important news with him. Viviani thought Sazonov was giving a very wide meaning to any assurances that Paléologue might have given him. As a result Viviani wired Paléologue saying *"France is resolved to fulfil all the obligations of her alliance," "but .... in the interest of the general peace .... in taking any precautionary measures of defence Russia should not immediately take any step which may offer Germany a pretext for a total or partial mobilisation of her forces"*.

Ignatiev, the Russian military attaché, asked Messimy how to translate into military terms Viviani's recommendation to Sazonov, and Izvolsky wired the answer to Sazonov *"the French Government has no intention of interfering in our military preparations*

but thinks it extremely desirable, in view of the further pursuance of negotiations for the preservation of peace, that these preparations should be of as little overt and provocative a character as possible".

Their main concern at the morning's cabinet meeting was not to stop Russian military preparations but to ensure Germany could not blame Russia for provoking war. In response to a request from Joffre, the French Chief of the General Staff, they agreed French covering troops could take up positions but on condition no train transport was used or reservists called up and most importantly, troops were to approach no closer than 10 kilometres to the frontier to avoid contact between German and French patrols. It was important for the sake of public opinion in France and the support of Britain that Germany was seen as the first country to take hostile military action. A telegram to Paul Cambon explained the cabinet's decision to leave part of French territory undefended. *"In doing so we have no other reason than to prove to British public opinion and the British government that France, like Russia, will not fire the first shot".*

3.5.4 Friday, 31 July - Germany Asks France What She Will Do In a Russo-German War

Shortly before the cabinet meeting Joffre sent Messimy a note saying every 24 hour delay in France putting its covering forces in position meant a loss of 10 to 12 kilometres of French territory. He was unwilling to carry this responsibility. He claimed Germany was secretly mobilising. The French were reacting or over-reacting to their military intelligence. Viviani also wired Paul Cambon the false rumour that German reservists were being called up and German troops were advancing on the French frontier. Viviani wanted Cambon to impress upon the British the Germans were being aggressive not the French.

In response to Joffre's latest statement the cabinet allowed the positioning of covering forces by train but reservists were still not to be called up. In two telegrams from Berlin an hour apart, Jules Cambon reported (1) the German ambassador in St Petersburg had

said Russia had decided on general mobilisation, and (2) Germany had declared the "State of Imminent Danger of War" in response to Russian general mobilisation and would ask Russia to demobilise failing which Germany would mobilise.

Schoen had an appointment with Viviani at 7.00 P.M. and Viviani consulted Poincaré as to what he should say. He expected to be asked about France's intentions. They agreed they would put off the answer until the next day and say only France would look after its own interests. When Schoen arrived he told Viviani of the German ultimatum to Russia, that if she did not demobilise Germany would mobilise, and for Germany mobilisation meant war. He wanted to know what France would do in a Russo-German conflict. He wanted an answer within 18 hours. Viviani said he had no news of Russian general mobilisation, only of precautionary measures. He would not give up hope of avoiding the worst. He promised to give Schoen an answer by 1.00 P.M. the next day. Viviani telegramed Paléologue summarising the meeting with Schoen. He asked the ambassador to report *"as a matter of urgency"* on Russian mobilisation. He also said *"I do not doubt that the Imperial Government, in the overruling interests of peace, will on its side avoid anything which might open up the crisis"*.

At this point it is probably true Viviani and the other French leaders did not know of the fact of Russian general mobilisation though they clearly knew Russia was very busy making extensive military preparations.

At 8.30 P.M. a very brief message from Paléologue sent that morning finally arrived announcing Russia had declared general mobilisation.

On learning of Schoen's announcement that Germany would mobilise if Russia didn't demobilise, Joffre told Messimy that France must mobilise at once. The cabinet met again. They had Paléologue's telegram confirming Russian general mobilisation. They discussed Joffre's demand for immediate mobilisation and agreed to wait until 4.00 P.M. the next day. This was the latest time at which the announcement could be made if the 2 August, the

earliest practicable date, was to be the first day of mobilisation. The Cabinet were also keen to be seen as responding to German action rather than initiating military measures.

Viviani was called out of the meeting to see Bertie. The British wanted to know if France would respect Belgium neutrality. A little later Bertie wired London that the French government was resolved to respect Belgium neutrality.

In the early hours of the next day Izvolsky forwarded a message from Messimy to St Petersburg asking the Russian General Staff *"…. to confirm the hope of the French General Staff that all …. efforts will be directed against Germany and that Austria will be regarded as a negligible quantity"*.

3.5.5 Saturday, 1 August – France Will Look After Its Own Interests

Joffre saw Messimy and claimed that Germany would be entirely mobilised by the 4 August *"even without the order for mobilisation having been issued"*. This was complete nonsense. He again threatened to resign if mobilisation was not ordered by 4.00 P.M. The cabinet met with Joffre present. He repeated his argument that the Germans were well advanced secretly mobilising.

Viviani was called out of the cabinet meeting to see Schoen who had called at the Quai d'Orsay to get the answer to the German question asked the day before whether France would remain neutral. Schoen repeated the question several times and Viviani finally answered that France would *"look after its own interests"*.

The cabinet decided to issue the mobilisation order and at 4.00 P.M. Telegrams announcing general mobilisation were dispatched across France and MOBILISATION GENERALE notices posted up outside main Paris post offices. France mobilised one hour before Germany.

At 11.00 P.M. Izvolsky received news from St Petersburg of the German declaration of war on Russia and immediately went to Poincaré to ask how France would respond. Poincaré did not want to declare war on Germany. He preferred Germany to declare war

on France so as to appear as peaceful as possible to the French public and Britain, but he assured Izvolsky there was no question of France not fulfilling its alliance obligations.

Luxembourg

During the evening just across the border in Luxembourg a German infantry company seized the railway station and telegraph office. Within thirty minutes more troops arrived telling them the invasion was a mistake. The British "proposal" being discussed in Berlin had led to the invasion being halted. A few hours later on discovering the British proposal was the result of a misunderstanding the Kaiser had told Moltke he could continue with the invasion. By midnight the railway station and the telegraph office were back in German hands. The rest of Luxembourg was occupied by German forces during Sunday, 2 August.

PART 4

Invasion

2-4 August / 3 Days

Germany invades Luxemburg and Belgium in order to invade France. Britain finally makes up its mind and declares war on Germany.

Chapter 4.1

Britain – Obligations and Interests

4.1.1 Sunday, 2 August – Ambiguity Keeps the Cabinet Together

The German invasion and occupation of Luxembourg, which was now known in London and Paris, broke the 1867 treaty signed by Britain, France and Prussia, and first thing Sunday morning Paul Cambon called on Grey to ask what the British were going to do. Grey said the treaty was a collective guarantee, unlike the treaty with Belgium, and Britain individually was not obliged to act.

It was going to be a very busy morning. Lichnowsky called on Asquith and they breakfasted together. According to Lichnowsky Asquith was emotional with tears in his eyes. Asquith said war between Britain and Germany was unthinkable but it rested largely with Germany to make British intervention impossible if she would (i) not invade Belgium and (ii) not send her fleet into the Channel to attack the unprotected north coast of France. Later Asquith wrote a note to be clear in his own mind as to what was right and wrong. He wrote:

(1) We have no obligation of any kind either to France or Russia to give them military or naval help.

(2) The dispatch of the Expeditionary Force to help France at this moment is out of the question and would serve no object.

(3) We must not forget the ties created by our long-standing and intimate friendship with France.

(4) It is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a Great Power.

(5) We cannot allow Germany to use the Channel as a hostile base.

(6) We have obligations to Belgium to prevent it being utilized and absorbed by Germany.

A small group of non-interventionist ministers met in Lloyd George's office. They were not willing to go to war to support France in all circumstances but would go to war if there was a wholesale German invasion of Belgium. In contrast to this the leaders of the Conservative opposition sent a letter to Asquith. It said *"... it would be fatal to the honour and security of the United Kingdom to hesitate in supporting France and Russia at this juncture; and we offer our unconditional support to the Government in any measures they may consider necessary for this object"*.

Between 11.00 A.M. – 2.00 P.M. there was a long and difficult cabinet meeting. It was possible the cabinet would split and individual resignations would force the whole cabinet to resign. Grey believed Britain must support France as a consequence of the Entente (the friendly relationship and understanding between the two countries). Only Grey himself, Churchill and Asquith took this view. Most of the cabinet were against. Grey would resign if Britain remained neutral. Grey also explained that as a result of naval understandings the French fleet was concentrated in the Mediterranean leaving the English Channel and the northern French coast to the protection of the Royal Navy. Asquith read the letter just received from the Conservatives. All present knew that if the cabinet broke up the opposition would be able to form a government with a decided policy of intervention.

After much discussion the majority agreed Britain would be justified in joining a war if the independence of Belgium was threatened though what exactly constituted a threat to Belgium's independence was not defined and some in the cabinet might have believed its independence need not be threatened by a temporary invasion. With some difficulty they also agreed that Britain would not allow German warships to enter the English Channel. This protected the French north coast from attack but it also served Britain's own security interests. One cabinet member announced his resignation and another said he would resign. They agreed to meet again at 6.30 P.M.

That afternoon Grey gave the formal assurance to Cambon that if German warships entered the Channel to operate against the French coast or shipping, the Royal Navy would give all the protection possible. Cambon asked what the cabinet would say about an invasion of Belgium. Grey told him they were still considering what to say to Parliament the next day. Grey added if there was a European war Britain would not be able to send its army to the continent because of all its imperial responsibilities and the need to protect its coasts.

The 6.30 P.M. cabinet meeting proved easier than the long divisive meeting of the morning. They agreed to a statement regarding Belgium *"... that it should be made evident that a substantial violation of the neutrality of that country would place us in the situation ... when interference with Belgian independence was held to compel us to take action"*. What would be considered *"substantial"* was not defined. It also now seemed certain that Germany would invade and the Belgians would resist, and if Belgium resisted the majority of the cabinet believed Britain had to enter the war. The second cabinet member confirmed his resignation.

4.1.2 Monday, 3 August – Neutrality is Not an Option

Lichnowsky gave Grey an assurance from Berlin that *"a threat to the French north coast on our part will not take place as long as England remains neutral"*. He also assured Grey that Germany would maintain the *"integrity"* of Belgium after the war. Shortly after Grey saw Lichnowsky, the British Foreign Office learned Germany had sent an ultimatum to Belgium.

Two Conservative party leaders, Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne, called on Asquith. They feared he was trying to find a reason for Britain not to intervene. On talking to him they concluded he supported Grey and Churchill but was trying to find a way to keep the cabinet together.

When the cabinet met at 11.00 A.M. Asquith had resignation letters from three cabinet members and during the meeting

another announced he would resign. This number of resignations normally meant the cabinet should resign. Lloyd George made a strong appeal for them not to go or delay and sit in their usual places when Grey spoke in the Commons, and the Government appear united. They discussed the statement Grey was to make and agreed the principal points. They also approved Churchill's unauthorised mobilisation of the Navy and ordered mobilisation of the Army. Later two members withdrew their resignations.

The Navy was as good as mobilised following the First Sea Lord's initiative not to disperse the fleet after the annual Royal Review and Churchill's approval of that decision. It was concentrated, fully manned and armed, and the First Fleet at its war station at Scapa Flow.

At 3.00 P.M. Grey made a statement to a packed House of Commons. He concentrated on the relationship with France and Belgium. He explained that Britain had no alliance or binding military or naval agreements with France. That French involvement in war with Germany arose out of France's alliance with Russia. But he also argued that Britain did have obligations to France because the friendship between the two countries had led France to concentrate her fleet in the Mediterranean which might be used to protect British trade in the event of a conflict. Britain could not stand aside and see Belgium occupied and France defeated and a single power take control of Europe. Britain would not be able to rectify this. A conflict would mean British trade would suffer greatly and it would be just as bad for the country staying neutral as joining in. For Britain this envisaged a naval war more than a land war.

The House approved the protection of the French coast and authorised Grey to warn Germany that Britain would take action if Belgium was invaded. At the end of Grey's speech a note was handed to him that had just come from the Belgian Legation. It summarised the German ultimatum and declared that Belgium had rejected the ultimatum and was resolved to repel aggression by all possible means. Grey read the note to the Commons.

The cabinet met again in the evening and agreed that a message should be sent the next day to Berlin asking the German government to withdraw its ultimatum to Belgium. The House of Commons reassembled to vote war credits. While looking out of his office window watching the lamps being lit in St James Park, Grey made the famous remark *"The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime"*.

4.1.3 Tuesday, 4 August – Britain Declares War on Germany

At 9.30 A.M. Grey wired Goschen, the British ambassador in Berlin, instructing him to tell the German government Britain is *"bound to protest against this violation of a treaty to which Germany is a party in common with themselves, and must request an assurance that the demand made upon Belgium will not be proceeded with, and that her neutrality will be respected by Germany"*. He was to ask for an immediate reply. The message was in the form of a request, not an ultimatum, and did not say what the British government would do if the request was ignored.

The news as the morning progressed confirmed the worst expectations. The Belgian legation got news that Germany had warned Belgium she would use armed force. Confirmation of this from the British minister in Brussels followed shortly after. Lichnowsky passed the Foreign Office a message from Jagow. It repeated the German assurance that in the case of armed conflict with Belgium, Germany would not annex any Belgian territory. It claimed that Germany was compelled to invade Belgium to forestall a French attack on Germany through Belgium.

Prompted by this news Asquith and Grey telegramed Goschen asking for a reply to the message sent to him at 9.30 A.M. If Germany did not reply by midnight he was instructed to *"ask for your passports and to say that His Majesty's Government feel bound to take all steps in their power to uphold the neutrality of Belgium"*. Britain's request was now an ultimatum.

Paul Cambon now knew that Britain would support France. He asked Grey *"How will you fight the war?"*. *"Will you send your Expeditionary Force?"* Grey replied *"No"*. *"We shall blockade the German ports. We have not yet considered sending a military force to the Continent"*. Cambon said public opinion would force Britain to intervene on the continent and to be effective it had to be immediate. He used a map of French army deployment to show Grey the need for British forces on the left of the French, as agreed by the British and French General Staffs, if France was attacked through Belgium. He asked Grey to tell Asquith and the cabinet of these considerations.

There was no news from Berlin. Goschen's messages never got to London but around 9.30 P.M. the government learned from an intercepted Berlin message to the German embassy in London that he had asked for his passports. They decided to wait until 11.00 P.M, midnight Berlin time.

11.00 P.M. arrived and the British government still had no news from Berlin. A declaration of war was delivered to Lichnowsky. Shortly after midnight the Foreign Office received a message from Brussels saying the Belgium government had asked for military help. Thus, Britain went to war.

Chapter 4.2

Germany – Necessity Knows No Law

4.2.1 Sunday, 2 August – Germany Invades Luxembourg and Gives Ultimatum to Belgium

In the very early hours of the morning at 2.30 A.M. Bethmann called a meeting with Moltke, Falkenhayn, Tirpitz, Jagow and foreign ministry officials. Berlin had not received Pourtalès' message that he had given the declaration of war to Sazonov because the Russians had cut communications. They did not know if they were at war with Russia. Finally, shortly after 4.00 A.M. news arrived in Berlin that Russian troops had attacked a railway installation inside the German border and this event was seized on as a reason to issue a statement saying Germany was at war with Russia. They also started a heated discussion over the need to issue a formal declaration of war on France. The military just wanted to get on with the job of invasion.

It was as this dawn broke German troops invaded and occupied Luxembourg to secure railways needed for the invasion of France through Belgium.

Tschirschky in Vienna was sent the news about war with Russia and told *"we expect of Austria fulfilment of her allied obligations and immediate vigorous intervention against Russia"*. Moltke sent a similar message to Conrad. Austro-Hungarian military efforts should concentrate against Russia, the *"mortal enemy"*. *"Serbia can be kept in check with limited forces"*.

At a meeting with the Kaiser the German military strenuously repeated their opposition to a formal declaration of war on France. Bethmann said it was a legal requirement and the ultimatum to Belgium did not make sense unless Germany was at war with France. His view prevailed. Below the German minister in Brussels was instructed to give the Belgium ultimatum to the Belgian

government 7.00 P.M. local time. He had this in the envelope he had already received from Berlin on the 29 July, three days earlier.

In response to Lichnowsky's message that it was most likely Britain would oppose Germany if it violated Belgian territory Jagow told him to explain to the British government the actions being taken in Belgium were *"self-defence against French menace"* and the integrity of Belgium would be restored in the peace settlement. He was not to do this until the next morning after the delivery of the ultimatum.

4.2.2 Monday, 3 August – Germany Declares War on France

The German military attaché in London had reported to Berlin *"... it would be desirable if our Navy refrained from actions which might lead to incidents ... regarded as a challenge. This would ... include naval attacks on French north coast, left unprotected by France in reliance on England"* and early Monday morning Tirpitz approved this suggestion that Germany refrained from naval actions that might provoke the British. Jagow telegramed Lichnowsky saying *"We can definitely state that a threat to the French north coast on our part will not take place as long as England remains neutral"*.

At midday the German government received the news Belgium had rejected the ultimatum. They didn't declare war on Belgium hoping the Belgians would offer only token resistance to the German army. Schoen in Paris was instructed to deliver the German declaration of war on France to the French government at 6.00 P.M. It contained accusations of French frontier infringements and bombing raids on Germany. There had been no bombing raids.

4.2.3 Tuesday, 4 August – Germany Invades Belgium

Austria-Hungary had still made no move to fight Russia and that afternoon Bethmann would be explaining to the Reichstag that Germany was forced to go to war with Russia and France to defend its Austro-Hungarian ally. He wired Vienna: *"We have been*

compelled to go to war on account of Austria's procedure, and have a right to expect that Austria should not seek to hide this fact, but will openly announce that the threat of interference in the Serbian conflict is forcing Austria to go to war".

At 3.00 P.M. Bethmann addressed the Reichstag. He admitted the invasions of Luxembourg and Belgium were breaches of international law but said *"necessity knows no law"*. He also said Britain had been told Germany would not attack the northern French coast and the territorial integrity and independence of Belgium would be respected at the end of the war.

At the end of Bethmann's speech Goschen called on Jagow with the British request sent that morning that Germany did not violate Belgian neutrality. Jagow said the answer must be *"no"* and he explained German troops had already crossed the Belgian border that morning and the Belgians were resisting.

Within a few hours at 7.00 P.M. Goschen called on Jagow again. This time he had the British ultimatum sent in the afternoon. He read it to Jagow. *"Unless Imperial Government can give assurance by 12 o'clock that night that they will proceed no further with their violation of Belgian frontier and stop their advance, I have been instructed to demand my passports and inform the Imperial Government that His Majesty's Government will have to take all steps in their power to uphold neutrality of Belgium"*. Jagow said that his answer was the same. Goschen said in that case he had to ask for his passports. He asked to see Bethmann and Jagow eagerly agreed.

The Chancellor was very agitated and he harangued Goschen for about twenty minutes. He said it was *"intolerable"* that when Germany was trying to save itself Britain *"should fall upon them just for sake of the neutrality of Belgium"*. Goschen's later account of the meeting claimed Bethmann used the notorious phrase that Britain was going to war for *"a scrap of paper"*.

Chapter 4.3

Belgium – Declares Its Duty Towards Europe

On Sunday, 2 August, in Brussels Below, the German minister, received the message from the German foreign office telling him to open the sealed document he had received on Wednesday and deliver the note inside to the Belgian government at 7.00 P.M. The note claimed the French were about to attack Germany through Belgium and the German army must be allowed to come through Belgium to repel this attack. He was told to give the impression to the Belgian government that he had received the note just that afternoon, in other words, to pretend the German government was reacting to events rather than implementing a carefully prepared plan.

The Belgian reply had to be in Berlin by 1.00 P.M. the next day, Monday, 3 August. Promptly at 7.00 P.M. Below called on Davignon, the Belgian foreign minister, and handed him the note. Both men were upset and Davignon became angry. He did not believe the German claim that France was about to attack Germany through Belgium. Davignon said the note would be dealt with immediately and Below left.

King Albert called a Crown Council with his ministers. It went on all through Sunday night. There was heated argument but not on whether or not to accept the German ultimatum. They were all agreed it should be rejected. The argument was over how best to resist the Germans, should they fight near the border or withdraw into the interior of Belgium. They decided to immediately ask the Guaranteeing powers for diplomatic support but not to ask for military support until an invasion began.

Well before the Monday 1.00 P.M. deadline for a reply, at 7.00 A.M., an official of the Belgian foreign ministry delivered the Belgian reply to the German legation. It included the statement *"Were Belgium to accept the proposals laid before it, the Belgian*

Government would sacrifice the nation's honour while being false to its duties towards Europe". Below wired Berlin that Belgium had rejected the German demand *"and will oppose by force any violation of her neutrality"*. Later he also wired *"Feeling towards Germany bad"*.

The Belgian government was careful not to openly side with the Entente powers, France and Britain, hoping when the German government realised Belgium would resist it would call off its invasion. Later that afternoon the British ambassador was given a copy of the German ultimatum and the Belgian reply and he wired summaries to London. Very early the next morning, Tuesday, 4 August, Brussels received confirmation German troops had entered Belgium.

Chapter 4.4

France – A Sacred Union

The Sunday cabinet, the 2 August, agreed a proclamation of a state of emergency. This meant the National Assembly now had to meet within forty-eight hours and Poincaré started preparing his message. The president had no right to address the National Assembly and Poincaré's speech would be read out for him. He wanted to say *"at last we can release the cry, until now smothered in our breasts: Vive L' Alsace Lorraine"* but ministers persuaded him that such a declaration would be bad for foreign opinion and make the war appear as one of revenge. He agreed to remove the passage.

At 6.00 P.M. on Monday, 3 August, Schoen delivered the German declaration of war on France to Viviani. It contained false accusations that the French had carried out bombing raids on Germany. Schoen asked for his passports and left.

On Tuesday, 4 August, Poincaré was very worried that the British had not yet made a commitment to send the British Expeditionary Force to France and he wrote to King George requesting him to send British troops to cover the French left flank as the Germans attacked through Belgium.

At 3.00 P.M. Poincaré's speech was read out in both houses of the National Assembly. It stressed the defensive nature of French policy and claimed France represented liberty, justice and reason. He called for a *union sacrée*. In the Chamber of Deputies the entire assembly got to its feet and cheered his words. He didn't mention Alsace-Lorraine.

WHAT WENT WRONG - A SUMMARY

To solve a problem, in this case "who started World War One?", you need at least two things. You need all the essential facts. Some otherwise excellent histories simply omit important events so they can more easily prove the point they want to prove. And, you need to know the right questions. This summary sets out to give those facts and questions.

1) Serbian military officers and government officials approved and took part in the assassination plot

The assassins believed the death of such a high personage as the Archduke would hasten the breakup of the Empire and free Bosnia from Austro-Hungarian rule.

Austria-Hungary had annexed Bosnia, a part of the declining Ottoman Empire, in 1908. This frustrated the ambitions of both those Serbs who wanted the unification of all southern Slavs in their own new country, Yugoslavia, and those who wanted to create a Greater Serbia by the unification of Bosnia with Serbia.

Two of the assassins, 19 year old Bosnian Serb youths, on reading newspaper reports of the Archduke's visit to Sarajevo and deciding to assassinate him approached a contact in Belgrade for weapons. He was a member of the Black Hand, a secret society, including many Serbian officers and officials, dedicated to the creation of a Greater Serbia. On his own initiative Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević, the leader of the Black Hand, and Head of Serbian Military Intelligence, approved the plot to assassinate the Archduke.

A Black Hand member who was also a Serbian military officer arranged for the assassins to be given guns, bombs, training, and credentials that would get them past Serbian border guards into Bosnia.

The Serbian government knew there was a plot of some kind and that weapons were being smuggled across the border into

Bosnia but did not have the political power to investigate it properly and stop it. They warned the Austro-Hungarian authorities but in such a vague way no action was taken.

Question: *What was the role of the Black Hand? Did it play a part in the instigation of the plot to assassinate the Archduke? [See: Chapter WHO INSTIGATED THE PLOT?] Could the Serbian government have done more to prevent the assassination of the Archduke?*

2) Austria-Hungary decided to put a permanent stop to Serb agitation for a Greater Serbia and the threat this posed to the Empire as well as punish those responsible for the crime in Sarajevo

It decided to use military force, to invade Serbia and give parts of its territory to its neighbours, Albania and Bulgaria, turning what was left into a vassal state of the Empire.

There had been bad relations between Austria-Hungary and Serbia since 1903 when Serbian officers in a military coup murdered the Serb royal family which had been friendly to Austria-Hungary and replaced it with one friendly to Russia.

Question: *Was Austria-Hungary right to pursue such an extreme solution to Serb ambitions that threatened the Empire?*

(3) Germany gave unqualified support to Austria-Hungary, the so-called blank cheque, in full knowledge of what the Austro-Hungarians intended to do

Serbia was of great interest to Russia. Both countries were composed mainly of ethnic Slavs and Orthodox Christians, and Russia had economic interests in the Balkan region especially regarding the Turkish Straits. Russia was likely to come to the aid of Serbia if Serbia was invaded and the only way that Austria-Hungary might deter Russia from such action was if it had the military backing of its ally in the Dual Alliance, Germany.

Within days of the assassination Austria-Hungary sent an envoy to Germany with a message for the Kaiser from Franz Joseph, the Austro-Hungarian Emperor, saying Serbia had to be

"eliminated as a political power factor in the Balkans". While discussing this message at a meeting in Potsdam with the Austro-Hungarian ambassador the Kaiser gave Germany's unqualified support to whatever the Austro-Hungarians decided to do which included military action. This policy was immediately rubber-stamped by Bethmann, the German chancellor, and the German military leaders in Potsdam at that time. The German leaders also advised Austria-Hungary to move against Serbia quickly and present the world with a *fait accompli*.

Question: *Was Germany right to give unqualified support to Austria-Hungary? What did Germany hope to achieve; to maintain its only powerful ally, or break up the Entente between Russia, France and Britain, or to bring about a "preventive" war defeating Russia before it became too powerful, and thus make Germany the dominant power over all Europe?*

It has been argued that Germany wanted war. The Sarajevo crime was simply an ideal opportunity to start one which would enable Germany to expand its boundaries and make it the master of Europe and a world power on a par if not more powerful than the British and Russian Empires.

This view is based mainly on what was said and done by German leaders early in the war itself, and in that respect it cannot necessarily be said to throw strong light on what they thought before the war and as the July crisis unfolded.

In addition to any imperial ambition, however extensive it might have been, there were two issues of great concern to the German leaders; (1) the great power status of its only reliable ally, the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire which was seen as an empire in decline, and if the assassination of its heir was not followed by the most stern measures it would hasten that decline, and (2) the growing military might of Russia.

Russia had undertaken a vast military modernisation and expansion programme following its defeat in a war with Japan in 1905. The part of this programme concerning the construction of

strategic railways which could be used to concentrate troops in the event of mobilisation was being funded by loans from France. In 1914 the programme was at least another three years from completion. For many in the German leadership especially the military, this meant a war now with Russia - a preventive war - was better than one later, when Germany could never match the Russian masses. On their part the Russians always thought they could never match German superiority in weapons technology.

It was worth taking the risk that Russia would come to the aid of Serbia if it was invaded by Austria-Hungary, and in the case of the Kaiser, as seen at Potsdam, he thought the risk was small. Russia was not ready, and the Tsar would not support regicides, those who murdered royals.

The Kaiser and the civilian leaders believed the conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia could be kept local and would not bring in Russia in defence of Serbia and Russia's allies in the Triple Entente, France and Britain, would restrain Russia. They also believed that if there was a European war brought about by a problem in the Balkans Britain would keep out of it.

If Russia did not defend Serbia, as the German leaders thought most likely, and Serbia was taken under the wing of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it would be an enormous boost for Austria-Hungary, and Germany which would then have greater influence in the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East in those days. And, if Russia failed to act because it was held back by France and Britain it might lead to the breakup of the Triple Entente, the Franco-Russian alliance (formed in 1894) linked with Britain through the Entente Cordial with France (1904) and the Anglo-Russian Convention (1907) that surrounded Germany.

Bethmann and some of the others while agreeing wholeheartedly with the risk being taken might also have had another justification in mind. It was a test of what Russia really intended. If Russia was rational, that is rational as these Germans understood rationality in this case, it would not go to war over Serbia. Russia was still militarily weaker than Germany, and it

would not risk revolution at home, that a long destructive war might bring about. If it did go to war, it meant Russia wanted war all along, and Germany should accept the challenge. Again, it was better now than later.

There is a third way to look at the course the German leaders took. Rather than the outcome of a rational attempt to meet or protect German ambitions it was more the result of a dysfunctional government led by personalities unsuited to leadership.

It surely is incredible that while the Kaiser at the Potsdam meeting was counting the chance of war with Russia as very unlikely, just something to keep in mind, in Berlin the top official of the German foreign office, Zimmermann, was telling Hoyos, the envoy of their major ally, that there was a 90 percent probability of war as a result of the policy they had chosen.

Even more astounding was the Kaiser's idea at the height of the crisis on the 28 July that Austria-Hungary should "halt in Belgrade", taking the city as a token until the Serbs took effective measures to stop their activities aimed at separating Bosnia from the Empire. "Halt in Belgrade" would have left the Serbian army and country intact, not as the Austro-Hungarians wished, to have the army smashed and the country broken up. And, it was hardly an idea that would have been expected from the leader of a country bent on a pre-planned world war of imperial conquest. Though, of course, the Kaiser had a reputation for sudden changes of mind, and in the event, the "halt in Belgrade" proposal was undermined by the way German chancellor handled it.

It is likely there was no coherent German view of what to expect or what Germany might gain.

(4) Austria-Hungary moved slowly and issued an ultimatum to Serbia

Initial opposition of the Hungarian prime minister and military unpreparedness, many regular troops were on harvest leave, meant weeks went by before Austria-Hungary could take action

and when they did it looked like a calculated power play rather than a reaction to the crime in Sarajevo.

Austria-Hungary decided first to issue an ultimatum to Serbia with a 48-hour time limit making demands to be met in full which they believed the Serbs would reject, thus giving Austria-Hungary an excuse to invade. It made 10 demands two of which infringed Serbian sovereignty by demanding Austro-Hungarian officials operate and carry out investigations in Serbia.

The ultimatum was delivered to Serbia at 6 P.M. on Thursday, the 23 July.

Question: *There might have been a different outcome to the crisis if Austria-Hungary had moved quickly and presented Europe with a "fait accompli" as Germany wished. Seizing some Serbian territory would have been possible especially as most of the Serbian army was in the south of the country. It could then have been used as a bargaining counter to ensure Serb good behaviour in the future.*

(5) France supported Russia

Diplomatic leaks and code breaking of diplomatic messages gave the Russians and French advance notice that Austria-Hungary was going to make extreme demands on Serbia.

By coincidence the French president, prime minister, and head of the French foreign office were on a state visit to St Petersburg from the 20 to the 23 July. During the visit both governments affirmed the importance of their alliance. The Serbian issue had not been on the original agenda but the French president gave a very clear indication of the French position and what might have been discussed with the Russians. During a diplomatic reception he publicly warned the Austro-Hungarian ambassador that Serbia had a friend in Russia and Russia had an ally, France. The ambassador reported to Vienna that what the president said was "tactless, almost threatening".

Question: *Was France right to support Russia?*

France had at least two possible motives for supporting Russia. The Franco-Russian alliance was the corner stone of French security. It guarded France against a potentially hostile Germany. The decades before the war had shown there were geographical and economic flash points that could easily lead to confrontation between great powers such as France and Germany. Even though France had little or nothing to gain by defending Serbia it could not afford, and did not wish, to sacrifice its alliance with Russia, which meant supporting Russia when Russia needed that support.

Secondly, France wished to regain Alsace and Lorraine the two eastern provinces lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. It is possible France took the opportunity created by Germany and Austria-Hungary to go to war, with a strong ally in Russia, and regain Alsace and Lorraine.

(6) On news of the ultimatum Russia reacted quickly and resolved to defend Serbia and started military preparations as well as diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis

On the Friday the 24 July, less than 24 hours after the delivery of the ultimatum on the 23 July, the Russian council of ministers met and agreed to advise the Tsar that if Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia, Russia should immediately order partial mobilisation, that is mobilise its forces facing Austria-Hungary, but not those facing Germany.

On meeting the council the next day the Tsar agreed to this. It was also decided to immediately initiate the "Period Preparatory to War" in all European areas including those along the German border so if mobilisation was ordered it could be quickly implemented.

Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, recognised that Serbia had a case to answer and proposed direct talks between Russia and Austria-Hungary to discuss how the demands on Serbia could be restated without infringing Serbia's sovereignty.

The Austro-Hungarians took several days to reply and eventually, after their declaration of war on Serbia, agreed to talk

but only about general relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia itself.

The activities involved in the “Period Preparatory to War” were quickly noticed by foreign diplomats and German military intelligence.

Question: *Was Russia justified in giving its support to Serbia? Was it wrong to decide immediately to take military precautions? Was Russia’s proposal for talks genuine?*

As well as the brotherly feeling Russia might have had for fellow Slavs in protecting Serbia from what it saw as an injustice, Russia had other reasons to defend Serbia. It might have wanted, as France might have, to seize the opportunity created by Germany and Austria-Hungary to go to war, to achieve a long-term objective, control of the Turkish Straits in Russia's case.

The Turkish Straits had enormous importance for Russia. Something near a half of Russian exports passed through the Straits, and the figure was even higher, around 75 percent for wheat and rye exports which generated vital cash needed for Russia's big industrialisation effort. The impact on Russia of any disruption to this trade had been demonstrated during the Italian-Turkish war in 1912, when the Turks briefly closed the Straits to shipping.

Though the Turkish Straits might have been in mind they were not mentioned, as far as is known, in Russian deliberations following the ultimatum to Serbia. The attitude at the first meeting of the Russian Council of Ministers was very much "enough is enough".

Sazonov said Germany had long been systematically furthering its international ambitions without concern for other powers. Russia had always responded with moderation but that hadn't worked. It encouraged Germany to be more demanding. He was sure Germany had connived with Austria-Hungary to threaten Serbia the object of which was to turn Serbia into a protectorate of the Central Powers. Russia should not abandon its historic mission

to enable the Slavs of the Balkans to obtain independence. If it did it would lose all influence. He noted that a firm policy would run the risk of war and he was still unsure of what Britain would do.

Krivoshein, the minister of agriculture and the most influential member of the Council, was also in favour of a firm Russian response. Even though the Russian rearmament programme wasn't complete the country was in a much better position than previously and it would be difficult for the government to explain to the public and the Duma why it was reluctant to act boldly. He also noted that Russia's careful attitude on previous international issues had not been effective. A firmer and more energetic attitude to the unreasonable claims of Germany and Austria-Hungary was the best policy. Sukhomlinov, the minister of war, said there was no reason for Russia to hesitate even though the military modernisation and expansion wasn't complete.

(7) As intended Austria-Hungary rejected Serbia's reply to the ultimatum and immediately broke off diplomatic relations with Serbia

Though the Austro-Hungarians designed the ultimatum expecting it to be rejected, it couldn't be blatantly unacceptable and the Serbs might have accepted it.

It is possible they considered this because the country was very weak after the Balkan wars but they believed they would get Russian support, and composed a clever reply accepting most of the Austro-Hungarian demands with qualifications, in effect, not accepting them, but giving the impression they were being contrite and reasonable.

Question: *Could the Serbian reply have been used as the basis of a solution? The Kaiser thought so. See (9)*

(8) Britain initially tried to play a neutral role

Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, put forward the idea of the great powers least involved in the crisis holding an ambassadors' conference in London to mediate between Russia and Austria-

Hungary. The four countries were France, Britain, Italy and Germany. The idea of a conference was accepted by Russia but turned down by Germany because it was too much like bringing Austria-Hungary in front of a tribunal.

Grey was stuck between supporting Russia and France and in doing this possibly encouraging them to be too bold, or advising them not to take any risks. Warning Russia in this way would have upset the delicate relationship between Britain and Russia concerning their imperial interests in Persia and southern Asia. The Russian foreign minister made clear that Britain's behaviour in the crisis would affect this relationship.

(9) Germany played a double game pretending to support mediation to solve the crisis but all the time encouraging Austria-Hungary to act quickly against Serbia

On the 27 July in response to a British request Germany forwarded another British mediation proposal to Vienna after Jagow, the German foreign minister, told the Austro-Hungarian ambassador that any proposal from Britain that Berlin might forward to Vienna could be ignored and was only being forwarded to please the British in the hope they would stay neutral. Germany kept pressing Austria-Hungary to act quickly.

Early morning on the following day the Kaiser himself, having only just seen the Serbian reply, two and a half days after it was made, thought the reply was more than one could have expected, it was a great moral victory for Vienna, and every reason for war dropped away. This was a remarkable compliment to the skill of the Serbs in crafting their reply to the ultimatum, to say the least. He proposed Austria-Hungary should accept it but occupy Belgrade (the "halt in Belgrade" proposal) until its demands were met, any remaining differences being settled by negotiation.

It took until the evening for the German chancellor to forward this proposal to Vienna now in his own words and accompanied by comments which gave the Austro-Hungarians the impression that if they rejected it they would still have full German support. It

also arrived in Vienna after Austria-Hungary had already declared war on Serbia. That the Austro-Hungarians were about to do this was known to the chancellor but not to the Kaiser.

Question: *Were the Kaiser and chancellor pulling in different directions? Was the Kaiser's proposal a way out of the crisis allowing negotiation and meeting the needs of both Austria-Hungary and Russia?*

(10) On Tuesday 28 July, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia

On the evening of its rejection of the Serbian reply to the ultimatum on Saturday 25 July, Austria Hungary decided to order mobilisation of its forces on the following Tuesday 28 July and prepare for an invasion of Serbia.

In response to further German advice to declare war and start military operations immediately Austria-Hungary also decided to formally declare war on Serbia on that Tuesday. It was believed that a declaration of war would pre-empt diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis. Conrad, the Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff, was against such a declaration of war because it would be two weeks before completion of mobilisation but he was persuaded to change his mind.

The declaration, and brief bombardment of Belgrade that followed it, alarmed the Russians even more. They thought a full-scale invasion was underway and it spurred them to further military action.

(11) Within 36 hours of the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia, Russia announced its mobilisation

The Russian military argued partial mobilisation, only on the Russian border with Austria-Hungary, which is what the Council of Ministers had decided on, would dislocate a general mobilisation if one became necessary later, and in any case Germany was behind Austria-Hungary's actions and war with Germany was almost certain. Consequently, Russia prepared to

announce general mobilisation which threatened Germany as well as Austria-Hungary.

At the last moment, following a message from the Kaiser saying he was trying to influence Vienna to negotiate, the Tsar changed this back to partial mobilisation and this was the announcement made late on Wednesday, the 29 July.

Following further arguments from the military and Sazonov, the Tsar changed again back to general mobilisation and this was announced at 5 P.M. on Thursday, the 30 July, less than 24 hours later.

For Russia mobilisation did not necessarily mean war. The Russian army could remain standing ready within Russia's borders.

Question: *Like the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia, Russian mobilisation, whether partial or general, was a game changing move. Did the Russians need to move so quickly?*

(12) France did not restrain Russia

The French leaders were at sea returning from the state visit to Russia. Poor radio communications meant they were not fully aware of how quickly and seriously the crisis was developing. They did not get back to France until the 29 July.

During this time on several occasions the French ambassador in St Petersburg assured the Russian government of France's full support. He was also unclear in his messages to the Foreign Ministry in Paris about the exact nature of Russia's military preparations.

The French themselves started to take military precautions and the French President once back in Paris approved the military measures and continued to back Russia.

Question: *Did the French ambassador exceed his authority and fail to keep the French government fully informed? With better and timelier information would the French have restrained the Russians?*

(13) Britain delayed for too long to make clear to Germany that it would support France and Russia

In issuing the German blank cheque at the beginning of the crisis and risking war with Russia, the German Kaiser and the civilian leadership believed Britain would remain neutral, and they were confirmed in this impression by George V saying to the Kaiser's brother as late as the 26 July, that he hoped Britain would be neutral.

Question: *Would an early warning to Germany that Britain would fight on the side of France in the event of a European war have deterred Germany from risking war?*

Grey was in a very small minority in the British Liberal cabinet – possibly only himself, Asquith, the prime minister, Haldane, and Churchill, four out of 19 men – and in an even smaller minority in the Liberal party in parliament, that would go to war on the side of France as a result of a conflict in the Balkans and France's alliance with Tsarist Russia. Most cabinet members wanted Britain to be neutral. Any public warning by Grey was impossible, and, in fact, the warning he eventually gave was given in a private conversation with the German ambassador in London.

Grey's private warning to the ambassador that Britain would not be neutral certainly had a significant impact and caused the German chancellor to modify his attitude.

Grey, like the ambassador, knew the Conservative party was fully in favour of supporting France if because of its alliance with Russia it was attacked by Germany, and if Grey and Asquith, who was of the same mind as Grey, had wanted they could have brought about a pro-war coalition or a pro-war Conservative government. It is not unreasonable to argue that Grey could have given his private warning earlier than he did.

(14) Germany realised that a European war was going to break out. Russia was mobilising and Grey had finally made it clear that Britain would be drawn in and would support its Entente partners, France and Russia

The German chancellor made a third and this time, apparently genuine attempt, to persuade Austria-Hungary to modify its policy. He put forward a British proposal for a mediated solution very similar to the Kaiser's "halt in Belgrade" idea.

This happened as military considerations were becoming paramount and the German minister of war wanted Germany to declare "State of Imminent Danger of War".

Question: *Was this third attempt to restrain Austria-Hungary too late? Was it genuine? Germany wanted to appear as the peaceful party and for Russia to make the first military move so it could be blamed if war broke out. This was important to get the support of the socialists, the largest party in the Reichstag.*

(15) Military considerations became paramount and Germany sent an ultimatum to Russia

Moltke who had supported the chancellor's efforts to keep the conflict local and to exhaust diplomatic possibilities suddenly changed his mind and demanded Germany immediately declare a "State of Imminent Danger of War" which led within 48 hours to German mobilisation.

Germany sent an ultimatum to Russia saying if Russia did not stop its mobilisation and demobilise, Germany would mobilise.

Question: *Could Germany have waited another two or three days to exhaust the "Halt in Belgrade" solution. Why did the German Chancellor give in to the military?*

In a memorandum given to the Kaiser and the German chancellor, Moltke, the German Chief of the General Staff, predicted how events would unfold and the consequences for Germany. He said an Austro-Russian clash was inevitable and it would bring in Germany under her alliance with Austria-Hungary. Germany would have to mobilise.

Moltke also warned that Russia and France were making military preparations (which was true) and if they were allowed to

get ahead it could have fatal consequences for Germany. The German military position was growing worse day by day.

Not mentioned in the memorandum but clearly upper most in his mind was Germany's military plan. There was only one plan which depended on critical timing and great speed. It was based on Schlieffen's ideas. As Russia and France had a military alliance it assumed that if Germany fought Russia it would have to fight France at the same time and it was best first to defeat France quickly in the west, which involved an immediate invasion of France through Belgium, and then turn on the Russians in the east who took at least three weeks to fully mobilise. German mobilisation took 16 days. It opened with an immediate surprise attack in the west to seize the Belgian forts blocking the invasion route to France, as soon as German mobilisation was announced. Any defensive preparations by the Belgians or the French would lessen the chances of success. Germany might not be able to wait. Time was running out.

It is remarkable, that Moltke was totally honest in describing the consequences of the course of action he now saw as necessary. He said:

"Germany does not want to bring about this terrible war. But the German Government knows that it would fatally wound the deeply rooted sentiment of allied loyalty, one of the finest traits of the German spirit, and place itself at variance with all the feelings of its people, if it were unwilling to go to the help of its ally at a moment which must decide that ally's fate. . . . This is the way things will and must develop, unless, one might almost say, a miracle takes place to prevent at the eleventh hour a war which will annihilate the civilization of almost the whole of Europe for decades to come".

It is sometimes claimed the leaders in 1914 were ready to risk war because they believed it would be over quickly. This is clearly not the case with some in key positions as Moltke's words testify. Bethmann too realised the consequences saying *"The future war with its use of million strong armies will not be over as quickly as the war of 1870"*. His great concern was keeping Britain neutral because

otherwise in a long war the Royal Navy could starve Germany. And, Grey foresaw wars would be long and destructive on an enormous scale. As the last moments of peace ticked away he made the famous remark *"the lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime"*. A ghastly fatalism gripped many of the decision makers.

(16) Austria-Hungary strongly adhered to its original objective to invade and break up Serbia

Austria-Hungary ignored the last-minute call from the German chancellor to accept a mediated solution. At no time during the crisis did Austria-Hungary consider modifying its plans. It believed anything less than a complete invasion would not solve the Serbian problem.

Almost at the same time the Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff received a message from Moltke, acting independently of the German chancellor, saying Austria-Hungary should mobilise against Russia and send the bulk of its forces north to fight Russia rather than Serbia. For Germany it was vital that Austria-Hungary threw its full military weight against the Russians to weaken and slow the Russian attack on Germany while Germany was attacking France in the west.

Austria-Hungary announced the mobilisation of all its forces.

Question: *Could war have been averted even at this late stage?*

The Austro-Hungarian leaders reviewed all the latest information and advice, including the contrasting messages from Berlin, and decided: (1) War operations against Serbia must be continued; (2) There could be no negotiation on the British proposal unless Russian mobilisation was suspended, and (3) Austria-Hungary's terms must be integrally accepted by Serbia. There could be no negotiations on them. They believed mediation would inevitably work against them. France, Britain and even Italy would support the Russian view and they could not expect warm support from the German ambassador in London representing Germany. Russia would be seen as the saviour of Serbia especially

the Serbian army and they were intent on destroying the Serbian Army to avoid another problem arising with Serbia in a few years time.

(17) Russia ignored the German ultimatum

Russia told Germany it could not stop mobilisation and mobilisation was only a precautionary measure. The Tsar might not have realised German mobilisation led immediately to war unlike Russian mobilisation, and that of the other great powers, which involved the call up of reservists and the preparation of the army, but not actual war.

(18) Germany mobilised, declared war on Russia and then on France, and immediately invaded Belgium

For Germany mobilisation meant an immediate cross-border attack, the seizure of the Luxembourg railways and the capture of the Belgian forts at Liège blocking the invasion route to France. The attack on Liège was carried out by regular German troops at peace-time strength.

(19) Britain joined the conflict

Britain had no formal alliance with France but because of the friendly Entente between the two countries the French had concentrated their warships in the Mediterranean. Consequently, the French northern and western coasts were open to naval attack by Germany unless protected by the Royal Navy.

This, combined with the wholesale German invasion of neutral Belgium which greatly aroused British public opinion against Germany, and influenced Lloyd George, the chancellor and a possible prime minister, brought about a majority in the cabinet that was willing to oppose Germany. Four cabinet ministers resigned but two later withdrew their resignations.

A third reason to intervene in the war received little attention. It is mentioned by Grey in his statement to the House of Commons on the 3 August – the balance of power.

"If France is beaten in a struggle of life and death, beaten to her knees, loses her position as a great Power, becomes subordinate to the will and power of one greater than herself …. if that were to happen, and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland, and then Denmark, then would not Mr. Gladstone's words come true, … there would be a common interest against the unmeasured aggrandisement of any Power?"

The Liberal cabinet also knew that if the cabinet split and the government resigned, it would be replaced by a coalition or a Conservative government either of which would go to war.

The next day Britain sent an ultimatum to Germany demanding it cease its invasion of Belgium. Germany refused. At 11.00 P.M. (London time, midnight in Berlin) on the 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany.

Question: *Did Britain do the right thing?*

LATEST OPINION

The 100th anniversary of the July Crisis saw the publication of a wide range of new works covering the start of World War One differing greatly in the topics covered and the conclusions drawn.

David Owen, a former British Foreign Secretary, in *"The Hidden Perspective – The Military Conversations 1906-1914"* [1] makes cabinet accountability and the possession of full and accurate information by all its members the central issue. He mentions the British Chilcot Inquiry into Britain's involvement in the Iraq war to draw attention to the continuing importance of such a concern!

He indicts Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, for keeping his cabinet colleagues including Asquith, the prime minister, in the dark about the Anglo-French staff talks that he thinks in the end obliged Britain mistakenly to go to war against Germany in August 1914, in effect, in defence of France.

Lord Owen's assertion that the Anglo-French military and naval talks created an obligation for Britain to defend France is debateable. The official position was unambiguous; Britain retained its right to act as its interests demanded. And that was the attitude of the government during the Crisis. In the final days as war started between Russia and Germany, Grey told the French ambassador France would have to make its own decision.

Also, it is possible that Lord Owen is particularly hard on his predecessor. Research [2] shows Grey did brief the prime minister about the staff talks soon after he took office in 1908. Whether Grey and the prime minister then and later appropriately informed all their cabinet colleagues in a way Lord Owen would have approved is another matter.

Max Hastings [3] clearly identifies the pivotal issue of the July Crisis as the Austro-Hungarian decision, backed by Germany without qualification, to punish Serbia for being involved in the assassination of the Archduke and his wife in Sarajevo, by invading and breaking up the country.

This poses the question: how should we deal with rogue or failing states or those that harbour our enemies? It is a good reminder of the relevance of historical knowledge in helping us solve or avoid conflicts in the world today.

Hastings is also clear that Germany deserves the greatest share of the blame for the outbreak of the war. Should *"Austria and its German guarantor ... have been allowed to have their way at gunpoint in the Balkans, in Belgium and indeed across Europe?"*

And, *"Even if Germany is acquitted of pursuing a design for general European war in 1914, it still seems deserving of most blame, because it had power to prevent this and did not exercise it"*.

He also thinks Britain had little choice *"If Britain had stood aside while the Central Powers prevailed on the continent, its interests would have been directly threatened by a Germany whose appetite for dominance would assuredly have been enlarged by victory"*.

There seems to be a new school of "Australian Revisionism".

Douglas Newton (University of Western Sydney) analyses *"Britain's Rush to War"* [4] in the last week of the crisis, and accuses Asquith, Grey and Churchill of deviously bouncing the cabinet into taking decisions that led Britain into unwisely joining the war.

He illuminates the wide extent of the opposition in and out of parliament to Britain joining the war. The Liberal Foreign Affairs Group wrote to Asquith saying they would withdraw their support from the government if Britain went to war. They claimed nine tenths of the Liberal party supported the group's stand.

Churchill's initiatives in keeping the Royal Navy together on the 26 July after a long-planned test mobilisation and ordering it to its war stations on the 28 July are two of the author's important examples of steps taken without full cabinet approval. And these naval moves encouraged Russia in taking a hard line. The non-interventionists in the cabinet were the overwhelming majority up to the very last moment. Neutrality should have been given a chance!

His fellow Australian, **Christopher Clark**, in *"The Sleepwalkers"* [5] deliberately steers clear of drawing up a charge sheet because it

makes the assumption that *"in conflictual interactions one protagonist must ultimately be right and the other wrong"* and he concentrates on the decisions that brought war about and the reasoning and emotions behind them (though this does not mean excluding questions of responsibility entirely from the discussion).

The book's title represents the authors opinion that the key players were blind to the horrors they were about to unleash. Some of the politicians and generals spoke of "Armageddon", a "war of extermination" and the "extinction of civilisation". *"They knew it, but did they really feel it?"*

Clark concludes *"The outbreak of war in 1914 is not an Agatha Christie drama at the end of which we will discover the culprit standing over a corpse in the conservatory with a smoking pistol. There is no smoking gun in this story; or, rather, there is one in the hands of every major character. Viewed in this light, the outbreak of war was a tragedy, not a crime."*

Margaret McMillan [6] is almost in the same camp. She concentrates on tracing Europe's path to 1914 and picking out the turning points when its options narrowed. She argues that some powers and their leaders were more culpable than others. Austria-Hungary's determination to destroy Serbia, Germany's decision to back it to the hilt, Russia's early military moves, these all seem to bear the greatest responsibility for the outbreak of the war but she goes on to say *"we may have to accept that there can never be a definitive answer because for every argument there is a strong counter"*.

Gordon Martel [7] says *"War was not inevitable. It was the choices that men made during those fateful days that plunged the world into a war. They did not walk in their sleep. They knew what they were doing. They were not stupid. .... Real people, actual flesh-and-blood human beings, were responsible for the tragedy of 1914 - not unseen, barely understood forces beyond their control".*

In addition to a compact narrative of the July Crisis Martel also gives a very useful summary of the blame debate over the decades since the war. From the Versailles Treaty that ascribed all the blame to Germany, through the revisionist views that blamed

everybody or nobody, the underlying causes, the system of secret alliances, militarism, nationalism, economic imperialism, the newspapers, Albertini's analysis, the Fischer controversy and the primacy of domestic politics, to where we are today.

Thomas Otte, in a highly informative book for the historian and layman, *"July Crisis: The World's Descent into War, Summer 1914"* [8] also concentrates on human agency, the actions, misjudgements and mistakes of politicians, civil servants, diplomats, military leaders and monarchs.

He is the only recent author to produce new information; the discovery that Grey's private secretary was planning in the month before the July Crisis to have secret talks in Germany with Jagow, the German foreign minister, as part of an effort to improve Anglo-German relations.

If you haven't got the time or stamina to read Luigi Albertini's 3-volume, 2000 page masterpiece, *"The Origins of the War of 1914"* [9], published in English in 1952, Otte's book (524 pages) is a good alternative. Like Albertini he is not only a mine of information but also has forthright views though he saves these for the conclusions at the end of the book.

"... a catastrophic failure of strategic leadership ... Bethmann and Jagow were also found wanting in terms of basic statecraft, most of which flowed from their abdication of an independent policy."

No-one at Berlin willed war; there was no criminal intent; and Bethmann and the Kaiser were not simply forerunners of Hitler and his movement. But their miscalculations and their reckless blunders brought about this war more than anything else. There is a recklessness that borders on the criminal. Theirs comes very close to it."

The word "dysfunctional" comes to mind.

At the far end of the revisionist scale the blame for the outbreak of the war lies with Russia with its eye on the Turkish Straits supported by France mindful of Alsace-Lorraine.

In a chapter entitled *"July 1914 revisited and revised - The erosion of the German paradigm"*, [10] the distinguished American historian **Samuel Williamson Jr** claims *"recent research shows a more culpable*

Serbia, a more aggressive Franco-Russian alliance, a more desperate Austria-Hungary, a more assertive Russian foreign policy, a more ineffective Britain in its efforts to contain the crisis...".

He then states *"Under no circumstances were Paris and St. Petersburg prepared to allow any chastisement of Belgrade"* and *"... the two governments would support Serbia in all circumstances, would allow no chastisement of Serbia, and were prepared to go to war if necessary"*.

This contradicts various accounts of Russia and France advising the Serbs to accept as much of the original Austro-Hungarian ultimatum as possible. It can be argued the Serbs went to the most reasonable lengths possible in meeting the demands of the ultimatum. The Kaiser even thought the Serb response was a way forward until he was overtaken by events and Germany's military plans.

Sazonov, the Russian foreign minister, told the German ambassador *"it was possible to give Serbia a well-merited lesson while respecting her sovereign rights"*.

And Gordon Martel in his book says *"On almost every day of the July crisis a solution seemed to be at hand. Anything short of crushing Serbia's independence appeared to be acceptable to Russia, France, and Britain"*.

Underlying Williamson's revisionist view is the belief that Austria-Hungary was justified in taking extreme measures because (a) Serbia was the source of propaganda for the separation of Bosnia from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its unification with Serbia, and this is what motivated the assassins, and (b) the plot to assassinate the Archduke was initiated and controlled by the Black Hand, a Serb secret society, including many Serbian army officers and officials, dedicated to the creation of a Greater Serbia. The Serbian government was as good as responsible for the plot.

Tim Butcher [11] tells a different story. In a well researched book following the journey the young assassins took from their homes, to Belgrade, and finally to Sarajevo, he reveals how they lived and what motivated them. He even unearths the school

reports of Gavrilo Princip, the nineteen year old who fired the fatal shots. The assassins obtained their bombs and guns from a member of the Black Hand but the plot was conceived and planned by Bosnians, especially Princip, and implemented by them, all discontented citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bosnia like much of South East Europe had once been part of the Ottoman Empire until it was annexed by Austria-Hungary in 1908.

"*Princip was not a Serbian nationalist but a Slav nationalist, committed to liberating all locals, known as South Slavs, whether they were Croats, Muslims, Slovenes or Serbs, then under the control of a foreign occupier, Austria*". One of the assassins was a Muslim.

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An earlier version of Samuel Williamson's chapter this time entitled *July 1914 Revisited and Revised—or The End of the German Paradigm* is available on video at the Woodrow Wilson Center website and YouTube.

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WHO INSTIGATED THE PLOT?

There are several contradictory versions of who instigated the plot to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand and why they wanted him dead.

Who carried out the assassination – the individuals with their bombs and pistols who lined the Appel Quay – who fired the fatal shots, and who supplied the weapons are not in doubt. What is not clear is the role of the Black Hand and their leader Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević, known as Apis (the Bull), who was also the Head of Serbian Military Intelligence.

The versions can be summarised as follows.

(1) The young Bosnian assassins themselves instigated the plot. Apis and the Black Hand were latecomers only learning of the plot and deciding to support it when approached for weapons.

In some accounts two of the assassins play the key role when in Belgrade after seeing newspaper reports – Princip in the middle of March 1914, and Čabrinović at the end of the month – about the Archduke's visit to Sarajevo, they meet and have what might be described as a lightbulb moment. Here is a great opportunity to remove the most important Austro-Hungarian figure after the Emperor and strike a blow against Austro-Hungarian rule.

These young men and their contemporaries believed tyrannicide was justified. Austro-Hungarian rule was unjust and those who imposed it were fair targets. Terrorism was more effective than political agitation. They also believed the violent removal of leading Austro-Hungarian figures such as the Archduke would hasten the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and bring closer the achievement of their objective; the creation of a new independent country, Yugoslavia, embracing all the southern Slav territories of the Empire and including Serbia.

There can be no doubt that many young Bosnians and other Slav youth in Croatia and Dalmatia were in favour of the assassination of leading Austro-Hungarian figures, and some were

willing and able to act, without encouragement or help from Apis, the Black Hand, Serbia, or anyone.

Most historians take a line close to this version of events.

(2) Apis instigated the plot when he learnt that the Archduke was to attend the Austro-Hungarian army manoeuvres in Bosnia in June 1914 and to visit Sarajevo.

The Archduke decided in September 1913 to attend the Bosnian manoeuvres and this was being talked about in Austro-Hungarian official circles in December. The public announcement was made in the middle of March 1914. As Head of Serbian Military Intelligence it is most likely that Apis knew about the manoeuvres and the Archduke's attendance well before the public announcement.

Two reasons are given for his wish to remove the Archduke. The Archduke was a military threat. Apis believed the manoeuvres were a pretext for a surprise attack on Serbia. Serbia though victorious in the Balkan wars was militarily weak and most of its forces were in the south of the country still subduing the newly conquered territory. Removing the Archduke would remove the threat.

This was the explanation given by Apis to a fellow senior Black Hand member. However it is not convincing. The assassination of the Archduke, the Heir Apparent of the Empire, by Serb backed terrorists would more likely spur the Austro-Hungarians to military action.

The Archduke was a political threat. People believed he wanted to give the Slavs within the Empire greater political power on a par with Austrians and Hungarians. This would lessen the attraction for them of joining with Serbia and undermine the plans of many in Serbia, especially the Black Hand, which had been formed to promote the creation, using terrorism where necessary, of a Greater Serbia incorporating Bosnia and Austro-Hungarian territories with large Serb populations.

These motives especially the second also explain why in the first version of events Apis and the Black Hand were willing to support an assassination providing weapons, training, and a safe route from Belgrade back into Bosnia and Sarajevo.

This version of events springs especially from Apis' confession during his trial in 1917 on trumped up charges that he plotted to assassinate Alexander, the Serbian Prince Regent. It also tallies with what Milan Živanović, Apis' nephew, said to Albertini, the historian and journalist. (*Origins Of the War of 1914*, Vol 2, p81).

(3) Independently of one another the young Bosnians and Apis decided on the assassination of the Archduke, and these two plots became one when the Bosnians in Belgrade approached a Black Hand member to obtain weapons. Both parties pursued their objectives as described in (1) and (2) above.

These versions are, of course, simplifications. Many points warrant careful expansion. One of particular importance is the composition of the Black Hand and how it operated. In Serbia, and especially Belgrade, the Black Hand was highly disciplined with procedures and joining rituals and involved mainly military people. In the Austro-Hungarian territories it was mainly composed of civilians who acted more informally. It was made up of small cells of five or so members and some individuals may not have been really aware of the Black Hand origins and objectives, just choosing to follow a like-minded friend.

In addition to Apis another important man in this story is Vladimir Gaćinović, a social revolutionary writer, who inspired many young Bosnians with his essays particularly one glorifying Bogdan Zerajić who in 1910 had tried to assassinate the Governor of Bosnia Herzegovina but failed and had then shot himself. Gaćinović was the Black Hand committee member responsible for Bosnia Herzegovina. He set up cells in Vienna and Zagreb and was responsible for recruiting Ilić to run a Black Hand cell in Sarajevo.

There are facts, events – covered in the above versions – that have not been adequately explained, that point to a fourth version being the closest to the truth of what happened.

(4) The assassins instigated a plot to assassinate the Governor of Bosnia Herzegovina, General Potiorek. They did this with the knowledge and encouragement of Apis and the Black Hand. When through his military intelligence activities Apis learnt of the Archduke's attendance at the manoeuvres and his visit to Sarajevo he passed this information to the young Bosnians either encouraging them to target the Archduke or knowing that they would.

Apis and the Black Hand were not latecomers to the plot.

Albertini concludes that Apis played a vital initiating role.

He draws attention to Princip's letter written in allegorical form in case it was intercepted sent from Belgrade at Easter (12 April in 1914) to Ilić in Sarajevo explaining that he, Princip, and two others, had decided to assassinate the Archduke on the occasion of his visit to Sarajevo, that they had the necessary weapons, and that Ilić should recruit three more assassins in Sarajevo. How could such a letter in allegorical form be understood, unless the sender and recipient had previously discussed what might be in it? The seeds of the plot must have been sewn before Princip went to Belgrade, before the public announcement in the middle of March of the Archduke's visit.

Albertini also mentions Grabež's admission during the investigation and trial of the assassins that he and Princip discussed assassination of the Archduke before Easter and possibly before Čabrinović showed Princip the press cutting announcing the visit.

The activities of Ilić and Mehmed Mehmedbašić, one of the assassins recruited by Ilić, as reported in both Albertini and Dedijer, are of great importance.

The relevant works are: Albertini's *Origins Of The War Of 1914* (3 Volume set, Enigma Books, Oxford University Press, 1952) and Dedijer's *The Road to Sarajevo* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1967).

Ilić and his Black Hand contacts

Both Ilić and Mehmedbašić were members of the Black Hand and Ilić made direct contact with leading Black Hand figures. He went to Switzerland for a short while in June 1913 to see Gaćinović, the man who had recruited him into the Black Hand. Ilić confirmed at the trial of the assassins that this journey took place though he claimed he went to Switzerland to explore the possibilities of studying pedagogy. (Dedijer, p279)

At the end of October or in the first days of November Ilić visited Colonel Popović, a senior member of the Black Hand based in Užice just inside the Serbian border and told him the youth in Bosnia were in ferment and something had to be done (Albertini, Vol 2, p79 and Dedijer, p283). It was around this time that Ilić and Princip had agreed that one of them should make an attempt on the life of Potiorek.

Ilić asked Popović what he thought of him going to talk things over with Apis in Belgrade. Popović approved this idea and provided Ilić with money and papers to get to Belgrade. He never heard anything more because Ilić returned by a different route.

If all this is true, or partly true, it is a startling fact. Accounts of the assassination of the Archduke tend to concentrate on Princip who was not only the youth who fired the fatal shots but the one who stood out at the trial for his strength of character and devotion to his cause. Ilić is often portrayed as a weaker character but here he is in 1913 with a direct line of communication to the Black Hand leadership.

It seems most likely that by November Apis knew through his duties as head of Military Intelligence and the Black Hand's own spy network that the Archduke was going to attend the Austro-Hungarian army's manoeuvres in Bosnia in June 1914. The decision for the Archduke to go had been taken in September 1913.

The decision for the Archduke to also make a formal visit to Sarajevo the nearby capital of Bosnia was not made until the 17 February 1914, but it did not take much imagination to think such a visit was likely.

Ilić and his meetings with Mehmedbašić

Historians agree a meeting took place in January 1914 in Toulouse under the auspices or with the knowledge of, or even organised by, the Black Hand. Only a handful attended, including Mustafa Golubić, a leading young Bosnian activist who was currently enrolled at Toulouse University, which was a reason for the meeting being held there, Mehmedbašić, and Gaćinović.

Mehmedbašić told Albertini (Vol 2, p78) various possibilities were discussed including an attempt on the life of the Archduke but the meeting decided the assassination of Potiorek would have a greater affect and Mehmedbašić was chosen to carry out the attempt. Afraid of being caught in a police search while on a train on his return to Bosnia he jettisoned his weapon, a knife and poison to be used with it.

The accounts of what happened next differ. Albertini says (Vol 2, p77) according to Golubić, Mehmedbašić returned at the end of January to Stolac in Bosnia Herzegovina where he lived and a few days later went to Sarajevo where he met Ilić who told him the plan was now to assassinate the Archduke when he visited Sarajevo.

Albertini goes on (Vol 2, p78) to correct this version reporting what Mehmedbašić himself said in 1937 in reply to questions from Albertini. Some weeks after he returned from Toulouse he received a letter from Ilić asking him to meet in Mostar on an important matter. Ilić told him that the Archduke was to visit Sarajevo and the plot to kill Potiorek took second place since an attack on the Heir Apparent was far more important.

If he returned to Bosnia at the end of January, “some weeks” later implies late February or early March.

Dedijer has a third account (Dedijer, p283). According to Dedijer, Trisić, a lifelong friend of Mehmedbašić, said that Mehmedbašić on his return to Stolac found a revolver to replace the knife and poison he had jettisoned on his train journey back to Bosnia, and went to Sarajevo on the 26 March when the Governor was due to attend the installation of a new religious leader. He met Ilić who told him to postpone the attempt on Potiorek because the plan to assassinate the Archduke on his visit to Sarajevo was in full swing.

It is most unlikely that Princip and Čabrinović in Belgrade would have had their meeting at the end of March (see version 1 above), made contact with the suppliers of weapons and obtained the promise they would be supplied, Princip written his allegorical letter, and the letter have reached Ilić in Sarajevo, by the 26 March.

Dedijer also says (p303) Ilić saw Mehmedbašić a second time, in Mostar in the middle of May. This Mostar meeting in the middle of May seems to be at odds with Albertini's account of a Mostar meeting "some weeks" after Mehmedbašić's return from Toulouse. It might be that the "some weeks" were really more like two months in which case Ilić did not see Mehmedbašić before the Princip and Čabrinović Belgrade meeting, or in 1937, 23 years after the event, Mehmedbašić himself may not have been that accurate in the information he gave Albertini and compacted two meetings.

Though these accounts of Ilić's meetings with Mehmedbašić differ they point to the very strong likelihood that Ilić was talking about a plot to assassinate the Archduke well before Princip and Čabrinović had their lightbulb moment in Belgrade and before he got Princip's letter in allegorical form saying such a plot had been decided and weapons would be provided. And, most important, Ilić had a line of communication to top people in the Black Hand who were in a position to know the Archduke's plans.

Another important fact differentiating this assassination plot from earlier attempts is the number of assassins. As noted there had been six attempts by discontented Austro-Hungarian Slav citizens to assassinate a senior Austro-Hungarian figure in the four

years before the killings in Sarajevo, but these were all carried out by single individuals.

The Archduke's assassination on the day involved a team of seven, Ilić who handed out the weapons – six hand grenades and four automatic pistols – and the six armed assassins he positioned along the Archduke's route. This is a plot of a different scale to that of a lone assassin with a revolver. In conception and implementation it was well beyond the work of a lone Bosnian youth.

Maps

Map 1 – The Assassins Route to Sarajevo

Map 2 - Europe in 1914 on the Eve of the War

Map 3 - The Balkans on the Eve of the War (Based on map from Niusereset)

Annex 1 – People

Austria-Hungary

Franz Joseph - *Austrian Emperor & Hungarian King*
Berchtold, Count Leopold - *Austro-Hungarian Imperial Foreign Minister*
Biliński, Leon - *Austro-Hungarian Common Finance Minister*
Burián, Baron István von - *Hungarian representative in Vienna*
Conrad von Hötzendorf, General Franz - *Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff*
Forgách, Count Janos - *Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry Chief of Section*
Giesl von Gieslingen, Baron Wladimir - *Austro-Hungarian minister in Belgrade*
Hoyos, Count Alexander - *Berchtold's chef de cabinet*
Krobatin, General Alexander von - *Austro-Hungarian Minister of War*
Macchio, Karl Freiherr von - *Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry Senior Official*
Mensdorff, Count Albert - *Austro-Hungarian ambassador in London*
Potiorek, General Oskar von - *Austro-Hungarian Governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina*
Stürgkh, Count Karl - *Austrian Prime Minister*
Szápáry, Graf Friedrich - *Austro-Hungarian ambassador in St Petersburg*
Szögyény, Count Laszlo - *Austro-Hungarian minister in Berlin*
Szécsen, Count Miklos - *Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Paris*
Tisza, Count István - *Hungarian Prime Minister*

Germany

Wilhelm II - *Kaiser*
Below-Saleske, Klaus von - *German minister in Brussels*
Bethmann-Hollweg, Theobald von - *German Chancellor*
Falkenhayn, General Erich von - *German Minister of War*
Henry, Prince of Prussia - *The Kaiser's brother*

Jagow, Gottlieb von - *German Foreign Minister*
Lichnowsky, Prince Karl - *German ambassador in London*
Moltke, General Helmuth von - *German Chief of the General Staff*
Pourtalès, Count Friedrich - *German ambassador in St Petersburg*
Schoen, Wilhelm Freiherr von - *German ambassador in Paris*
Stumm, Wilhelm von - *German Foreign Ministry Political Director*
Tirpitz, Grossadmiral Alfred von - *German Navy Minister*
Tschirschky, Heinrich von - *German ambassador in Vienna*
Waldersee, General Alfred von - *German Deputy Chief of the General Staff*
Zimmermann, Alfred - *German Under Secretary of State Foreign Ministry*

Serbia

Crown Prince Alexander - *Serbian Regent*
Dimitrijević (Apis), Dragutin - *Head of Serbian Military Intelligence*
Gruić, Slavko - *Serbian Secretary-General Foreign Ministry*
Jovanović, Ljuba - *Serbian Minister of Education*
Paču, Lazar - *Serbian Finance Minister*
Pašić, Nicholas - *Serbian Prime Minister*
Spalajković, Miroslav - *Serbian minister in St Petersburg*
Vesnić, Milenco - *Serbian minister in Paris*

Russia

Nicholas II - *Tsar*
Benckendorff, Count Alexander - *Russian ambassador in London*
Bronevski, A - *Russian chargé in Berlin*
Danilov, General Yuri - *Russian Army Quarter-Master General*
Dobrorolski, General Sergei - *Chief of Russian Mobilisation Section*
Izvolsky, Alexander - *Russian ambassador in Paris*
Krivoshein, Alexander - *Russian Minister of Agriculture*
Kudashev, N - *Russian embassy counsellor in Vienna*
Sazonov, Serge - *Russian Foreign Minister*
Sevastopula - *Russian counsellor in Paris*
Schilling, Baron von - *Russian Foriegn Ministry Head of Chancery*
Shebeko, Nicolai - *Russian ambassador in Vienna*

Strandtmann, Basil - *Russian counsellor in Belgrade*
Sukhomlinov, General Vladimir - *Russian Minister of War*
Sverbeev, Serge - *Russian ambassador in Berlin*
Yanushkevich, General Nikolai - *Russian Chief of the General Staff*

Britain

King George V - *King of Gt Britain & Ireland*
Asquith, Henry - *British Prime Minister*
Bertie, Sir Francis - *British ambassador in Paris*
Bonar Law, Andrew - *Conservative Party leader*
Buchanan, Sir George - *British ambassador in St Petersburg*
Bunsen, Sir Maurice de - *British ambassador in Vienna*
Churchill, Winston - *First Lord of the Admiralty*
Crackanthorpe, Dayrell - *British chargé in Belgrade*
Crowe, Sir Eyre - *British Assistant Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs*
Goschen, Sir William - *British ambassador in Berlin*
Grey, Sir Edward - *British Foreign Secretary*
Haldane, Viscount Richard - *British Lord Chancellor*
Lloyd George, David - *Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Morley, Viscount John - *British Lord Privy Seal*
Nicolson, Sir Arthur - *British Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs*
Rodd, Sir J Rennell - *British ambassador in Rome*
Rumbold, Sir Horace - *British chargé in Berlin*
Tyrrell, Sir William - *Grey's private secretary*

France

Poincaré, Raymond - *President of France*
Berthelot, Philippe - *French Foreign Ministry Director*
Bienvenu-Martin - *French Minister of Justice & Acting Foreign Minister*
Cambon, Jules - *French ambassador in Berlin*
Cambon, Paul - *French ambassador in London*
Ferry, Abel - *French Under Secretary Foreign Ministry*
Joffre, General Joseph - *French Chief of the General Staff*
Margerie, Bruno - *French Foreign Ministry Political Director*

Messimy, Adolphe - *French Minister of War*
Paléologue, Maurice - *French ambassador St Petersburg*
Viviani, René - *French Prime Minister & Foreign Minister*

Belgium
King Albert - *King of the Belgians*
Davignon, Julien - *Belgian Foreign Minister*

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Cover Photo Gallery

Wilhelm II - *Kaiser*; Bertie - *British ambassador in Paris*; Falkenhayn - *German Minister of War*; Pašić - *Serbian Prime Minister*; Hoyos - *Berchtold's chef de cabinet*

Sukhomlinov - *Russian Minister of War*; Jagow - *German Foreign Minister*; Tisza - *Hungarian Prime Minister*; Izvolsky - *Russian ambassador in Paris*; Viviani - *French Prime Minister & Foreign Minister*

Cambon, Jules - *French ambassador in Berlin*; Lichnowsky - *German ambassador in London*; Moltke - *German Chief of the General Staff*; Messimy - *French Minister of War*; Poincaré - *President of France*

Franz Joseph - *Austrian Emperor and Hungarian King*; Berchtold - *Austro-Hungarian Imperial Foreign Minister*; Danilov (holding piece of paper) - *Russian Army Quarter-Master General*; Sazonov - *Russian Foreign Minister*

Bethmann - *German Chancellor*; Joffre - *French Chief of the General Staff*; Paléologue - *French ambassador St Petersburg*; Grey - *British Foreign Secretary*; Conrad - *Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff*

Asquith - *British Prime Minister*; Krobatin - *Austro-Hungarian Minister of War*; Henry Prince of Prussia - *The Kaiser's brother*; Szögyény - *Austro-Hungarian minister in Berlin*; Yanushkevich - *Russian Chief of the General Staff*

Krivoshein - *Russian Minister of Agriculture*; Nicholas II - *Tsar*; Nicolson - *British Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs*; Szápáry - *Austro-Hungarian ambassador in St Petersburg*; Buchanan - *British ambassador in St Petersburg*

Timeline

A useful companion to this book is the ***Who Started World War One? Timeline***. See http://whostartedwwone.com

The Timeline covers over 500 critical events (decisions, statements, messages, meetings, and actions) involving 50 or so politicians, military leaders, and diplomats, in Austria-Hungary, Germany, Serbia, Russia, Britain, France and Belgium from the 29th June to the 4th August 1914, and the outbreak of World War One.

We believe it is the most detailed Timeline available.

It is presented at two levels, the TOP TIMELINE that gives an easy to view overall picture and the MAIN TIMELINE that gives detailed information day by day and by country.

The Author

Alan Paton is a retired businessman and former newsletter editor with a great interest in World War One and how it came about. He has many years of experience gathering and analysing complex information from diverse sources, distilling the essentials, and presenting the results in a useful way. He is also very interested in using web technology to provide a new and better understanding of major historical events and is the creator and editor of the detailed Timeline of the 1914 July Crisis. See above. The principal scholarly sources for the Timeline and the book are listed in Annex 2 – Bibliography.

The book is for well informed and interested citizens and students who want to have some depth on key topics, while avoiding the need for extensive prior knowledge. It provides an excellent introduction to scholarly work.