Structural Causes of World War I

Economic
- Economic competition as most highly industrialized nation between Germany (challenger) and Great Britain (long-time number one)
- Economic disparity (and therefore increased threat) between neighbors Germany and Russia

Imperial Competition
- Germany’s and Italy’s desire for colonies (newly unified nation-states)
- Restiveness among natives of existent colonies

Arms Races
- Most important, the Anglo-German Naval Race with Germany challenging Britain’s long-running (since 1714) control of the seas
- Development in industrialized nations of bigger/better weapons (especially more destructive and longer-range artillery; more accurate rifles; more advanced naval technology) and the capacity to produce large numbers quickly

Balance of Power Issues
- The status of the “new” “Great Powers (Germany and Italy)
- The imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire and conflicting Austrian-Russian interests in the region
- The “alliance systems” (Triple Alliance; Triple Entente)

Nationalism
- Serbian desire for a “Greater Serbia”
- Nationalistic desires of other ethnic groups within Austrian and Ottoman Empires
- Militant nationalism of the Great Powers (to demonstrate superiority)

Attitudes
- No one feared war enough; few realized the impact that industrialization and democratization would have on the nature of warfare
- Rampant jingoism
- Desire to settle outstanding differences
Issues of Individual Nations

Germany
  • Desire to demonstrate her status as a Great Power
  • Recognition that she was “at the top of her game”—better a war sooner than later when other states could be more threatening or competitive
  • Desire to expand territory in Europe (Belgium, Netherlands)

France
  • Revanchism—desire to take revenge on Germany for the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War and loss of Alsace-Lorraine
  • Paranoia at increasing German strength (another power with an attitude of “better a war sooner than later”)

Italy
  • Desire to be taken seriously as a Great Power
  • Desire for “Italia irredenta”—Italian territory still part of Austria-Hungary

Russia
  • Necessity to prove Great Power status after defeat by Japanese
  • Interests in the Balkans (ethnic/nationalistic protection of Slavs; naval interests in the straits)

Austria-Hungary
  • Need to quell nationalistic unrest within empire
  • Desire to expand influence in Balkans

Great Britain
  • Desire to maintain Number 1 status in naval, commercial, industrial areas
  • Desire to maintain Number 1 status in imperial affairs

Ottoman Empire
  • Desire to maintain territorial/political integrity