

WAS WAR INEVITABLE?

The simple answer is yes though probably not in 1914, the far more complicated part is the explanation of why. We tend to look at 1914 in isolation and see Europe as it is today, but for more than 100 years Europe had been changing and evolving, new nations forming out of the former states. As more nations formed the concept of empire became an important aspect for them, France and Britain being far more advanced and the late comer being Germany. We also forget that Belgium was not the one we see in 1914, 'poor little Belgium' who we needed to defend. The reason Europe had a pact on her was not to protect Belgium, but to protect Europe from Belgium. She wasn't created until 1830, and was born out of a Dutch rebellion, the buffer zone created in the Treaty of Vienna to stop countries expanding was damaged. Not only that but Belgian king, Leopold II, was determined to join the race for empire and had taken over the Congo, with the permission of other countries (Berlin Africa Conference) but it soon became clear that the way Leopold governed gave cause for concern. After the execution of a British trader an enquiry was launched and found indescribable atrocities being carried out in the Congo. Her reputation was tarnished and Britain was at loggerheads with her. Throw into the mix German expansionism and the colonial demands of 'a place in the sun' and France and Britain found not only their power in Europe challenged but also the fear for their colonies.

By 1912 Germany had the second most powerful navy in Europe and the first most powerful army. Arthur Balfour commented:-

'There are two ways in which a foreign country can be crushed. It can be conquered, or it can be starved. If Germany were master in our home waters, she could apply both methods to Britain. Were Britain ten times master in the North Sea she could apply neither method to Germany. Without a superior fleet Britain could no longer count as a Power. Without any fleet at all Germany would remain the greatest Power in Europe.'

By 1914 Europe was not a settled place to be, intrigue, colonialism and power threatened the very fabric of society. Though the war was hastened by Austria-Hungary and the Serbian crisis, it was a symptom of where Europe was heading rather than the cause. Germany and France were never settled, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/1 outcome meant the two countries would vie for a war. The Schlieffen Plan, 1905, was created to plan war against France followed in 1913 by Plan XVII with French aspirations of waging war against Germany. And Britain? She had a huge colonial empire, Germany wanted it and wanted to be in the same position in the world as her, so once France had been taken a challenge to Britain would have been inevitable.

European history of this time is extremely complex and not one specific cause can be attributed to the start of WWI. What we do know is that the war was not futile, it was to protect Europe and the world from a tyrant, one who had already set up concentration camps in her own colony of Shark Island in 1905. It was inevitable, and above all if it had been left any later then no power in Europe would have been able to stand up against her. Germany was determined to ensure her place in the world.

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