

Imperialism and The Great War

Imperialism in the Context of WWI

Imperialism refers to the competition among European powers for overseas colonies, economic dominance, and global influence. This created tensions and rivalries that contributed to the war.

Key Ways Imperialism Led to WWI

a. Competition for Colonies Increased Tensions

- European powers, especially **Britain, France, and Germany**, were competing for overseas territories, particularly in **Africa and Asia**.
- The **Scramble for Africa (1880s–1914)** created disputes, such as:
 - **Fashoda Incident (1898)**: Britain and France nearly went to war over Sudan.
 - **Moroccan Crises (1905, 1911)**: Germany challenged French influence in Morocco, leading to tensions with Britain and France.

b. Economic and Military Rivalries

- Industrialized nations sought **raw materials and markets** for their goods, fuelling conflicts over colonial territories.
- Germany, a latecomer to imperial expansion, envied Britain's and France's colonial empires, leading to **military build-up and naval competition** (e.g., the **Anglo-German naval arms race**).

c. Imperialism Strengthened Alliance Systems

- Colonial rivalries led European powers to **form military alliances** for security:
 - **Triple Entente (1907)**: Britain, France, Russia.
 - **Triple Alliance (1882)**: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy.
- These alliances **divided Europe into hostile camps**, making war more likely.

d. Imperialist Conflicts in the Balkans

- The **decline of the Ottoman Empire** led to power struggles in the Balkans, where Austria-Hungary and Russia vied for influence.
- Austria-Hungary's annexation of **Bosnia and Herzegovina (1908)** angered Serbia, which had Russian backing.
- Germany's support for Austria-Hungary and Russia's support for Serbia heightened tensions.

e. Imperialism and the Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1914)

- Serbian nationalist **Gavrilo Princip** assassinated the Austro-Hungarian heir in Sarajevo, triggering a **diplomatic crisis**.
- Austria-Hungary, backed by Germany, declared war on Serbia, which had Russian support—leading to a **chain reaction of war declarations** due to imperial and alliance commitments.

Imperialism as a Long-Term Cause of WWI

- Imperialism **increased tensions among European powers**, making them more likely to resort to war.
- It **deepened alliances** that turned a regional crisis into a global conflict.
- Imperial ambitions **fuelled military expansion**, making war seem like an inevitable outcome of political disputes.

Thus, while the **assassination of Franz Ferdinand** was the immediate trigger of WWI, **imperialism created the rivalries, tensions, and alliances that made a large-scale war almost unavoidable**.

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