

Although powerful forces were pushing Europe towards war, the great powers had formed alliances signing non-binding agreements, called **ententes**, to try to keep the peace. The Triple Alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Russia and France, and later Britain, formed the Triple Entente. During World War I, Germany and Austria fought together as the Central Powers. At that time, Russia, France, and Britain became known as the Allies.

In the decades before 1914, European powers competed to protect their status. Overseas rivalries divided them, as they fought for new colonies in Africa and elsewhere. They began to build up their armies and navies. The rise of **militarism** helped to feed this arms race. At the same time, sensational journalism stirred the public against rival nations.

Nationalism also increased tensions. Germans were proud of their military and economic might. The French yearned for the return of **Alsace and Lorraine**. Russia supported a powerful form of nationalism called Pan-Slavism. This led Russia to support nationalists in Serbia. Austria-Hungary worried that nationalism might lead to rebellions within its empire, while Ottoman Turkey felt threatened by nearby new nations in the Balkans, such as Serbia and Greece. Serbia's dreams of a South Slav state could take land away from both Austria-Hungary and Turkey. Soon, unrest made the Balkans a "powder keg." Then, in 1914, a Serbian nationalist assassinated the heir to the Austrian throne at Sarajevo, Bosnia.

Some Austrian leaders saw this as an opportunity to crush Serbian nationalism. They sent Serbia an **ultimatum**, which Serbia refused to meet completely. Austria, with the full support of Germany, declared war on Serbia in July 1914.

Soon, the network of alliances drew other great powers into the conflict. Russia, in support of Serbia, began to **mobilize** its army. Germany declared war on Russia. France claimed it would honor its treaty with Russia, so Germany declared war on France, too. When the Germans violated Belgian **neutrality** to reach France, Britain declared war on Germany. World War I had begun.

Review Questions

1. How did the network of European alliances cause World War I to develop?

2. What act caused Britain to declare war?

Summarize Describe the events that led Austria to declare war on Serbia.

READING SKILL

What does the word *overseas* mean in the underlined sentence? What clues can you find in the surrounding words, phrases, or sentences? Circle the words in the paragraph that could help you learn what *overseas* means.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

Which countries made up the Central Powers?

READING CHECK