Four M.A.I.N. Causes of World War I
CH. 13 Section 1

The Steady Rise of Nationalism One such force was nationalism, or a deep devotion to one's nation. Nationalism can serve as a unifying force within a country. However, it also can cause intense competition between nations, with each seeking to overpower the other. By the turn of the 20th century, a fierce rivalry indeed had developed among Europe's Great Powers. Those nations were Germany, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, and France.

This increasing rivalry among European nations stemmed from several sources. Competition for materials and markets was one. Great Britain, home of the Industrial Revolution, had long been Europe's leader in industry, finance, and shipping. After 1850, however, other nations began to challenge Britain's power. One such nation was Germany. Germany's many new industries made its economy the fastest growing one on the continent. As a result, Germany competed with Great Britain for industrial dominance.

Nationalistic rivalries also grew out of territorial disputes. France, for example, had never gotten over the loss of Alsace- Lorraine to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War (1870). Austria-Hungary and Russia both tried to dominate in the Balkans, a region in southeast Europe. Within the Balkans, the intense nationalism of Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians, and other ethnic groups led to demands for independence.

Imperialism Another force that helped set the stage for war in Europe was imperialism. As Chapter 11 explained, the nations of Europe competed fiercely for colonies in Africa and Asia. The quest for colonies sometimes pushed European nations to the brink of war. In 1905 and again in 1911, Germany and France nearly fought over who would control Morocco, in northern Africa. With most of Europe supporting France, Germany eventually backed down. As European countries continued to compete for overseas empires, their sense of rivalry and mistrust of one another deepened.

The Growth of Militarism Beginning in the 1890s, increasing nationalism led to a dangerous European arms race. The nations of Europe believed that to be truly great, they needed to have a powerful military. By 1914, all the Great Powers except Britain had large standing armies. In addition, military experts stressed the importance of being able to quickly mobilize, or organize and move troops in case of a war. Generals in each country developed highly detailed plans for such a mobilization. The policy of glorifying military power and keeping an army prepared for war was known as **militarism.** Having a large and strong standing army made citizens feel patriotic. However, it also frightened some people.

Alliances The growing international rivalries had led to the creation of several military alliances among the Great Powers as early as the 1870s. This alliance system had been designed to keep peace in Europe. But it would instead help push the continent into war.

Between 1864 and 1871, Prussia's blood-and-iron chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, freely used war to unify Germany. After 1871, however, Bismarck declared Germany to be a "satisfied power." He then turned his energies to maintaining peace in Europe.

Bismarck saw France as the greatest threat to peace. He believed that France still wanted revenge for its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Bismarck's first goal, therefore, was to isolate France. "As long as it is without allies," Bismarck stressed, "France poses no danger to us." In 1879, Bismarck formed the Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary. Three years

later, Italy joined the two countries, forming the **Triple Alliance**. In 1887, Bismarck took yet another possible ally away from France by making a treaty with Russia.

Bismarck knew that his network of alliances was unstable. Two of Germany's allies, Russia and Austria, were themselves bitter rivals for the Balkans. The slightest shift in diplomatic winds could blow apart the fragile web of treaties.

In 1890, Germany's foreign policy changed dramatically. That year, **Kaiser Wilhelm II**—who two years earlier had become ruler of Germany—forced Bismarck to resign. A proud and stubborn man, Wilhelm II did not wish to share power with anyone. Besides wanting to assert his own power, the new Kaiser was eager to show the world just how mighty Germany had become. The army was his greatest pride. "I and the army were born for one another," Wilhelm declared shortly after taking power.

Wilhelm set Germany on a new course. He let his nation's treaty with Russia lapse in 1890. Russia responded by forming a defensive military alliance with France in 1892 and 1894. Such an alliance had been Bismarck's fear. A war with either Russia or France would make Germany the enemy of both. Germany would then be forced to fight a two-front war, or a war on both its eastern and western borders.

Next, the impulsive Kaiser, envious of Britain's large empire and mighty navy, decided to challenge Britain. During the 1890s, Germany built its own small colonial empire. At the same time, Wilhelm started a tremendous shipbuilding program in an effort to make the German navy equal to Britain's.

Alarmed, Great Britain began to enlarge its own fleet. In 1904, Britain formed an entente, or alliance, with France. In 1907, Britain made another entente, this time with both France and Russia. The **Triple Entente,** as it was called, did not bind Britain to fight with France and Russia. However, it did almost certainly ensure that Britain would not fight against them.