

# THE FIRST WORLD WAR



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## A European Tragedy

THE FIRST WORLD WAR was a tragic and unnecessary conflict. Unnecessary because the train of events that led to its outbreak might have been broken at any point during the five weeks of crisis that preceded the first clash of arms, had prudence or common goodwill found a voice; tragic because the consequences of the first clash ended the lives of ten million human beings, tortured the emotional lives of millions more, destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent and left, when the guns at last fell silent four years later, a legacy of political rancour and racial hatred so intense that no explanation of the causes of the Second World War can stand without reference to those roots. The Second World War, five times more destructive of human life and incalculably more costly in material terms, was the direct outcome of the First. On 18 September 1922, Adolf Hitler, the demobilised front fighter, threw down a challenge to defeated Germany that he would realise seventeen years later: "It cannot be that two million Germans should have fallen in vain . . . No, we do not pardon, we demand—vengeance!"

The monuments to the vengeance he took stand throughout the continent he devastated, in the reconstructed centres of his own German cities, flattened by the strategic bombing campaign that he provoked, and of those—Leningrad, Stalingrad, Warsaw, Rotterdam, London—that he himself laid waste. The derelict fortifications of the Atlantic Wall, built in the vain hope of holding his enemies at bay, are monuments to his desire for vengeance; so, too, are the decaying huts of Auschwitz and the remnants of the obliterated extermination camps at Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka. A child's shoe in the Polish dust, a scrap of rusting barbed wire, a residue of pulverised bone near



the spot where the gas chambers worked, these are as much relics of the First as of the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> They have their antecedents in the scraps of barbed wire that litter the fields where the trenches ran, filling the French air with the smell of rust on a damp morning, in the mildewed military leather a visitor finds under a hedgerow, in the verdigrised brass of a badge or button, corroded clips of ammunition and pockmarked shards of shell. They have their antecedents also in the anonymous remains still upturned today by farmers ploughing the bloodsoaked soil of the Somme—"I stop work at once. I have a great respect for your English dead"—just as the barely viewable film of bodies being heaped into the mass graves at Belsen in 1945 has its antecedents in the blurred footage of French soldiers stacking the cordwood of their dead comrades after the Second Battle of Champagne in 1915. The First World War inaugurated the manufacture of mass death that the Second brought to a pitiless consummation.

There are more ceremonial monuments. Few French and British communities lack a memorial to the dead of the Second World War. There is one in my West Country village, a list of names carved at the foot of the funerary crucifix that stands at the crossroads. It is, however, an addition and an afterthought. The cross itself was raised to commemorate the young men who did not return from the First World War and their number is twice that of those killed in the Second. From a population of two hundred in 1914, W. Gray, A. Lapham, W. Newton, A. Norris, C. Penn, L. Penn and W. J. White, perhaps one in four of the village's men of military age, did not come back from the front. Theirs are names found in the church registers that go back to the sixteenth century. They survive in the village today. It is not difficult to see from the evidence that the Great War brought heartbreak on a scale never known since the settlement was established by the Anglo-Saxons before the Norman Conquest and, thankfully, has not been known since. The memorial cross is, the church apart, the only public monument the village possesses. It has its counterpart in every neighbouring village, in the county's towns, where the names multiply many times, and in the cathedral of the diocese at Salisbury. It has its counterpart, too, in every cathedral in France, in each of which will be seen a tablet bearing the inscription, "To the Glory of God and in memory of one million men of the British Empire who died in the Great War and of whom the greater number rest in France."

Nearby, certainly, will stand a memorial to the locality's own dead, itself replicated in every surrounding town and village. France lost

nearly two million in the Great War, two out of every nine men who marched away. They are often symbolised by the statue of a *poilu*, defiant in horizon blue, levelling a bayonet eastward at the German frontier. The list of names on the plinth is heartrendingly long, all the more heartrending because repetition of the same name testifies to more than one death, often several, in the same family. There are similar lists to be seen graven in stone in the towns and cities of most combatant nations of the Great War. Particularly poignant, I find, is the restrained classicism of the memorial to the cavalry division of the Veneto that stands beside the cathedral of Murano in the lagoon of Venice, bearing row after row of names of young men from the lowlands of the River Po who died in the harsh uplands of the Julian Alps. I am touched by the same emotion in the churches of Vienna where severe stone tablets recall the sacrifice of historic Habsburg regiments now almost forgotten to history.<sup>3</sup>

The Germans, who cannot decently mourn their four million dead of the Second World War, compromised as the Wehrmacht was by the atrocities of the Nazi state, found a material, if not morally equivalent difficulty in arranging an appropriately symbolic expression of grief for their fallen of the First, since so many lay on foreign soil. The battlefields of the east were closed to them by the Bolshevik revolution, those of the west made at best grudgingly accessible for the retrieval and reburial of bodies. The French and the Belgians found little room in their hearts or in the national soil for the creation of German war cemeteries. While the British were accorded a *sépulture perpétuelle* for their places of burial, which ramified during the 1920s into an archipelago of gardened graveyards along the line of the Western Front breathtaking in their beauty, the Germans were obliged to excavate mass graves in obscure locations to contain the remains of their casualties. Only in East Prussia, on the site of the Tannenberg epic, did they succeed in creating a mausoleum of triumphal monumentality for the fallen. At home, far from the fronts where their young men had died, they gave form to their sorrow in church and cathedral monuments that take their inspiration chiefly from the austerity of high Gothic art, often using the image of Grünewald's *Crucifixion* or Holbein's *Christ in the Tomb* as their theme.<sup>4</sup>

The Christ of Grünewald and Holbein is a body that has bled, suffered and died, untended in its final agony by relative or friend. The image was appropriate to the symbolisation of the Great War's common soldier, for over half of those who died in the west, perhaps more



in the east, were lost as corpses in the wilderness of the battlefield. So numerous were those missing bodies that, in the war's immediate aftermath, it was proposed, first by an Anglican clergyman who had served as a wartime chaplain, that the most fitting of all the memorials to the War dead would be a disinterment and reburial of one of those unidentified in a place of honour. A body was chosen, brought to Westminster Abbey and placed at the entrance under a tablet bearing the inscription, "They buried him among the Kings because he had done good toward God and toward His house." On the same day, the second anniversary of the armistice of 11 November 1918, a French Unknown Soldier was buried under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and unknown soldiers were later reburied in many of the victor nations' capitals.<sup>5</sup> When the defeated Germans attempted to create a national memorial to their dead in 1924, however, the unveiling broke down into a welter of political protest. The speech made by President Ebert, who had lost two sons, was heard out. The two minutes of silence that was supposed to follow was interrupted by the shouting of pro-war and anti-war slogans, which precipitated a riot that lasted all day.<sup>6</sup> The agony of a lost war continued to divide Germany, as it would until the coming of Hitler nine years later. Soon after his assumption of the Chancellorship, Nazi writers began to represent Hitler, the "unknown corporal," as a living embodiment of the "unknown soldier" Weimar Germany had failed as a state to honour. It was not long before Hitler, in his speeches as *Führer* of the German nation, began to refer to himself as "an unknown soldier of the world war." He was sowing the seed that would reap another four million German corpses.<sup>7</sup>

War's rancours are quick to bite and slow to heal. By the end of 1914, four months after the outbreak of the Great War, 300,000 Frenchmen had been killed, 600,000 wounded, out of a male population of twenty million, perhaps ten million of military age. By the end of the war, nearly two million Frenchmen were dead, the majority from the infantry, the major arm of service, which had lost 22 per cent of those enlisted. The heaviest casualties had been suffered by the youngest year-groups: between 27 per cent and 30 per cent of the conscript classes of 1912-15. Many of those young men were not yet married. By 1918, however, there were 630,000 war widows in France and a very large number of younger women deprived by the war of the chance of marriage. The imbalance between the sexes of those aged twenty to thirty-nine stood in 1921 at forty-five males to fifty-five females. Among the five million wounded of the war, moreover, several hun-

dred thousand were numbered as "*grands mutilés*," soldiers who had lost limbs or eyes. Perhaps the worst afflicted were the victims of disfiguring facial wounds, some of whom were so awful to behold that secluded rural settlements were established, where they could holiday together.<sup>8</sup>

The suffering of the German war generation was comparable. "Year groups 1892-1895, men who were between nineteen and twenty-two when the war broke out, were reduced by 35-37 per cent." Overall, of the sixteen million born between 1870 and 1899, 13 per cent were killed, at the rate of 465,600 for each year the war lasted. The heaviest casualties, as in most armies, fell among the officers, of whom 23 per cent were killed—25 per cent of regular officers—as against 14 per cent of enlisted men. The surviving German "*grands mutilés*" included 44,657 who lost a leg, 20,877 who lost an arm, 136 who lost both arms and 1,264 who lost both legs. There were also 2,517 war blind, a fraction of those seriously wounded in the head, of whom most died. In all, 2,057,000 Germans died in the war, or of wounds in its aftermath.<sup>9</sup>

Germany, though it lost the largest number of counted dead—those of Russia and Turkey remain uncounted with any exactitude—was not the worst proportionate sufferer. That country was Serbia, of whose pre-war population of five million, 125,000 were killed or died as soldiers but another 650,000 civilians succumbed to privation or disease, making a total of 15 per cent of the population lost, compared with something between two and three per cent of the British, French and German populations.<sup>10</sup>

Even those smaller proportions left terrible psychic wounds, falling as they did on the youngest and most active sections of society's males. It has, as the war recedes into history, become fashionable to decry the lament for a "Lost Generation" as myth-making. The loss, demographers demonstrate, was swiftly made good by natural increase of population, while loss was felt, the harder-hearted sort of historian insists, by a fraction of families. At the very worst, they argue, only 20 per cent of those who went to the war did not return, while the aggregate was lower, 10 per cent or less. For the majority, the war was but a passage in their lives, an interruption of normality to which society rapidly returned as soon as the guns fell silent.

This is a complacent judgement. It is true that the Great War, by comparison with that of 1939-45, did little material damage. No large European city was destroyed or even seriously devastated during its course, as all large German cities were by aerial bombardment during



the Second World War. The First World War was a rural conflict, on the Eastern as on the Western Fronts. The fields over which it was fought were swiftly returned to agriculture or pasturage and the villages ruined by bombardment—except for those around Verdun—quickly rebuilt. The war inflicted no harm to Europe's cultural heritage that was not easily repaired: the medieval Cloth Hall at Ypres stands today as it did before the bombardments of 1914–18, so do the town squares of Arras, so does the cathedral of Rouen, while the treasures of Louvain, burnt in an uncharacteristic act of vandalism in 1914, were replaced piece by piece in the war's aftermath.

Above all, the war imposed on the civilian populations involved almost none of the deliberate disruption and atrocity that was to be a feature of the Second. Except in Serbia and, at the outset, in Belgium, communities were not forced to leave their homes, land and peaceful occupations; except in Turkish Armenia, no population was subjected to genocide; and, awful though the Ottoman government's treatment of its Armenian subjects was, the forced marches organised to do them to death belong more properly to the history of Ottoman imperial policy than to that of the war itself. The First, unlike the Second World War, saw no systematic displacement of populations, no deliberate starvation, no expropriation, little massacre or atrocity. It was, despite the efforts by state propaganda machines to prove otherwise, and the cruelties of the battlefield apart, a curiously civilised war.

Yet it damaged civilisation, the rational and liberal civilisation of the European enlightenment, permanently for the worse and, through the damage done, world civilisation also. Pre-war Europe, imperial though it was in its relations with most of the world beyond the continent, offered respect to the principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law and representative government. Post-war Europe rapidly relinquished confidence in such principles. They were lost altogether in Russia after 1917, in Italy after 1922, in Germany in 1933, in Spain after 1936, and only patchily observed at any time in the young states created or enlarged by the post-war settlement in Central and Southern Europe. Within fifteen years of the war's end, totalitarianism, a new word for a system that rejected the liberalism and constitutionalism which had inspired European politics since the eclipse of monarchy in 1789, was almost everywhere on the rise. Totalitarianism was the political continuation of war by other means. It uniformed and militarised its mass electoral following, while depriving voters generally of their electoral rights, exciting their lowest political instincts and marginalis-

ing and menacing all internal opposition. Less than twenty years after the end of the Great War, the "war to end wars" as it had come to be called at the nadir of hopes for its eventual conclusion, Europe was once again gripped by the fear of a new war, provoked by the actions and ambitions of war lords more aggressive than any known to the old world of the long nineteenth-century peace. It was also in the full flood of rearmament, with weapons—tanks, bombing aircraft, submarines—known only in embryo form in the First World War and threatening to make a Second an even greater catastrophe.

The Second World War, when it came in 1939, was unquestionably the outcome of the First, and in large measure its continuation. Its circumstances—the dissatisfaction of the German-speaking peoples with their standing among other nations—were the same, and so were its immediate causes, a dispute between a German-speaking ruler and a Slav neighbour. The personalities, though occupying different status, were also the same: Gamelin, the French commander in 1939, had been principal staff officer to Foch, the Allied Supreme Commander in 1918, Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty in 1939, had been First Lord of the Admiralty in 1914, Hitler, "the first soldier of the Third Reich," had been one of the first volunteers of Kaiser Wilhelm's Reich in August 1914. The battlefields were to be the same: the River Meuse, crossed with spectacular ease by the German panzer divisions in May 1940, had proved impassable at Verdun throughout 1914–18; Arras, focus of some of the British Expeditionary Force's worst trench fighting on the Western Front, was the scene of the British army's only successful counter-attack in 1940; while the River Bzura, a narrow watercourse west of Warsaw, was to be critical to the conduct of operations on the Eastern Front both in 1939 and in 1915. Many of those who marched off in 1939 were the same people who, younger in age, junior in rank, had also marched away in 1914, convinced they would be home, victorious, "before the leaves fall." The fortunate survivors would, however, have admitted this difference. In 1939 the apprehension of war was strong, so was its menace, so, too, was knowledge of its reality. In 1914, by contrast, war came, out of a cloudless sky, to populations which knew almost nothing of it and had been raised to doubt that it could ever again trouble their continent.



## EUROPEAN HARMONY

Europe in the summer of 1914 enjoyed a peaceful productivity so dependent on international exchange and co-operation that a belief in the impossibility of general war seemed the most conventional of wisdoms. In 1910 an analysis of prevailing economic interdependence, *The Great Illusion*, had become a best-seller; its author Norman Angell had demonstrated, to the satisfaction of almost all informed opinion, that the disruption of international credit inevitably to be caused by war would either deter its outbreak or bring it speedily to an end. It was a message to which the industrial and commercial society of that age was keenly sympathetic. After two decades of depression, precipitated by an Austrian bank failure in 1873 but sustained by a fall in the prices to be had both for raw materials and for manufactured goods, industrial output had begun to expand again in the last years of the nineteenth century. New categories of manufactures—electrical goods, chemical dyes, internal combustion vehicles—had appeared to tempt buyers; new sources of cheaply extractable raw materials had been found; so, too, had new deposits of precious metals, above all in South Africa, to fertilise credit. Rising population—there was a 35 per cent increase in Austria-Hungary, between 1880 and 1910, 43 per cent in Germany, 26 per cent in Britain, over 50 per cent in Russia—sharply enlarged the size of internal markets; emigration—twenty-six million people left Europe for the Americas and Australasia in 1880–1910—increased demand for goods there also, while the enormous expansion of overseas empires, formal and informal, in Africa and Asia, drew millions of their inhabitants into the international market, both as suppliers of staples and consumers of finished goods. A second revolution in transport—in 1893 steamship overtook sailing-ship tonnage for the first time—had greatly accelerated and expanded the movement of commerce overseas, while the extension of the railway network (virtually complete in Western Europe and the United States by 1870) in Eastern Europe and in Russia—where it grew in length from 31,000 to 71,000 kilometres between 1890 and 1913—added that enormous region, rich in cereals, minerals, oil and timber, to the integrated international economy. It is scarcely surprising that, by the beginning of the century, bankers had recovered their confidence, gold-based capital was circulating freely, largely from Europe to the Americas and Asia, at a rate of £350 million a year in the first decade of the twentieth century, and return

on overseas investment had come to form a significant element of private and corporate incomes in Britain, France, Germany, Holland and Belgium; Belgium, one of the smallest countries in Europe, had in 1914 the sixth largest economy in the world, the result of early industrialisation but also of intense activity by its banks, trading houses and industrial entrepreneurs.

Russian railways, South African gold and diamond mines, Indian textile factories, African and Malayan rubber plantations, South American cattle ranches, Australian sheep stations, Canadian wheat-fields and almost every sector of the enormous economy of the United States, already by 1913 the largest in the world, producing one-third of its industrial output, devoured European capital as fast as it could be lent. The greater proportion passed through the City of London. Though its central banking reserve of gold was small—only £24 million in 1890, when the Bank of France had £95 million, the Reichsbank £40 million and the United States Federal Reserve £142 million—the worldwide connections of its private banks and discount houses, insurance and commodity companies and equity and produce exchanges made it nevertheless the principal medium of buying, selling and borrowing for all advanced countries. Its predominance fed the belief so persuasively advanced by Norman Angell that any interruption of the smooth, daily equalisation of debit and credit it masterminded must destroy not only confidence in the monetary mechanism by which the world lived, but the very system itself.

Speaking to the Institute of Bankers in London on 17 January 1912, on "The Influence of Banking on International Relations," Angell argued that

commercial interdependence, which is the special mark of banking as it is the mark of no other profession or trade in quite the same degree—the fact that the interest and solvency of one is bound up with the interest and solvency of many; that there must be confidence in the due fulfilment of mutual obligation, or whole sections of the edifice crumble, is surely doing a great deal to demonstrate that morality after all is not founded upon self-sacrifice, but upon enlightened self-interest, a clearer and more complete understanding of all the ties that bind us the one to the other. And such clearer understanding is bound to improve, not merely the relationship of one group to another, but the relationship



of all men to all other men, to create a consciousness which must make for more efficient human co-operation, a better human society.

W. R. Lawson, a former editor of the *Financial Times*, observed at the end of the speech, "It is very evident that Mr. Norman Angell had carried this meeting almost entirely with him."

It was not only bankers—of whom many of London's foremost were German—that accepted the interdependence of nations as a condition of the world's life in the first years of the twentieth century, a necessary condition and one destined to grow in importance. The acceptance was far wider than theirs. Much of it had a purely practical basis. The revolution in communications—by railway, telegraph and stamped postage—required international co-operation to service the new technologies and bureaucracies of travel and messaging. An International Telegraph Union was established in 1865 and the International Postal Union in 1875. An International Conference for Promoting Technical Uniformity in Railways was set up in 1882—too late to standardise gauges between Western and Eastern Europe, where Russia had already adopted the broad gauge which was to make the use of its railways by invaders so difficult both in 1914 and in 1941 but which, in peace, was nothing but an impediment to commercial traffic. The International Meteorological Organisation, set up to exchange information on the world's weather movements, of critical importance to maritime transport, appeared in 1873 and the International Radiotelegraph Union, which allotted separate wavelengths for the new invention of wireless, in 1906. All these were governmental organisations whose workings enjoyed the support of treaty or statute in member states. The world of commerce was meanwhile establishing its own, equally necessary, international associations: for the Publication of Customs Tariffs in 1890, of Patents and Trademarks in 1883, for Industrial, Literary and Artistic Property in 1895, of Commercial Statistics in 1913; an Institute of Agriculture, which collected and published statistics of farming production and marketing, came into being in 1905. Particular industries and professions meanwhile set up their own international bodies: the International Congress of Chambers of Commerce was established in 1880, the Congress of Actuaries in 1895, the Association of Accountancy in 1911, the International Electrotechnical Commission in 1906, the Committee for the Unification of Maritime Law in 1897, the Baltic and White Sea Conference (which standardised maritime charter) in

1905. An International Bureau of Weights and Measures had been organised in 1875 and the first International Copyright Conventions were signed in the 1880s.

Without such bodies the network of buying and selling, collecting and distributing, insuring and discounting, lending and borrowing could not have knotted as it did in the square mile of the City of London. Internationalism, however, was not merely commercial. It was also intellectual, philanthropic and religious. The only truly transnational religious movement remained, as it had since the collapse of the Roman empire, the Catholic Church, with bishoprics throughout the world centred on that of Rome; its incumbent in midsummer 1914, Pope Pius X, was, however, a willing prisoner in the Vatican, a root-and-branch opponent of all modernising tendencies in theology and as suspicious of his own liberals as he was of Protestants. The latter were equally divided among themselves, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist and Independent of many hues. Some denominations nevertheless succeeded in co-operating in the missionary field at least. The China Inland Mission, uniting several Protestant churches, dated from 1865. A World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910 broadened that impetus and in 1907 Christians in universities had founded the International Christian Movement at Tokyo. Little of this spirit, however, permeated Europe. There the only inter-Protestant body was the Evangelical Alliance, founded in 1846 in resistance to Catholicism.

Doctrinal differences therefore made fellowship between Christians a chancy spiritual undertaking. Common Christianity—and Europe was overwhelmingly Christian by profession in 1914 and strongly Christian in observance also—found an easier expression in philanthropy. Anti-slavery had been an early issue to white international sentiment, Christian at its root. In 1841 Britain, France, Russia, Austria and Prussia had signed a treaty that made slave-trading an act of piracy, a policy Britain was already energetically enforcing through the anti-slavery patrols of the Royal Navy off West Africa. The treaty's provisions were extended by another signed in 1889 at Brussels, ironically the capital of a king who ran a brutal slave empire in the Congo. Nevertheless the oceanic slave trade had by then been extinguished by international co-operation. The traffic in women and children for prostitution, "White Slavery," also stimulated international action, or at least expressions of disgust. An International Abolitionist Federation Congress met at Geneva in 1877, there were other conferences in 1899 and 1904 and in 1910 a convention, subsequently signed by nine states,



decreed the traffic to be a crime punishable by their domestic law wherever committed.

Conditions of labour were also a philanthropic concern. In an age of mass emigration governments neither could nor sought to regulate the welfare of those seeking a new life in distant lands. The impulse to restrict working hours and forbid the employment of children had been a major influence, however, on domestic legislation in many European states during the nineteenth century and was by some subsequently given international force. By 1914 many European states had entered into bilateral treaties protecting workers' rights to social insurance and industrial compensation, while restricting female and child labour. Most were designed to protect migrant workers in border areas; a typical treaty was that of 1904 between France and Italy, guaranteeing reciprocal insurance facilities and protection of respective labour laws to each other's citizens. They may best be seen as a state response to the activities of the international working man's movements, particularly the First International, founded by Karl Marx in London in 1864, and, the Second, Paris 1889. It was their preaching of social revolution that had driven governments, particularly Bismarck's in Germany after 1871, to enact labour welfare laws as a measure of self-protection.

Other, older measures of self-protection were present in international agreements to check the spread of disease, usually by the quarantining of ships in the distant trade and of immigrants from the Near East, identified as the main source of epidemic outbreaks in Europe. The sale of liquor and drugs was also subject to international control; an Opium Conference between twelve governments met at the Hague in 1912; inevitably it failed in its purpose, but the undertaking was evidence of a growing willingness by governments to act collectively. They had done so with success to suppress piracy. They would also cooperate to repatriate each other's criminals, though usually not if their offences could be decreed political. There was a strong objection in liberal states to supporting the rule of tyrannical governments, despite the prevailing commitment of all to the principle of absolute sovereignty. Non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states, however, was restricted to Christendom. The Ottoman empire's treatment of its minorities had prompted international intervention in Greece in 1827, in the Lebanon in 1860, and several times later. The Chinese empire's complicity in the Boxer siege of the Peking embassies in 1900 had prompted the despatch of a full-scale international relief expedition, mounted by British bluejackets, Russian Cossacks, French colonial

infantry, Italian Bersaglieri and detachments of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, as well as Japanese guardsmen and United States marines.

The relief expedition was a complete success, showing that Europe could act together when it chose. It could, of course, also think and feel together. Europe's educated classes held much of its culture in common, particularly through an appreciation for the art of the Italian and Flemish renaissance, for the music of Mozart and Beethoven, for grand opera, for the architecture of the Middle Ages and the classical revival, and for each other's modern literature. Tolstoy was a European figure; so, too, were other writers of Europe's present or recent past. Victor Hugo, Balzac, Zola, Dickens, Manzoni, Shakespeare, Goethe, Molière and Dante were familiar, at least as names, to every European high school child, and French, German and Italian were commonly taught them in their foreign-language classes. Despite a growing resistance to the primacy of Latin and Greek in the high schools, Homer, Thucydides, Caesar and Livy were set-books in all of them and the study of the classics remained universal. Through the teaching of the tenets of Aristotle and Plato, there was, despite the nineteenth-century turmoil of ideas stoked by Hegel and Nietzsche, even a congruence of philosophy; the classical foundations stood, perhaps more securely than the Christian. Europe's university graduates shared a corpus of thought and knowledge and, tiny minority though they were, their commonality of outlook preserved something recognisable as a single European culture.

It was enjoyed by an ever-increasing number of European cultural tourists. Ordinary people travelled little; seamen, transhumant pasturers herding their flocks across mountain frontiers, migrant workers moving to the harvest, cooks and waiters, itinerant musicians, pedlars, specialist craftsmen, the agents of foreign business, these were the only sort of aliens Europe's settled people would have met before 1914. The monied tourist was the exception. Travel had been the pastime of the rich in the eighteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth it had become a middle-class pleasure as well, thanks to the railway revolution and the rise of the hotel industry which it fuelled. Karl Baedeker's Guides, the essential handbook for the tourist abroad, were in 1900 in their thirteenth edition for Rome, their ninth for the Eastern Alps and already their seventh for Scandinavia. Tourism was, for the majority, channelled and unadventurous. The most visited locations were Venice and Florence, the Holy City, the castles of the Rhine, and



Paris, "City of Light"; but there were also large annual migrations to the spa towns of Central Europe, Carlsbad and Marienbad, to the French and Italian rivieras and to the Alps. Some travellers were venturing further afield. Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates, with their tutors, had already embarked on what was to become the twentieth-century institution of the Hellenic tour; and Baedeker's Guide to Austria included Bosnia, with an entry on Sarajevo: "... the numerous minarets and the little houses standing in gardens give the town a very picturesque appearance . . . The streets on the river-banks are chiefly occupied by the Austrian and other immigrants, while most of the Turks and the Servians have their houses on the hillsides . . . the so-called Konak is the residence of the Austrian commandant. Visitors are admitted to the garden."<sup>12</sup>

The most important visitor to Sarajevo in 1914 would be Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne. He, of course, was travelling within his own territory but the members of the royal houses of Europe were great international travellers and their acquaintanceship one of the most important of bonds between states. If international marriages were uncommon even between Europe's upper classes, between royal houses they remained an instrument of foreign relations. The offspring of Queen Victoria were married into most of the Protestant royal families of the continent; one granddaughter, Ena, had breached the religious barrier and was Queen of Spain. Grandsons of Victoria occupied the thrones of her own country and of Germany in 1914; her daughter-in-law's family, the Sonderburg-Glucksburgs of Denmark, numbered as members the Empress of Russia and the Kings of Greece and Norway. It was broadly true that all European royalty were cousins; even the Habsburgs of Austria, most imperious of sovereigns, occasionally mingled their blood with outsiders; and since every state in Europe, except France and Switzerland, was a monarchy, that made for a very dense network of inter-state connections indeed. Symbolic relationships ramified those of birth. The Kaiser was Colonel of the British 1st Dragoons and an admiral in the Royal Navy; his cousin, George V, was Colonel of the Prussian 1st Guard Dragoons. The Austrian Emperor was Colonel of the British 1st Dragoon Guards; while among foreign colonels of Austrian regiments were the Kings of Sweden, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony and Montenegro and the Tsar of Russia.

Symbolic relationships were, however, not hard currency in for-

eign affairs, any more than were royal cousinship or marriage ties. Nineteenth-century Europe had produced no solid instruments of inter-state co-operation or of diplomatic mediation. The "Concert of Europe," which had been Napoleon's unintended creation, had withered; so, too, had the anti-revolutionary League of the Three Emperors. It is commonplace to say that Europe in 1914 was a continent of naked nationalism: it was true all the same. The Catholic Church had long lost its pan-European authority; the idea of a secular ecumenicism had died with the Holy Roman Empire in 1804. Some effort had been made to supply the deficiency through the establishment of a code of international law. It remained a weak concept, for its most important principle, established by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, was that of the sovereignty of states, which left each in effect unfettered by anything but judgement of self-interest. The only area over which states had agreed to limit the operation of self-interest lay not on land but at sea, which the leading powers had agreed at Paris in 1856 should be one where neutrality was respected and private military activity outlawed. The immunity of medical personnel and of those in their care had been established by the first Geneva Convention of 1864 and some limitation of the destructiveness of weapons had been negotiated at St. Petersburg in 1868. The Geneva Convention, however, was on common humanitarianism, while the St. Petersburg Declaration did not inhibit the development of automatic weapons or high-explosive projectiles.

The decision of Tsar Nicholas II in 1899 to convene an international conference dedicated not only to strengthening the limitation of armaments but also to the founding of an international court for the settlement of disputes between states by arbitration was therefore a creative innovation. Historians have perceived in his summons of the powers to the Hague an admission of Russia's military weakness. Cynics said the same at the time, as did Russia's professional enemies in Germany and Austria. People of goodwill, of whom there were many, thought differently. With them the Tsar's warning that "the accelerating arms race"—to produce ever larger armies, heavier artillery and bigger warships—was "transforming the armed peace into a crushing burden that weighs on all nations and, if prolonged, will lead to the very cataclysm it seeks to avert"—struck a chord. It was to some degree in deference to that public opinion that the 1899 Hague Conference did consent both to a limitation of armaments, in particular the ban-



ning of aerial bombardment, and to the creation of the International Court.

### A EUROPE OF SOLDIERS

The flaw in the provision for an International Court was that its convening was to be voluntary. "The greatest thing," wrote the American delegate about the conference, "is that the Court of Arbitration . . . shall be seen by all nations [to] indicate a sincere desire to promote peace [and to] relieve the various peoples of the fear which so heavily oppresses all, the dread of a sudden outburst of war at any moment." A German delegate more realistically noted that the Court's "voluntary character" deprived it of "the very last trace of any compulsion, moral or otherwise, upon any nation."<sup>19</sup> The truth of Europe's situation at the turn of the century lay rather with the German than the American. There was, admittedly, a fear of war in the abstract, but it was as vague as the perception of what form modern war itself might take. Stronger by far, particularly among the political classes in every major country, was the fear of the consequences of failure to face the challenge of war itself. Each—Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary—felt its position threatened in some way or other. The three great European empires, German, Austrian and Russian, felt threatened by the national dissatisfactions of their minorities, particularly in Austria-Hungary, dominated by Germans and Magyars but populated by Slav peoples who outnumbered them. All three were also troubled by demands for wider democracy—in Russia for any democracy at all—and all the more acutely when nationalism and the democratic impulse found a common voice. Democracy was not the problem in Britain or France, since their male populations exercised full electoral rights. It was the burden of a different sort of empire that weighed upon them, the administration of vast overseas dominions in Africa, India, Arabia, South-East Asia, the Americas and the Pacific, a source of enormous national pride but also a spur to aggressive jealousy among their European neighbours. The British believed that Russia had ambitions on India, which its Central Asian possessions closely abutted; the belief was probably mistaken but held nonetheless. The Germans certainly and deeply resented their lack of colonies, sought to extend the few they had acquired in Africa and the Pacific and were ever ready to quarrel, particularly with France, over influence in the few remaining areas not yet subject to European rule.

In a continent in which a handful of powers exercised control over a large cluster of subordinate peoples, and from which two, Britain and France, ruled much of the rest of the world, it was inevitable that reactions between all should be infused with suspicion and rivalry. The worst of the rivalries had been provoked by Germany, through its decision in 1900, enacted in the Second Naval Law, to build a fleet capable of engaging the Royal Navy in battle. Even though Germany's merchant fleet was by then the second largest in the world, the British rightly decided to regard the enactment of the Second Naval Law as an unjustified threat to its century-old command of the seas and reacted accordingly; by 1906 the race to outbuild Germany in modern battle-ships was the most important and most popular element of British public policy. There was a strong and complementary military rivalry between the continental powers, exemplified at its starkest by the decision of France, a nation of forty million people, to match the strength of Germany, with sixty million, in number of soldiers; the "Three Year Law" of 1913, extending the service of conscripts, promised, at least in the short term, to achieve that object. There were other rivalries, not least between Britain and France which, by 1900 mutual allies in the face of Germany's rising aggressiveness, nevertheless managed to quarrel over colonial interests in Africa.

What uniformly characterised all these disputes was that none was submitted to the process of international arbitration suggested by the discussions at the Hague in 1899. When issues of potential conflict arose, as they did over the first (1905) and second (1911) Moroccan crises in Franco-German relations, turning on German resentment of the extension of French influence in North Africa, and over the First (1912) and Second (1913) Balkan Wars, the results of which disfavoured Austria, Germany's ally, the great powers involved made no effort to invoke the Hague provision for international arbitration but settled affairs, as was traditional, by ad hoc international treaty. Peace, temporarily at least, was in each case the outcome; the ideal of supra-national peacemaking, towards which the Hague Conference had pointed the way, was in no case invoked.

International, which chiefly meant European, policy was indeed, in the opening years of the twentieth century, guided not by the search for a secure means of averting conflict but by the age-old quest for security in military superiority. That means, as the Tsar had so eloquently warned at the Hague in 1899, translated into the creation of ever larger armies and navies, the acquisition of more and heavier guns and the



building of stronger and wider belts of frontier fortification. Fortification, however, was intellectually out of fashion with Europe's advanced military thinkers, who were persuaded by the success of heavy artillery in recent attacks on masonry and concrete—as at Port Arthur, during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5—that guns had achieved a decisive advantage. Power had transferred, it was believed, from static defence to the mobile offensive as represented particularly by large masses of infantry manoeuvring, with the support of mobile field guns, at speed across the face of the battlefield. There was still thought to be a role for cavalry, in which European armies abounded; the German army, in the years before 1914, added thirteen regiments of mounted riflemen (*Jäger zu Pferde*) to its order of battle, while the French, Austrian and Russian armies also expanded their horsed arm. It was on numbers of infantrymen, equipped with the new magazine-rifle, trained in close-order tactics and taught, above all, to accept that casualties would be heavy until a decision was gained that, nevertheless, the generals counted upon to achieve victory.<sup>14</sup> The significance of improvised fortification—the entrenchments and earthworks thrown up at speed which, defended by riflemen, had caused such loss to the attacker on the Tugela and Modder rivers during the Boer War, in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War and at the lines of Chatalja during the Second Balkan War—had been noted, but discounted. Given enough well-led and well-motivated infantry, the European military theorists believed, no line of trenches could be held against them.

Among the other great industrial enterprises of Europe in the first years of the twentieth century, therefore, the industry of creating soldiers flourished. Since the triumph of Prussia's army of conscripts and reservists over the Austrians in 1866 and the French in 1870, all leading European states (Britain, sea-girt and guarded by the world's largest navy, was the exception) had accepted the necessity of submitting their young men to military training in early manhood and of requiring them, once trained, to remain at the state's disposition, as reservists, into late maturity. The result of this requirement was to produce enormous armies of serving and potential soldiers. In the German army, model for all others, a conscript spent the first two years of full adulthood in uniform, effectively imprisoned in barracks which were governed by distant officers and administered by sergeants all too close at hand. During the first five years after his discharge from duty he was obliged to return to the reserve unit of his regiment for annual training. Then, until the age of thirty-nine, he was enrolled in a unit of the sec-

ondary reserve, or *Landwehr*; thereafter, until the age of forty-five, in the third-line reserve, the *Landsturm*. There were French, Austrian and Russian equivalents. The effect was to maintain inside European civil society a second, submerged and normally invisible military society, millions strong, of men who had shouldered a rifle, marched in step, borne the lash of a sergeant's tongue and learnt to obey orders.

Submerged, also, below the surface of Europe's civil geography was a secondary, military geography of corps and divisional districts. France, a country of ninety administrative departments, created by the First Republic to supplant the old royal provinces with territorial units of approximately equal size, named for the most part after the local river—Oise, Somme, Aisne, Marne, Meuse (names to which the First World War would give a doleful fame)—was also divided into twenty military districts, comprising four or five departments. Each military district was the peacetime location of a corps of the "active" army, and the source in war of an equivalent group of divisions of the reserve; the XXI Corps had its location in French North Africa. The forty-two active divisions, comprising 600,000 men, would on mobilisation take with them into the field another twenty-five reserve divisions and ancillary reserve units, raising the war strength of the army to over three million. From the I Corps District (departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais) to the XVIII (Landes and Pyrenees) the military replicated the civil geography of France at every layer. So, too, did it in Germany, also divided into twenty-one Corps Districts, though there a larger population yielded both more conscripts and more reserve units.<sup>15</sup> The I Corps District in East Prussia was the peacetime station of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions, but also of the wartime I Reserve Corps and a host of additional *Landwehr* and *Landsturm* units, dedicated to the defence of the Prussian heartland, against the danger of Russian attack. Russia's military geography resembled Germany's; so, too, did that of Austria-Hungary, whose multilingual kaleidoscope of archduchies, kingdoms, principalities and marquisates produced Europe's most complex army, comprising Hungarian hussars, Tyrolean riflemen and Bosnian infantry in the fez and baggy trousers of their former Ottoman overlords.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the diversity of the European armies' component units—and that diversity embraced French *Turcos* in turban and braided waistcoats, Russian Cossacks in kaftan and astrakhan hats and Scottish highlanders in kilt, sporran and doublet—there was a central uniformity to their organisation. That was provided by the core fighting



organisation, the division. The division, a creation of the Napoleonic revolution in military affairs, normally comprised twelve battalions of infantry and twelve batteries of artillery, 12,000 rifles and seventy-two guns. Its firepower in attack was formidable. In a minute of activity, the division could discharge 120,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition—more if its twenty-four machine guns joined in the action—and a thousand explosive shells, a weight of fire unimaginable by any commander in any previous period of warfare. There were in Europe, in 1914, over two hundred divisions, in full existence or ready to be called into being, theoretically deploying sufficient firepower to destroy each other totally in a few minutes of mutual life-taking. The current belief in the power of the offensive was correct; whoever first brought his available firepower into action with effect would prevail.

What had not been perceived is that firepower takes effect only if it can be directed in timely and accurate fashion. That requires communication. Undirected fire is wasted effort, unless observers can correct its fall, order shifts of target, signal success, terminate failure, co-ordinate the action of infantry with its artillery support. The communication necessary to such co-ordination demands, if not instantaneity, then certainly the shortest possible interval between observation and response. Nothing in the elaborate equipment of the European armies of the early twentieth century provided such facility. Their means of communication were at worst word of mouth, at best telephone and telegraph. As telephone and telegraph depended upon preserving the integrity of fragile wires, liable to be broken as soon as action was joined, word of mouth offered the only standby in a failure of communication, consigning commanders to the delays and uncertainties of the earliest days of warfare.

Radio communication, wireless telegraphy as it was then known, offered a solution to the difficulty in theory, but not in practice. Contemporary wireless sets, dependent on sources of energy too large and heavy to be useful militarily outside warships, were not practicable tools of command in the field. Though wireless was to play a minor strategic role early in the coming war; it was to prove of no tactical significance at any time, even at the end. That was to prove true at sea also, because of the failure of navies to solve the problem of assuring radio security in the transmission of signals in action and in close proximity to the enemy.<sup>17</sup> In retrospect, it may be seen that a system existing in embryo, though promising to make effective all the power available

to combatants in their quest for victory, lagged technically too far behind its potentiality to succeed.

If the potentiality of modern communications failed those dedicated to waging war, how much more did it fail those professionally dedicated to preserving the peace. The tragedy of the diplomatic crisis that preceded the outbreak of the fighting in August 1914, which was to swell into the four-year tragedy of the Great War, is that events successively and progressively overwhelmed the capacity of statesmen and diplomats to control and contain them. Honourable and able men though they were, the servants of the chancelleries and foreign officers of the great powers in the July crisis were bound to the wheel of the written note, the encipherment routine, the telegraph schedule. The potentialities of the telephone, which might have cut across the barriers to communication, seem to have eluded their imaginative powers. The potentialities of radio, available but unused, evaded them altogether. In the event, the states of Europe proceeded, as if in a dead march and a dialogue of the deaf, to the destruction of their continent and its civilisation.





## The Crisis of 1914

SECRET PLANS DETERMINED that any crisis not settled by sensible diplomacy would, in the circumstances prevailing in Europe in 1914, lead to general war. Sensible diplomacy had settled crises before, notably during the powers' quarrels over position in Africa and in the disquiet raised by the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. Such crises, however, had touched matters of national interest only, not matters of national honour or prestige. In June 1914 the honour of Austria-Hungary, most sensitive because weakest of European powers, was touched to the quick by the murder of the heir to the throne at the hands of an assassin who identified himself with the monarchy's most subversive foreign neighbour. The Austro-Hungarian empire, a polity of five major religions and a dozen languages, survived in dread of ethnic subversion. The chief source of subversion was Serbia, an aggressive, backward and domestically violent Christian kingdom which had won its independence from the rule of the Muslim Ottoman empire after centuries of rebellion. Independent Serbia did not include all Serbs. Large minorities remained, by historical accident, Austrian subjects. Those who were nationalists resented rule by the Habsburgs almost as much as their free brothers had rule by the Ottomans. The most extreme among them were prepared to kill. It was the killing by one of them of the Habsburg heir that fomented the fatal crisis of the summer of 1914.

The Habsburg army's summer manoeuvres of 1914 were held in Bosnia, the former Ottoman Turkish province occupied by Austria in 1878 and annexed to the empire in 1908. Franz Ferdinand, nephew to the Emperor Franz Josef and Inspector General of the army, arrived in Bosnia on 25 June to supervise. After the manoeuvres concluded, on 27 June, he drove next morning with his wife to the provincial capital,

Sarajevo, to carry out official engagements. It was an ill-chosen day: 28 June is the anniversary of the defeat of Serbia by the Turks in 1389, Vidov Dan, the event from which they date their long history of suffering at the hands of foreign oppressors.<sup>1</sup> The role of oppressor, after the retreat of the Ottoman Turks, had been assumed, in the eyes of nationalist Serbs, by the Habsburgs, and the provincial administration had been warned that his visit was unwelcome and might be dangerous. The warnings he ignored; threats to the great were commonplace in an era which had brought the killing by fanatics or lunatics of a Tsar, an Austrian Empress and a President of the United States. In this case a murder team was in place, a group of five young Serbs and a Bosnian Muslim, he recruited by the conspirators for cosmetic purposes, all equipped with bombs and pistols.<sup>2</sup> On the Archduke's way to the residence of the provincial governor, one of the terrorists threw a bomb at the car carrying Franz Ferdinand and his wife but it bounced off, exploding under the car following and wounding an officer occupant. The imperial party proceeded on its way. Three-quarters of an hour later, however, en route to visit the casualty in hospital, the archducal couple's chauffeur took a wrong turning and, while reversing, came to a momentary halt. The stop brought the car opposite one of the undetected conspirators, Gavrilo Princip, who was armed with a revolver. He stepped forward and fired. The Archduke's wife died instantly, he ten minutes later. Princip was arrested on the spot.<sup>3</sup>

Investigation swiftly revealed that, though the terrorists were all Austrian subjects, they had been armed in Serbia and smuggled back across the Austrian border by a Serbian nationalist organisation. The Austrian investigators identified it as the *Narodna Odbrana* (National Defence), set up in 1908 to work against the incorporation of Bosnia into the Austrian empire; it was a tenet of the nationalist creed that Bosnia was historically Serb. In fact the responsible organisation was the clandestine "Union or Death," commonly known as the Black Hand. The misapprehension was scarcely substantial, since the two shared members and the *Narodna Odbrana* in Bosnia lent help to the Black Hand.<sup>4</sup> The latter, more sinister, body had as its aim the "unification of Serbdom" and administered a death oath to its initiates. More important, it lay under the control of "Apis," as he was code-named, the colonel commanding the intelligence section of the Serbian army's General Staff.<sup>5</sup>

The exact degree of foreknowledge of the plot attributable to the Serbian government has never been established; intelligence is a murky



world, then as now, but then more commonly one peopled by uniformed officers, as the Dreyfus affair had sensationally revealed. Apis, properly Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic, was a revolutionary as well as a soldier—he had taken part in the brutal overthrow of the Obrenovic dynasty in 1903—and may well have been living two lives. Whatever the truth, by 2 July three of the murder team had made a full confession; it disclosed that they had been supplied with weapons from a Serbian military arsenal and helped to cross the border by Serbian frontier guards. The information was sufficient to confirm Austria's rooted belief in Serbian malevolence and to arouse its equally ready desire to punish the small kingdom for its disturbance of order within the empire.

The Slav problem was the weightiest of the empire's many difficulties with its minorities but, within those difficulties, the Serb problem constituted an active and growing threat. While the problem of the Poles was diffused by the partition of their ancient kingdom with Germany and Russia, the problem of the Czechs by the heavy Germanisation of their cities and the problem of the Croats by their Catholicism, nothing, it seemed, could diffuse that of the Serbs but the use of force. Their Orthodox Christianity made them a religious as well as national minority and one which Russia's guardianship of the Orthodox Church made cocksure; their long years of guerrilla resistance to Turkish rule had rendered them headstrong and self-reliant but also, in Austrian eyes, devious and untrustworthy; their poverty kept them warlike. The small kingdom of Serbia was intensely warlike. It had won independence from the Ottomans by its own effort in 1813 and glory and territory in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. National rebirth had raised the idea of a Greater Serbia, strong within the kingdom and a beacon to Austria's Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia. It had to be resisted, for not only were Serbs but one minority among others in those territories but neither could be surrendered. Strategy forbade it but so also did the imperial system itself, which was creakily sustained by the denial of the worth of nationality as a political idea. Concession to one nationality would soon entail concession to others and that way lay the dissolution of the empire itself.

The evidence of Serb complicity, official or not, in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, exposed by the conspirators' confessions of 2 July, was therefore enough to persuade many in the imperial government that a war against Serbia was now a necessity. As it happened, Count Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, had spent much of

the week before the assassination preparing aggressive diplomatic measures against Serbia. His scheme was to persuade Germany to support Austria in seeking an alliance with Bulgaria and Turkey, Serbia's enemies in the Second Balkan War of 1913, which would confront the Belgrade government with a hostile encirclement: Bulgaria and Turkey to the east, Austria-Hungary to the west and north. The assassination lent urgency to Berchtold's diplomacy. An Austrian emissary was ordered to Berlin with the document in early July. On 4 July, the eve of his departure, Berchtold made radical amendments to it. The memorandum now requested the German government to recognise that the empire's differences with Serbia were "irreconcilable" and stated the "imperious . . . necessity for the Monarchy [Austria-Hungary] to destroy with a determined hand the net which its enemies are attempting to draw over its head." A covering letter alleged that "the Sarajevo affair . . . was the result of a well-organised conspiracy, the threads of which can be traced to Belgrade" and insisted that "the pivot of the Panslavic policy" (Serbia as the protagonist of a "Greater Serbia") "must be eliminated as a power factor in the Balkans."<sup>6</sup> Berchtold gave the emissary, Count Hoyos, verbal authority to warn the Germans that Vienna would ask Belgrade for guarantees as to its future conduct, to be followed by military action if refused. Within six days of the assassination, therefore, Austria had staked out her position. It remained to see whether the German Emperor and his government, without whose backing the Austrians dare not act, would support them.

Dare not Austria might; in retrospect it is tempting to surmise that, had she struck at once in anger, trumpeting dynastic wrath and righteous belief in Serbia's guilt, Europe might have allowed her to mount positive measures without outside interference. Russia, a great Slav brother, had tender feelings towards the Serbs but feelings are different from vital interests and certainly no motive for war. The Bulgarians were Slavs also, and they had suffered defeat and humiliation in 1913 without Russia intervening to rescue them. The Serbs, moreover, were odd-man-out even in the wild Balkans, worse than that in the eyes of civilised Europe. The "Asiatic" behaviour of their army's officers in 1903, when they had not only killed their king and queen but then thrown the bodies from a window of the royal palace and hacked them limb from limb with their swords, had shocked sensibilities everywhere. Italy, which covered the same Adriatic coastline towards which "Greater Serbia" aspired, would certainly not have impeded her Triple Alliance partner if she had punished Belgrade. France, though she had



supplied Serbia with weapons, had no means of lending her further support, even had she wished to do so. Britain had no involvement in the Balkans whatsoever. Had Austria moved at once, therefore, without seeking Germany's endorsement, it is possible, perhaps probable, that the Serbs would have found themselves as isolated strategically as, initially, they were morally, and so forced to capitulate to the Austrian ultimatum. It was Austria's unwillingness to act unilaterally that transformed a local into a general European crisis and her unwillingness so to act must be explained in large part by the precautionary mood of thought which decades of contingent war planning had implanted in the mind of European governments.

The net of interlocking and opposed understandings and mutual assistance treaties—France to go to war on Russia's side and vice versa if either were attacked by Germany, Britain to lend assistance to France if the vital interests of both were judged threatened, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (the Triple Alliance) to go to war together if any one were attacked by two other states—is commonly held to have been the mechanism which brought the "Allies" (France, Russia and Britain) into conflict in 1914 with the "Central Powers" (Germany and Austria-Hungary). Legalistically that cannot be denied. It was no treaty, however, that caused Austria to go running to Berlin for guidance and support in the aftermath of the Sarajevo assassination—no treaty in any case applied—but anticipation of the military consequences that might ensue should she act alone. At their worst, those consequences would bring Russia to threaten Austria on their common border as a warning to desist from action against Serbia; Austria would then look to Germany for support; that support, if given, risked drawing France into the crisis as a counterweight against German pressure on Russia; the combination of France and Russia would supply the circumstances to activate the Triple Alliance (with or without Italy); the ingredients of a general European war would then be in place. In short, it was the calculation of presumed military response, of how it was guessed one military precaution would follow from another, that drove Austria to seek comfort in the Triple Alliance from the outset, not the Triple Alliance that set military events in train.

Those Austrians who calculated the potential consequences were not Berchtold, a suave procrastinator suddenly emboldened by the Serbian affront, so emboldened that he chose not to discriminate between Serbia itself and Serb nationalism, nor the Chief of Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, who had so long been adamant for a Serbian war that he

scorned to make the distinction. The cautious men were the old emperor, Franz Josef, in the sixty-sixth year of his reign in 1914, and Count Tisza, Prime Minister of Hungary. The Emperor opposed war for many reasons but ultimately because war brought change and he rightly identified change as the enemy of his empire's frail stability. Tisza also feared the changes war might bring because Hungary's equal partition with Austria of power within the empire, a share not justified by Hungarian numbers, required that the imperial system be preserved exactly as it was. The consequence of an unsuccessful war might be concessions to the Slavs, perhaps the "trialism" which would undo Austro-Hungarian "dualism." The consequence of a successful war, in which the empire's Slavs made a contribution to victory, might be trialism all the same. It was those two men's prudence, dispassionate in the Emperor's case, partisan in Tisza's, on which the urge for instant action against Serbia broke. On 2 July the Emperor insisted to Berchtold that he must not move before he consulted Tisza. Tisza told Berchtold the same day that the Emperor must have time to consider Hungarian objections. Berchtold, frustrated in his desire to act alone and soon, therefore decided on the fateful step of averting the first of the two other men's fears—that Austria might find itself isolated in a crisis on which hostile, in particular Russian, war plans might impinge—by seeking assurance that Germany would stand by her.

With the arrival of Berchtold's emissary, Count Hoyos, in Berlin, on 5 July, calculations of the import of war planning switched to the German side. Berchtold's memorandum was delivered to the Kaiser by the Austrian ambassador the same day. Over lunch Wilhelm II authorised him to tell Emperor Franz Josef that Austria could "rely on Germany's full support."<sup>7</sup> The offer seemed to apply as much to the proposal for an alliance with Bulgaria as to action against Serbia; the possibility of Russian intervention was discussed but discounted. So it was also in the discussions with the Kaiser's ministers and military advisers whom the ambassador saw next. General von Falkenhayn, the Minister of War, asked if preparatory measures should be taken and was told not. Bethmann Hollweg, the Chancellor, had been independently advised by his Foreign Office that Britain would not involve herself in a Balkan crisis nor would Russia if it came to the point. The following day, Monday 6 July, after repeating his own judgement to a number of military officers that Russia, and France also, would not involve themselves and that precautionary measures were consequently not necessary, the Kaiser departed on the imperial yacht, *Hohenzollern*, for his annual



cruise in the Norwegian fjords. He was to be absent for three weeks. The Chief of the Great General Staff and the Secretary of the Navy were already on leave and he left no orders for their recall.

The Kaiser had, however, insisted both to the Austrian ambassador and to his officials on one point. That was that it was for Austria to come to a firm resolution about what it wanted to do. Austrian *Schlamperei*—a mixture of prevarication and procrastination—was a constant irritant to the emphatic Germans. The young empire, the creation of an urgent nationalism and urgent in all it did, found little patience for the old empire, which thought time a solution to all problems. The first week of July 1914 therefore brought a strange reversal of attitudes. Austria was for once in a hurry. Germany went on holiday. Fundamentally, however, things remained as usual. The Kaiser's party aboard *Hohenzollern* exercised vigorously, held boat races, listened to lectures on military history. The Austrians, under pressure to make up their minds, dithered.<sup>8</sup>

The Imperial Council of Ministers did not meet until Tuesday 7 July, already ten days after the assassination and five after the murderers had made their confessions. Berchtold, who sensed justification and time slipping away equally rapidly, proposed military action. Austria had mobilised against Serbia twice already in recent years, in 1909 and in 1912, on both occasions without Russia responding, and the German guarantee now put her in a stronger position. Tisza held out. He insisted that the taking of military measures be preceded by the issue of a note of demands, none of them too humiliating for Serbia to accept. Only if they were rejected would he agree to an ultimatum leading to war. His opponents—three German-Austrians, a Pole and a Croat—argued but he, as Prime Minister of the Hungarian and co-equal half of the empire, could not be talked down. He won the concession that Berchtold should not present proposals to the Emperor until he had prepared his own objections in writing. That would require another day. Thus no decision could be taken until Thursday 9 July.

Franz Josef then agreed that any ultimatum be preceded by the transmission of a note, as Tisza wanted. That was not what Berchtold desired to hear. His position was steadily hardening, towards that of Field Marshal Conrad, who had wanted war from the outset. He sustained his pressure, so that by Sunday 12 July, Tisza was prepared to agree to the presentation of a note, to be followed if necessary by an ultimatum, instead of a note with a time limit for a response attached. The importance of the distinction was greater than the choice of words

might seem to imply: a note did not commit a sovereign power, an ultimatum did. By Tuesday 14 July, when Tisza and Berchtold met again, the Hungarian Prime Minister won his case against an ultimatum but was forced to concede the shortest possible time limit attaching to a note. It was to be only forty-eight hours after the document was delivered. The terms of the note were drafted and so was the date of the ministerial meeting at which it would be finally approved.

That date, however, was Sunday 19 July, the twenty-first day since the assassination. Worse, Berchtold told Tisza that the note would not formally be presented for another week after that. He had a justification. The French President, Raymond Poincaré, who would leave to make a state visit to Russia on 16 July, would not, it was believed, begin his return until Saturday 25 July. The delivery of an Austrian note to Serbia in the days when the Russian and French heads of state—respectively the Serbs' protector and his chief ally—would be in intimate contact was likely to throw them into diplomatic and strategic conclave. Hopes of localising the dispute and of isolating Serbia—objectively already so much diminished by delay, as Berchtold must subjectively have recognised—would be dangerously reduced thereby. That was the explanation given to Berlin for the further postponement of the *démarche*; the Germans, Berchtold expostulated, could feel absolutely "assured . . . that there was not a thought of hesitation or uncertainty [in Vienna]."

The Austrian note, conclusively agreed on Sunday 19 July, met some of Tisza's objections. He had from the beginning opposed the presentation of any demands that might increase the number of Slavs within the empire and so it contained no threat of annexation nor, despite Conrad's desires, of dismemberment. Serbia, if it capitulated to the full list of Austrian demands, was to be left intact. On the other hand, the note also fulfilled Berchtold's wish that Serbia be asked for guarantees as to its future conduct. To that end, the note required first of all that the Serbian government newspaper publish on its front page a condemnation of all propaganda for the separation of any portion of imperial territory, a condemnation to be repeated by the Serbian King in an order of the day to the Serbian army. It then listed ten numbered demands, of which five were elaborations of the prohibition of propaganda or subversion and the last a demand for information that the others were being enacted. None of these points entailed any infringement of Serbian sovereignty. Points 5, 6, 7 and 8 did, since, besides stipulating the arrest, interrogation and punishment of Serbian officials



implicated in the assassination, they also demanded that Austro-Hungarian officials should take part in the necessary processes on Serbian soil. Serbia, in short, was not to be trusted to police the crime itself; Austria should supervise. The time limit for an answer attached to the note was forty-eight hours from delivery. That would take place on the day Berchtold had now learnt the French President would leave Russia, Thursday 23 July. The document would reach Belgrade at six o'clock (local time) in the afternoon of that day and expire on Saturday 25 July.

It was then the twenty-fifth day since the assassination and the Serbian government had been warned that the note was on its way. Nicholas Pasic, the Serbian Prime Minister, had nevertheless decided to leave the capital for the country and, even after word reached him that the Austrian ambassador had brought the document to the foreign ministry, proceeded with his journey. Only during the night did he decide to return and it was not until ten o'clock in the morning of Friday 24 July that he met his ministers to consider what answer should be made. The Russian, German and British governments had already received their copies of the text, and so had the French though, with the President and Foreign Minister still at sea, in Paris it was in the hands of a deputy. In Belgrade, however, the British minister was ill, the Russian minister had just died and not been replaced, while a replacement for the French minister, who had had a nervous breakdown, had only just arrived. The Serbian ministry were thus deprived of experienced diplomatic advice at a moment when the need was critical. Belgrade was a small and remote city, and the government, though experienced in the rough-and-ready diplomacy of Balkan warfare, was ill-equipped to deal with a crisis likely to involve all the great powers. The Serbian ministers, moreover, had taken fright as they pored over the Austrian note in the absence of Pasic. On his return, though there was some bold, initial talk of war, the mood quickly moved towards acquiescence. Messages were received from Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister, and from Paris, both counselling acceptance of as much of the Austrian note as possible. By the following morning, Saturday 25 July, both the British and French delegations in Belgrade reported home that Belgrade would agree to the Austrian demands, excepting the condition that imperial officials be admitted on to Serbian territory to supervise the investigations.

Even on that sticking point, however, the Serbians had as yet not made up their minds. As late as the twenty-seventh day after the assas-

sination, it therefore seemed possible that Austria would arrive at the result it might very well have achieved had it exercised its right as a sovereign power to move against Serbia from the outset. The vital interest of no other power was threatened, except by consideration of prestige, even if Serbia permitted Austrian officials to participate in judicial proceedings conducted on its territory. That would be a humiliation to the Serbs, and a violation of the idea of sovereignty by which the states of Europe conducted relations between themselves. Yet, given Serbia's semi-rogue status in the international community, it was unlikely to constitute an issue of principle for others, unless others made that choice. Even at noon on Saturday 25 July, therefore, five hours before the time limit attached to the Austrian note would expire, the crime of Sarajevo remained a matter between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, diplomatically no more than that.

Such was strictly true in the arena of diplomatic protocol. In the real world, however, the elapse of three weeks and six days since the murders had given time for fears to fester, premonitions to take form, positions to be taken in outline. Grey, on the Friday afternoon when the Serbian ministers were preparing to capitulate, had already asked the German and Austrian ambassadors in London, Prince Lichnowsky and Count Mensdorff, to consider proposing an extension of the time limit, so anticipating the possibility that the Serbs might after all jib. He also raised the question of mediation. Accepting, as the Austrians had made clear, that they would refuse any interference in their dealings with Serbia, he proposed nevertheless the idea that Germany, with France and Italy, might offer to mediate between Austria and Russia, if Russia were to mobilise, which the diplomatic community recognised to be a potential development. A Russian mobilisation would harden attitudes everywhere, even though it was not thought to entail that of other armies, and certainly not the consequence of war. Nevertheless, Mensdorff returned to the Foreign Office in the evening to reassure the officials—Grey had left for a weekend's fishing—that the note was not an ultimatum and that Austria would not necessarily declare war if a satisfactory answer had not been received when the time limit lapsed.

The night and most of Saturday remained for it to be seen what the Serbs would do. On the morning of 25 July they were still reconciled to capitulation, though reluctantly and with occasional bursts of belligerence. Then, during the afternoon, word was received from their ambassador at the Tsar's country palace that the mood there was fiercely pro-Serbian. The Tsar, though not yet ready to proclaim



mobilisation, had announced the preliminary "Period Preparatory to War" at eleven o'clock. The news reversed everything the Serbian ministers had decided. In the morning they had agreed to accept all ten Austrian demands, with the slightest reservations. Now they were emboldened to attach conditions to six and to reject absolutely the most important, that Austrian officials be allowed to take part in the investigation of the assassinations on Serbian territory. In the hurried hours that followed, the reply to the note was drafted and redrafted, lines crossed out, phrases corrected in ink. As would happen in the Japanese embassy in Washington on the night before Pearl Harbor, the typist gave way to nerves. The finished document was an undiplomatic palimpsest of revisions and afterthoughts. With a quarter of an hour in hand, however, it was finished, sealed in an envelope and taken by the Prime Minister himself, Nicholas Pasic, for delivery to the Austrian ambassador. Within an hour of its receipt, the personnel of the legation had boarded the train for the Austrian frontier and left Belgrade.

There followed a curious two-day intermission, Sunday and Monday, 26–27 July. Serbia mobilised its little army, Russia recalled the youngest reservists to the units in its western military districts, there were scenes of popular enthusiasm in Vienna over the government's rejection of the Serbian reply and similar scenes in German cities, including Berlin. On Sunday, however, the Kaiser was still at sea, while Poincaré and Viviani, the French Foreign Minister, aboard *La France*, did not receive a signal urging their immediate return until that night. Meanwhile there was much talk, reflective and anticipatory, rather than decisive or belligerent. Bethmann Hollweg instructed the German ambassadors in London and Paris to warn that the military measures Russia was taking could be judged threatening. The German ambassador in St. Petersburg was told to say that the measures, unless discontinued, would force Germany to mobilise which "would mean war." Bethmann Hollweg learnt from him in reply that the British and French were working to restrain Russia while Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, was moderating his position. The Kaiser and the Austrian government were informed. The British Foreign Office, working from information of its own, perceived a hope that the Russians were ready to acquiesce in a mediation by the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy. There was, briefly, the circulation of a feeling that the crisis, like those of 1909 and 1913, might be talked out.

The weakness of that hope was the ignorance and misunderstanding among politicians and diplomats of how the mechanism of abstract

war plans, once instigated, would operate. Only Sir George Buchanan, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, and Jules Cambon, the French ambassador in Berlin, fully comprehended the trigger effect exerted by one mobilisation proclamation on another and the inexorability of deployment once begun.<sup>9</sup> Buchanan had already warned the Russians, as he reported to the Foreign Office, that a Russian mobilisation would push the Germans not into a responsive mobilisation but to a declaration of war. Cambon had come to the same conclusion. Mere ambassadors as they were, however, and far from home in an age of formal and indirect communication, their voices lacked weight and, worse, failed to convey urgency. It was those at the point of decision—in the entourages of the Tsar and Kaiser, in Paris, in Vienna, in London—who were heard. They, moreover, though few in number—a handful of ministers, officials and soldiers in each capital—did not equally share the information available, nor understand what they did share in the same way, nor agree within each capital about what was understood. Information arrived fitfully, sometimes much, sometimes little, but was always incomplete. There was no way of correlating and displaying it, as there is in modern crisis management centres. Even had there been, it is not certain that the crisis of 1914 would have been managed any better than it was. Modern communication systems may overload those who seek to be informed through them, so consuming time necessary for thought; underload, in 1914, consumed time as men puzzled to fill in the gaps between the facts they had. Time, in all crises, is usually the ingredient missing to make a solution. It is best supplied by an agreement on a pause.

Today there are mechanisms to hand designed to negotiate pause: regional security councils, the United Nations. In 1914 there were none. Any pause would have to be arranged by men of goodwill. Grey, British Foreign Secretary, was such a man. He had raised the proposal for a four-power conference on Sunday 26 July and spent Monday trying to convene one. Had it been the only proposal in circulation he might have succeeded, but others were set in motion and that deflected attention. The Russians proposed, on Monday, direct talks with the Austrians for a moderation of their demands on the Serbs; they also suggested that the great power ambassadors in Belgrade exert pressure in the opposite direction to weaken Serb resistance. To distraction was added deliberate confusion. The senior official in the German Foreign Office, Gottlieb von Jagow, verbally assured the British and French ambassadors that Germany was anxious to preserve the peace but preferred



direct talks between Russia and Austria to a wider mediation; meanwhile, Germany did nothing to encourage Austria to speak to Russia. Her aim was to delay a Russian mobilisation while sustaining a process of diplomacy that would keep Britain and France—the latter agreed on Monday afternoon to join Grey's proposed four-power conference—inert. Finally, there was sabotage. When Berchtold, in Vienna, learnt of Grey's conference proposal that same Monday he informed the German ambassador that he intended "to send official declaration of war tomorrow, at the latest the day after, in order to cut away the ground from any attempt at mediation."<sup>10</sup>

In the event, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on Tuesday 28 July. It was Berchtold rather than Conrad who was now in a hurry. There had already been an exchange of fire between Serbian and Austrian troops—it was one-sided, an Austrian volley at Serbs who had strayed too near the Austrian border—but Berchtold chose to regard it as an act of war. War was now what he wanted on the terms he might have had during the days immediately following the murders, a straightforward offensive against Serbia uncomplicated by a wider conflict. The month's delay had threatened that simplicity, but he retained hopes that diplomacy would delay the taking of irretrievable decisions by others while he settled the Serbian score.

His urge to act was heightened by the discovery that his own country's war plans impeded what prospect remained of a speedy resolution.<sup>11</sup> Conrad's tripartite division of forces—the "minimal" concentration on the Balkan frontier, the major concentration against Russia in Poland, the "swing" grouping to reinforce one or the other—precluded, the Field Marshal warned him, an immediate offensive against Serbia unless it could be guaranteed that Russia would not mobilise. Small though Serbia's army was, only sixteen weak divisions, it outnumbered Austria's "minimal" group; operational prudence therefore required the commitment of the "swing" grouping if a quick Serbian war were to be brought off. If the "swing" grouping went south, however, the northern frontier with Poland would be left dangerously exposed. All therefore depended on what Russia would do next.

Russia had already done much. On the previous Saturday, when news of her emphatic support for Serbia had encouraged the Belgrade government to change its mind and reject the Austrian note, she had instigated the military measures known as the "Period Preparatory to War." Entailing in this case only the bringing to operational readiness

of the peacetime army in European Russia, the procedure was precautionary and intended not to provoke an escalation to mobilisation by another power. The equivalent in Germany was the "State of Danger of War" (*Kriegsgefahrzustand*) and in France *la couverture*, covering operations behind the frontier. The Russian measure could be justified by the fact that Serbia had mobilised and Austria mobilised against her only, a partial mobilisation, on the same day. France was informed of the measure—the Franco-Russian Convention required that Russia consult her ally before mobilisation—and the German military representative at the Russian court informed Berlin that he had "the impression that all preparations are being made for a mobilisation against Austria."<sup>12</sup> In practice, much more had been done. Under cover of the "Period Preparatory to War," orders had been sent for the mobilisation of the military districts of Kiev, Odessa, Moscow and Kazan—half of European Russia—and were extended on Monday 27 July to the Caucasus, Turkestan, Omsk and Irkutsk.

By the beginning of what was to prove the last week of peace, therefore, half the Russian army—though the half not stationed in the military districts adjoining Germany, those in Poland, White Russia and the Baltic provinces—was coming to a war footing. France had been informed and approved; indeed, Messimy, the Minister of War, and Joffre, the Chief of Staff, were pressing the Russians to achieve the highest possible state of readiness.<sup>13</sup> The Russian generals at least needed little urging. Their responsibility as they saw it—all generals in all countries in July 1914 saw their responsibility in such terms—was to prepare for the worst if the worst came. The worst for them would be that, in seeking to deter Austria from making war in Serbia, their preparations provoked Germany into full-scale mobilisation. That would come about if their partial mobilisation, already in progress, prompted a full Austrian mobilisation which, they had good reason to believe, required a full German mobilisation also. On Tuesday 28 July, therefore, the Russian Chief of Staff, Janushkevich, with his quartermaster-general, chief of mobilisation and chief of transportation, agreed that the "Period Preparatory to War" must now be superseded by formal mobilisation announcements.<sup>14</sup> Privately they accepted that general war could probably not be avoided: the sequence Russian partial mobilisation against Austria = Austrian general mobilisation = German general mobilisation = war stood stark before them. They decided, however, that publicly they would announce only partial mobilisation, while preparing with the order for it



another for general mobilisation, both to be set simultaneously before the Tsar for signature.

Sazonov, who had received word of Austria's declaration of war on Serbia that Tuesday morning and conferred with Paléologue, the French ambassador, in the afternoon—Albertini, the great historian of the origins of the war, concluded that Paléologue "must now have approved of [the decision for partial mobilisation] and promised full French solidarity"—attempted to palliate the fears the proclamation would certainly arouse by telegraphing Vienna, Paris, London and Rome (though not Berlin) with the news and requesting that the German government be informed, with "stress on the absence of any intention on the part of Russia to attack Germany."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, that evening Janushkevich informed all military districts that "30 July will be proclaimed the first day of our general mobilisation" and on the following morning, having seen Sazonov, called on the Tsar and secured his signature to the orders for full as well as partial mobilisation.<sup>16</sup> In the afternoon the chief of the mobilisation section got the relevant ministers' signatures—the minister of the interior, a deeply devout Orthodox believer, signed only after making the sign of the cross—and in the evening the quartermaster-general had the orders typed up at the St. Petersburg central telegraph office and prepared for despatch.

This decision to order general mobilisation "was perhaps the most important . . . taken in the history of Imperial Russia and it effectively shattered any prospect of averting a great European war."<sup>17</sup> It was also unnecessary. Sazonov's support for the soldiers seems to have been supplied by his learning of a bombardment of Belgrade by Austrian gunboats on the Danube on the night of 29 July. The attack was a pinprick; Kalimegdan, the Turkish fortress crowning the Belgrade heights at the junction of the Danube and the Sava, is impervious to anything but the heaviest artillery and remains unscarred to this day. On the wider front, Russia's security was not threatened by the Austrian mobilisation. Indeed, Austria's war with Serbia precluded its fighting a larger war elsewhere. Small as Serbia's army was, its size, to say nothing of its proven fighting ability, required, even by Vienna's calculation, the commitment against it of over half the Austrian force available. The "minimal" and "swing" groupings totalled twenty-eight of Austria's divisions, and the twenty remaining were too few to launch an offensive into Russian Poland. The Serbian interior, moreover, was difficult campaigning country, mountainous, largely roadless and heavily forested, and therefore likely to impose serious delay on an invader seek-

ing speedy decision: such was to prove exactly the case in 1915 when Germany, Austria and Bulgaria fell on the Serbs from several directions but took two months to conclude the campaign.<sup>18</sup>

Russia might, therefore, without risk to its security, threat to the general peace or abandonment of the Serbs, have confined itself to partial mobilisation deep within its own frontiers on 29 July. General mobilisation, including that of the military districts bordering Germany, would mean general war. That awful prospect was now taking shape in all the European capitals. Those who most feared the military preparations of others—Janushkevich, Moltke, Conrad, Joffre—were looking to their own lest they be taken at a disadvantage. Those who more feared war itself were scrabbling for stopgaps. Bethmann Hollweg, the German Chancellor, was one of them; he had already instructed the German ambassador in St. Petersburg to warn Sazonov that "Russian mobilisation measures would compel us to mobilise and that then European war could scarcely be prevented."<sup>19</sup> The Kaiser was another. On the afternoon of 29 July, he telegraphed his cousin the Tsar, in English, urging him "to smooth over difficulties that may still arise." In reply the Tsar pathetically suggested, "It would be right to give over the Austro-Servian problem to the Hague conference," that weakling brainchild of his not scheduled to meet again until 1915.<sup>20</sup> Later that evening a second telegram from the Kaiser reached the Tsar. "It would be quite possible," he suggested, "for Russia to remain a spectator of the Austro-Servian conflict without involving Europe in the most horrible war she has ever witnessed" and ended by again representing himself as a mediator. Immediately on receipt of this telegram, the Tsar telephoned the War Minister and ordered the cancellation of general mobilisation; the order was to be for partial mobilisation only after all. He intervened only just in time, for at 9:30 in the evening of 29 July the Russian quartermaster-general was actually standing over the typists at the Central Telegraph Office in St. Petersburg as they tapped out the orders on to telegraph forms.<sup>21</sup>

The cancellation should have brought the pause which the search for peace required. At the opening of the day following, Thursday 30 July, the British—though refusing to reveal whether they would or would not intervene in a general European war—were still seeking to arrange a mediation, France had not taken any substantial precautionary measures, the Austrian troops mobilised were marching against Serbia only and Germany had mobilised no troops at all. The leaders of the German army were nevertheless in a state of acute anxiety. To



General von Falkenhayn, the Minister of War, Russia's partial mobilisation had consequences as threatening as full; it gave the Russians a start that would upset the feather-balance timing of the Schlieffen Plan. He wanted to mobilise at once, Bethmann Hollweg did not. He was still hoping that Berchtold would deal directly with the Russians and succeed in persuading them to accept the offensive against Serbia as a local war. Moltke, the Chief of the Great General Staff, was less bellicose but wanted at least the proclamation of the *Kriegsgefahrzustand*, which would match Russian preparations. In order to get his way, he wished himself on a meeting Bethmann held at one o'clock with Falkenhayn and Admiral Tirpitz, the naval minister. He failed to get what he wanted; but what he learnt shortly afterwards so alarmed him that he decided he must get general mobilisation at once and by any means. The Austrian liaison officer to the Great General Staff outlined to him his army's current dispositions which, Moltke instantly grasped, would leave Germany's eastern frontier desperately exposed if war came. "He needed forty Austro-Hungarian divisions in (Austrian Poland) ready to attack; what he was getting were twenty-five divisions standing on the defensive."<sup>22</sup> He at once expressed his extreme alarm to the Austrian military attaché; later that evening he telegraphed Conrad in Vienna, as one Chief of Staff to another, "Stand firm against Russian mobilisation. Austria-Hungary must be preserved, mobilise at once against Russia. Germany will mobilise."

Even in militaristic Germany, Moltke thereby vastly exceeded his powers. What made his meddling even more reprehensible was that the Chancellor and the Kaiser were still seeking to persuade Austria to localise the war against Serbia and limit its objectives: "Halt in Belgrade" was the phrase in circulation. Berchtold, when he saw the telegram next morning, Friday 31 July, expressed an understandable surprise. "How odd! Who runs the government: Moltke or Bethmann?" Nevertheless, he took his cue. Telling Conrad, "I had the impression that Germany was beating a retreat; but now I have the most reassuring pronouncement from responsible military quarters," he arranged for the general mobilisation order to be laid before Emperor Franz Josef later that morning.<sup>23</sup> It was returned signed shortly after noon and published immediately.

That announcement in itself would have ensured a reconsideration of the Tsar's decision to cancel general mobilisation in the evening of 29 July. In fact, it had already been reconsidered. Throughout Thursday 30 July, Sazonov, Sukhomlinov and Janushkevich—Foreign Minis-

ter, War Minister, Chief of Staff—had badgered the Tsar with their fears. He was at his summer residence on the Baltic, swimming, playing tennis, worrying about a bleeding attack suffered by his haemophilic son, clinging to hopes of peace and trusting in the best intentions of his cousin the Kaiser. A good but infuriatingly evasive man, he deflected their arguments during the morning; in the afternoon, Sazonov set out by train to Peterhof to confront him. Sazonov was in a state of high agitation. It was no help that Paléologue, the French ambassador, whom he had seen earlier, did nothing to deter him from heightening the crisis. Paléologue, a strident patriot, appears to have given way already to belief in the inevitability of war and to have wanted only the certainty of Russian involvement when it came.<sup>24</sup> Sazonov had never wanted war but his was an excitable and impressionable nature and he was keyed up by the warnings of the generals over losing advantage; moreover, he possessed in an acute form the Russian neurosis over control of the Balkans, with which went fears of a hostile power dominating the Bosphorus, Russia's Black Sea exit to the Mediterranean and wider world. Between three and four o'clock on the afternoon of Thursday 30 July he rehearsed his anxieties to the Tsar who listened, pale and tense, occasionally showing an uncharacteristic irritation. General Tatistchev, his personal representative to the Kaiser, who was present, at one point observed, "Yes, it is hard to decide." The Tsar replied in a rough, displeased tone, "I will decide."<sup>25</sup> Shortly he did. Sazonov left the audience chamber and telephoned Janushkevich with the order to proclaim general mobilisation. "Now you can smash your telephone," he concluded. Janushkevich had earlier threatened that if he got the order for general mobilisation a second time he would smash his telephone and make himself unobtainable until mobilisation was too far advanced for another cancellation to take effect.

The hour had come. That evening the posters announcing mobilisation went up in the streets of St. Petersburg and of all cities in Russia. The reservists would begin reporting to their depots next day, Friday 31 July. For reasons never properly elucidated, what was necessary knowledge for every Russian failed officially to reach London and Paris until late that evening; the British ambassador was dilatory in telegraphing, Paléologue's telegram was inexplicably delayed. The Germans were not so ill-informed. They knew on Friday morning. At 10:20 a telegram arrived for Pourtalès, their ambassador in St. Petersburg, "First day of mobilisation, 31 July."<sup>26</sup> It was what Moltke wanted to hear. He would now get the permission he needed to take the military precautions he



believed essential. It was not what Bethmann Hollweg wanted to hear. He had retained the hopes up to the moment of the telegram's arrival that Austria could be brought directly to negotiate with Russia and that Russia could be brought to accept the war against Serbia as local and limited. Now he had to accept what seemed inevitable. News of Austria's general mobilisation arrived half an hour after noon. Germany proclaimed the "State of Danger of War" half an hour after that.

The "State of Danger of War" was an internal measure not entailing mobilisation. Nevertheless, with Austria and Russia mobilising, the Germans concluded that they must mobilise also unless Russian general mobilisation was reversed. An ultimatum to that effect was sent soon after three o'clock on the afternoon of 31 July to St. Petersburg and another to Paris. The relevant sentence in each read: "[German] mobilisation will follow unless Russia suspends all war measures against ourselves and Austria-Hungary." That to Russia demanded, within twelve hours, "a definite assurance to that effect," that to France included the warning "Mobilisation inevitably means war" and required a declaration of neutrality "in a Russo-German war . . . within eighteen (18) hours."<sup>27</sup>

The afternoon of 31 July thus brought to a crux the crisis which had begun thirty-four days earlier with the murders at Sarajevo. Its real duration had been much shorter than that. From the murders on 28 June to the conclusion of the Austrian judicial investigation and the confessions of the conspirators on 2 July was five days. It was in the period immediately following that the Austrians might have decided for unilateral action, and taken it without strong likelihood of provoking an intervention by the Serbs' protectors, the Russians. Instead, Austria had sought a German assurance of support, given on 5 July; elapsed time from the murders, eight days. There had then followed an intermission of nineteen days, while the Austrians waited for the French President to conclude his state visit on 23 July. The real inception of the crisis may thus be dated to the delivery of the Austrian "note with a time limit" (of forty-eight hours) on 24 July. It was on its expiry on Saturday 25 July, twenty-eight days from the murders, that the diplomatic confrontation was abruptly transformed into a war crisis. It was not a crisis which the participants had expected. Austria had simply wanted to punish Serbia (though it had lacked the courage to act alone). Germany had wanted a diplomatic success that would leave its Austrian ally stronger in European eyes; it had not wanted war. The Russians had certainly not wanted war but had equally not calculated that sup-

port for Serbia would edge the danger of war forward. By 30 July, thirty-three days from the murders, the Austrians were at war with Serbia, yet were doing nothing about it, had declared general mobilisation, but were not concentrating against Russia. Russia had declared partial mobilisation but was concentrating against nobody. The German Kaiser and Chancellor still believed that Austria and Russia could be brought to negotiate their mobilisations away, even if the Chief of the Great General Staff by then wanted a mobilisation of his own. France had not mobilised but was in growing fear that Germany would mobilise against her. Britain, which had awoken to the real danger of the crisis only on Saturday 25 July, still hoped on Thursday 30 July that the Russians would tolerate an Austrian punishment of Serbia but were determined not to leave France in the lurch.

It was the events of 31 July, therefore, the dissemination of the news of Russian general mobilisation, and the German ultimata to Russia and France, which made the issue one of peace or war. The day following, 1 August, the thirty-fifth since the murders, would bring Germany's mobilisation against Russia—thus making, in the words of the German ultimatum to France, "war inevitable"—unless Germany withdrew its ultimatum to Russia, which was incompatible with its status as a great power, or Russia accepted it, which was incompatible with such status also. German mobilisation would, under the terms of the Franco-Russian Convention of 1892, require both to mobilise and, if either were attacked by Germany, to go jointly to war against her. As the hours drew out on 31 July—the twelve demanded for a response from Russia, the eighteen demanded from France—only a hair's breadth kept the potential combatants apart. There was still a hope. The Russo-French Convention of 1892, strictly interpreted, required that Germany actually attack one country or the other before the two went to war against her. German mobilisation entailed only their mobilisation. Even a German declaration of war, unless followed by German military action, would not bring the treaty into force. Nevertheless, the Germans had warned France that their mobilisation meant war with Russia and the outbreak of war between great powers not followed by fighting was a state of affairs without credibility in early twentieth-century Europe. The twelve hours given by Germany to Russia for acceptance of the ultimatum was, by any rational calculation, the last twelve hours of available peace. It was, in France, an inexact twelve hours. Wilhelm Freiherr Schoen, the German ambassador to Paris, who came to communicate news of the ultimatum to Russia at



the French foreign ministry at six p.m. on Friday 31 July, was unclear when the period began and ended—it was midnight to noon next day—but the exact delimitation was by then beside the point. War hovered half a day away.<sup>28</sup>

That, by 31 July, was certainly the view of the French army. News, true or exaggerated, of German military preparations, had thrown even Joffre, “a byword for imperturbability,” into a state of anxiety. The loss of advantage was a fear that now afflicted him as acutely as it had Janushkevich on 29 July and Moltke on 30 July. He foresaw the secret approach of German troops to their deployment positions while his own soldiers were still in barracks, German reservists kitting out at their depots while his were still at home. On the afternoon of Friday 31 July, he handed to Messimy, the Minister of War, a short note which epitomises, better than any other document of the crisis of July 1914, the state of mind which possessed the military professionals of the age.

It is absolutely necessary for the government to understand that, starting with this evening, any delay of twenty-four hours in calling up our reservists and issuing orders prescribing covering operations, will have as its result the withdrawal of our concentration points by from fifteen to twenty-five kilometres for each day of delay; in other words, the abandonment of just that much of our territory. The Commander-in-Chief must decline to accept this responsibility.<sup>29</sup>

That evening he formally requested the President to order general mobilisation at once. His representation was debated by the cabinet next morning and the first day of mobilisation, to be 2 August, proclaimed at four o'clock that afternoon.

The French had hoped to delay the proclamation until after the announcement of German mobilisation, in order to avoid any appearance of provocation. In practice, though the French order preceded the German, no such appearance was given, for the interval was only one of an hour. Moreover, two hours after that, the German ambassador in St. Petersburg delivered to Sazonov the declaration of war on Russia. The hour was soon after seven in the evening, local time, Saturday 1 August. The exchange took place in a mood of high emotion. There were mutual recriminations, accusations against others, regrets, embraces, tears. The ambassador left Sazonov's room “with tottering steps.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet the irrevocable did not yet seem done. The Tsar still hoped, on

the strength of a telegram from the Kaiser begging him not to violate the German frontier, that war could be averted. The Kaiser, meanwhile, had fixed on the belief that the British would remain neutral if France were not attacked and was ordering Moltke to cancel the Schlieffen Plan and direct the army eastward. Moltke was aghast, explained that the paperwork would take a year, but was ordered to cancel the invasion of Luxembourg, which was the Schlieffen Plan's necessary preliminary.<sup>31</sup> In London this Sunday 1 August, the French ambassador, Paul Cambon, was thrown into despair by the British refusal to declare their position. Britain had, throughout the crisis, pursued the idea that, as so often before, direct talks between the involved parties would dissolve the difficulties. As a power apart, bound by treaties with none, it had concealed its intentions from all, including the French. Now the French demanded that the understanding between them and the British be given force. Would Britain declare outright its support for France and, if so, on what issue and when? The British themselves did not know. Throughout Saturday and Sunday 2 August, the cabinet debated its course of action. The treaty of 1839, guaranteeing Belgian neutrality, would force it to act, but that neutrality was still intact. It could give no firm answer to France, any more than it could to Germany, which had requested a clarification on 29 July. Precautionary measures had been taken; the fleet had been sent to war stations, France was even secretly assured that the Royal Navy would protect its Channel coast; but further than that the cabinet would not go. Then, on 2 August, Germany delivered the last of its ultimatums, this time to Belgium, demanding the use of its territory in operations against France and threatening to treat the country as an enemy if she resisted. The ultimatum was to expire in twenty-four hours, on Monday 3 August. It was the day Germany also decided, claiming violation of its own territory by French aircraft, to present France with a declaration of war. The expiry of the ultimatum to Belgium, which the British cabinet had finally resolved would constitute a cause for war, proved the irrevocable event. On Tuesday 4 August, Britain sent an ultimatum of its own, demanding the termination of German military operations against Belgium, which had already begun, to expire at midnight. No offer of termination in reply was received. At midnight, therefore, Britain, together with France and Russia, was at war with Germany.

The First World War had still not quite begun. The Austrians succeeded in delaying their declaration of war on Russia until 5 August



and were still not at war with Britain and France a week later. Those two countries were driven to make up the Austrians' mind for them by announcing hostilities on 12 August. The Italians, Triple Alliance partners to Austria-Hungary and Germany, had stood on the strict terms of the treaty and declared their neutrality. The Serbs, cause of the crisis in the first place, had been forgotten. War was not to come to their little kingdom for another fourteen months.

## FOUR



## The Battle of the Frontiers and the Marne

STATESMEN WERE FILLED with foreboding by the coming of war but its declaration was greeted with enormous popular enthusiasm in the capitals of all combatant countries. Crowds thronged the streets, shouting, cheering and singing patriotic songs. In St. Petersburg the French ambassador, Maurice Paléologue, found his way into the Winter Palace Square, "where an enormous crowd had congregated with flags, banners, icons and portraits of the Tsar. The Emperor appeared on the balcony. The entire crowd at once knelt and sang the Russian national anthem. To those thousands of men on their knees at that moment the Tsar was really the autocrat appointed of God, the military, political and religious leader of his people, the absolute master of their bodies and souls."<sup>1</sup> The day was 2 August. On 1 August a similar crowd had gathered in the Odeonsplatz in Munich, capital of the German kingdom of Bavaria, to hear the proclamation of mobilisation. In it was Adolf Hitler who was "not ashamed to acknowledge that I was carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment and . . . sank down upon my knees and thanked Heaven out of the fullness of my heart for the favour of having been permitted to live in such times."<sup>2</sup> In Berlin the Kaiser appeared on his palace balcony, dressed in field-grey uniform, to address a tumultuous crowd: "A fateful hour has fallen upon Germany. Envious people on all sides are compelling us to resort to a just defence. The sword is being forced into our hands . . . And now I command you all to go to church, kneel before God and pray to him to help our gallant army." In the Berlin cathedral, the Kaiser's pastor led a huge congregation in the recitation of Psalm 130 and at the Oranienstrasse synagogue the rabbi conducted prayers for victory.<sup>3</sup>