Pre-war Crises

**International Crises (1905-1913)**

Early in the twentieth century, the European powers had formed themselves into two rival groups: the TRIPLE ENTENTE versus the TRIPLE ALLIANCE. The policies of these groups began to clash in many parts of the world. Altogether there were four important clashes from 1905 to 1913: two arising out of the Moroccan question, and two concerning disputes in the Balkans. Whenever a clash arose, the two groups seemed to be on the point of war.

1. First Moroccan Crisis 1905-06
2. Bosnian Crisis 1908-09
3. Second Moroccan Crisis 1911
4. Balkan Wars 1912-13

**1. First Moroccan Crisis 1905-06**

**Franco-German rivalry**

Morocco on the northern coast of Africa was rich in mineral and agricultural wealth. Both Germany and France coveted the place. By her entente with Britain in 1904, France was given a free hand in Morocco. Kaiser William II, angry at France's influence and at Germany's exclusion, decided to intervene. In March 1905, the Kaiser landed at Tangier where he made a speech greeting the Sultan of Morocco as an independent sovereign and promising him German protection if France attempted to colonize his state. The German government followed this up by demanding an international conference to clarify the status of Morocco.

Germany's aim of calling a conference was to humiliate France and to split the Entente because from the point of view of international law, Morocco was an independent state and the French claim to Morocco was illegal. France was prepared to fight but at last she agreed to settle her conflict with Germany at a conference.

**The Algeciras Conference**

At the conference at Algeciras in 1906, Germany was supported by Austria while France was supported by Britain, Russia and the United States. In name Morocco was preserved as an independent state whose trade was to be open to all nations; but in fact France was given two special privileges: (i) she, in conjunction with Spain, was given control over the Moroccan police and (ii) she was to control the customs and arms supply of Morocco. Thus the Entente powers scored a diplomatic victory over the Dual Alliance of Germany and Austria.

**Consequence**

The Algeciras Conference could only offer a temporary solution to the Franco-German conflict. Germany was dissatisfied with the resolutions of the Conference because they would benefit France more. France also bore ill feeling towards Germany. She remembered that Germany had tried to browbeat France to give up Morocco by a threat of war. To prepare for the eventuality of a Franco-German war, France began to hold secret military conversations with Britain, which
finally led to the sending of British army to fight alongside the French army during the First World War.

>> Back to Top

2. Bosnian Crisis 1908-09

Each succeeding international crisis from 1905 to 1913 threatened the security of all the powers and thus increased the hostility between the rival camps. If a war broke out in Europe, it would naturally become an international war involving all the powers.

Background

National struggles

The Balkan area was a trouble spot in Europe. It was ruled by the despotic Turks. By the late nineteenth century, many of the subject races of the Turks had gained independence and formed their national states--Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and Bulgaria; but these national states were small and many of their fellow nationals still lived in the Turkish Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus the Balkan states were prepared to carry on a series of struggles against Turkey and Austria-Hungary in order to win back those territories that were still lived by their fellow nationals. For example, Serbia wanted Austria to give up Bosnia which had many Serbs.

Intervention of the Great Powers

The national struggles of the Balkan peoples were complicated by the rivalry between the powers in the area. Of the five great powers, Russia, Austria and Germany were particularly interested in the area. Russia's interest in the area was based on economic and cultural reasons. Economically speaking, Russia wanted to find a warm water port in the south because half of Russian total exports (including nearly all her exports of grains) passed through this area. Many historians have also pointed out that Russia might need a warm water port for the construction of naval base.

Russian support and Austrian suppression

Culturally speaking, Russia always regarded herself as a member of the Slav race. As Russia was the powerful Slavic state, she took it as her duty to support her Slav brothers (e.g. Serbia) in their national struggles against Turkey and Austria. Pan Slavism (the union of all Slavs) was always espoused as the policy of the Russian government in the Balkans. Austria's interest in the Balkans was based on political reason. Austria wanted to suppress the nationalist movements in the Balkans, particularly that in Serbia. By the early twentieth century, Austria wanted to extend her rule over Serbia. This brought her into conflicts with both Serbia and Russia.

German interest

Germany's interest in the area was based on both economic and cultural reasons. Economically speaking, the control of the Balkans would provide industrial Germany with abundant supply of cheap raw materials, a populous market and a large field for profitable investment. From 1888 onwards, Germany began her economic penetration in the area by building the Baghdad railway, which was ultimately to connect Berlin with the Persian Gulf. Culturally speaking, the German government believed that the Germans were spiritually and culturally a superior race and so had a 'historic mission' to dominate both the Balkans, the Middle East, central Europe and Asia. The inferior races should be forced to accept the German culture.

Because of the complicated nationalistic movements and the conflicting interests of the powers in the Balkans, the area was prolific of crises from 1908 to 1914.

Events leading to the Crisis

Count von Aehrenthal, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, always wanted to extend Austrian political control over the Serbs in the Balkans. In 1908, three events caused him to take action at once. First, a new king had ascended the throne in Serbia. The new king, Peter, was strongly anti-Austrian and he wanted to unite with his fellow nationals in Bosnia, which had been under Austrian administration since the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Second, in 1908 a revolution, known as the 'Young Turk Revolution', broke out in the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks were liberal reformers and young officers. They demanded the Sultan to grant a parliament and a modern
constitution and to liberalize his despotic rule. In July 1908, they rose in rebellion and threatened to march to Constantinople. The Sultan Abdul Hamid II gave way at once and agreed to restore a constitution. Taking advantage of the chaos at Constantinople, Ferdinand of Bulgaria threw off his last shreds of allegiance to the Sultan and proclaimed himself King of Bulgaria. Crete proclaimed herself united with Greece. Austria also wanted to take advantage of this chaotic situation. Third, Russia’s defeats in the Far East had turned her attention back to the Balkans again. In September 1908, the Russian Foreign Minister, Alexander Izvolski made a political bargain with Count von Aehrenthal: Russia agreed not to oppose Austrian annexation of Bosnia Herzegovina if Austria agreed to raise no objections against the opening of the Dardanelles to Russian warships.

**Austrain annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina**

While Izvolski was trying to gain approval from the other powers about the opening of the straits, Austria suddenly annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina on October 6. Thus Austria had strengthened her position in the Balkans without giving the Russians any compensation. Russia was indignant. The country which was as indignant as Russia over the Austrian action was Serbia. The inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina were primarily South Slavs; Serbia had long cherished the dream of creating a Greater Serbia which should include Serbia proper and all the neighbouring kindred people. The Austrian annexation dashed this dream to the ground. Serbia was ready for war and asked for support from Russia. War seemed imminent but Russia was obliged to back down because England and France were unwilling to become involved in this issue and because Germany promised to give military support to Austria (The Kaiser said, "a knight in shining armour will be found by her [Austrian side.").

**Greater Serbia Movement**

All the Serbs in the Turkish Empire, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in Serbia and in fact in southern Europe were to be united together to form an independent country. That was the dream of the Serbs.

**Bosnian Crisis - Consequences**

The Bosnian crisis had harmful consequences for the peace of Europe.

Firstly, Russia felt humiliated and was determined that this must not come again. Immediately after the crisis, the Russian government intensified her armaments programme and sent Izvolski as ambassador in Paris in order to get more support from France.

Secondly, the annexation of Bosnia Herzegovina made Serbia the irreconcilable enemy of Austria. Without Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia could never become a united state and could not have an outlet to the sea. The Serbian nationalists foamed a secret society, the Black Hand, in 1911. The society aimed to provoke revolt in Bosnia and war with Austria. Young Bosnians were trained to assassinate Austrian officials in Bosnia.

Thirdly, as a result of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria had more Serbs than the Kingdom of Serbia itself. Three fifths of the South Slavs were now under Austrian rule.

The Slavs were opposed to the annexation, so Austria had great difficulties in ruling these two provinces. Troubled by the restlessness of the Slavs and encouraged by the German promises of support (Moltke, the German Chief of Staff, wrote to Conrad, the Austrian Chief of Staff, “the moment Russia mobilizes, Germany will also mobilize”, and “his deepest regret is that a chance has been let slip which will not soon offer itself again in favourable conditions!”), Austria wanted to crush Serbia if a new opportunity arose.

>> [Back to Top]

**3. Second Moroccan Crisis 1911**

**Continued rivalry between France and Germany**

The French were not satisfied with their partial control of Morocco since 1906. France wanted to have complete control of the country. After 1906 France steadily increased her influence in the country. In 1908, the French installed a pro-French Sultan on the throne. In May 1911, the French forces occupied Fez, the capital of Morocco, in order to suppress a rising against the pro-French Sultan.

The Germans responded by sending a gunboat Panther to Agadir, a strategic port on the Atlantic
coast. The British feared that Germany would make Agadir as a German naval base on the British naval route (the Cape Route). So Britain protested against Germany and backed up France to fight against Germany. War seemed to be inevitable.

Because of British support of France, Germany gave in. In a negotiated settlement, France (together with Spain) gained most of Morocco, leaving a small portion opposite Gibraltar to Spain. Germany was compensated with a strip of the French Congo. (This was a consolation price to Germany.)

**Consequence**

The Agadir crisis also had harmful consequences for the peace of Europe.

On the one hand, as Germany had suffered a diplomatic defeat, she was unwilling to suffer another diplomatic defeat again.

On the other hand, the British, French and Russian governments were alarmed by the aggressive attitude of the Germans. They remembered that Germany had tried to dictate the world by force for three times since 1905, firstly in the first Moroccan crisis of 1905, secondly, in the Bosnian crisis of 1909 and finally in the second Moroccan Crisis of 1911. After the crisis, the Entente powers exchanged information about the conditions of their army and navy. In 1912, Britain and France made a naval agreement that in the event of a war, the British fleet should guard the North Sea and the English channel, while the French fleet was to be deployed in the Mediterranean.

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**4. Balkan Wars 1912-13**

After the Young Turk Revolution, the Turkish government remained weak and inefficient. In 1911 Italy attacked Tripoli. In 1912, by the Treaty of Lausanne, Italy received Tripoli from Turkey.

**First Balkan War 1912**

Exploiting the chaotic political situation following the Turkish defeat in 1912, the Balkan states -- Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro--formed the Balkan League and declared war on Turkey in October 1912. They aimed to partition the Turkish Empire. From October 1912 to May 1913, the League won series of battles and Turkey could only retain the areas around Constantinople. The powers watched the victory of the League with great anxiety. Austria wanted to stop Serbia from becoming too powerful and was determined not to allow Serbia to get a seaport on the Adriatic. The powers intervened and imposed their own settlement, the Treaty of London. The most important provision of the Treaty was that, on Austria's insistence, a new state, Albania, was created to prevent Serbia from getting a coastline on the Adriatic. To compensate for this, Serbia was given a large part of Macedonia.
Second Balkan War 1913

Bulgaria had long regarded Macedonia as her possession. Her quarrels with Serbia soon developed into a war. In the second Balkan War, Bulgaria alone fought against Serbia, Montenegro, Rumania, Greece and Turkey. The war was soon over. Bulgaria was soundly defeated. The territorial settlement made after the First Balkan War was largely preserved except that Turkey and Rumania gained some valuable territory.

Balkan Wars - Consequence

The consequences of the Balkan Wars directly led to the outbreak of the First World War.

Firstly, Serbia was twice victorious in the Balkan wars and was larger than ever--her area doubled
as she got a large part of Macedonia. The desire to make herself larger by including all fellow nationals in a united Slav state was intensified. This brought her more sharply into collision with Austria which ruled eight million Serbs and Croats and which prevented Serbia from getting a coastline.

Secondly, Austria found that the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina grew increasingly troublesome. She was determined to attack Serbia before it was too late.

Thirdly, the Kaiser knew that Austria was her only dependable ally in Europe. He assured the Austrian Foreign Minister that 'You can be certain I stand behind you and am ready to draw the sword whenever your action makes it necessary.'

Fourthly, the Russian Czar felt that Russia had suffered a diplomatic defeat because she could not obtain Albania for Serbia due to Austrian insistence. In order to recover her lost prestige in the Balkans, the Czar declared in February 1914, "For Serbia, we shall do everything."

>> Back to Top
(Back to Introduction page)

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