GREAT BRITAIN

Britain had a clear advantage militarily on the seas over any European power, but a distinct disadvantage militarily on land. However, its status as an island was believed to partly counter-balance its army disadvantage.

Britain had for years been nervous about the German army and the rapid growth of the German navy. Germany was perceived as the major threat on the European continent to England's pre-eminent position economically as well, as Germany had risen to become the #3 industrial world power behind the United States and Germany.

Britain was determined that Germany not gain control of southeastern Europe, because in the view of Britain that could lead to a military threat to Britain's control of the Suez Canal in Egypt – the key to European trade with Asia.

Britain's intelligence services had gathered information that led the government to believe that Germany – which had only been unified as a nation in the 1870s and thus lacked the widespread colonies of England and France – was determined to acquire its own colonies to allow it to compete for raw materials with Britain and France.

British intelligence also led the government to believe that the government of Austria-Hungary was heavily influenced, if not controlled, by Germany.

GERMANY

Germany viewed England as not only its major military and economic competitor in Europe, but as a country determined to deny Germany a fair chance to compete with Britain. It viewed Britain as hypocritical for calling Germany's pursuit of colonies "aggression" when the British Empire had more colonies than any country in the world.

Germany had attempted several times to enter into alliances with Britain; the government interpreted Britain's refusal as a hostile act, which justified building up the German navy. Germany also viewed Britain's control of the Suez Canal in Egypt as a threat to Germany's trade with Asia.

Although Germany believed it had the best army in Europe (technologically especially), it was nervous about Russia, which had an inferior army but one that was twice the size of Germany. Germany's military leaders believed they could smash the Russian army, but nonetheless worried that the pure size of the Russian army would make Germany's victory more costly if Russia was allowed to attack first (Russia's technology was inferior and her troops could not be moved nearly as quickly as Germany could move hers). Also, the French were seen as hostile to Germany because of the French-Prussian War decades before (Prussia later merged with other ethnic German states to become the nation of Germany).

Germany viewed France's alliance with Russia as dangerous, as it could be used to justify France joining Russia in a two-front war with Germany. Although Germany believed it could defeat both countries, a two front war would hurt Germany.

Germany did not believe Britain would enter a war to protect France – Britain's long-time enemy – unless Germany directly threatened England. But Germany also believed the British army could not affect the outcome.

Although Germany had supreme confidence in its army, the government was reluctant to enter the war with no allies. In particular, it felt a connection to Austria Hungary, where ethnic Germans controlled the Austrian government. Germany also felt Austria, which had a majority of Slavic people dominated by the German minority, was threatened by the instability in the Slavic neighboring nations of Serbia, Albania, etc. Germany also believed that Russia – a Slavic nation – was encouraging radicals in Serbia by maintaining a military alliance with that country. And Germany believed that Russia's goal was to control access to the Mediterranean Sea from the Black Sea (in southeastern Europe)

Austrian intelligence told the Germans that they had direct evidence of a link between the Slavic organization the Black Hand, which had carried out the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, and the government of Serbia. This evidence in fact did not exist, but it is unclear that Germany knew that. In any event, Germany backed Austria's determination to find out if there was a link.

FRANCE

The French government was very nervous about the rise in the military power of Germany, as well as about Germany passing France as the #3 industrial power in the world. Germany also was seen as hostile to France, because of the Franco-Prussian War decades before (Prussia later merged with other ethnic German states to become the nation of Germany).

France realized Germany wanted to acquire colonies, and feared Germany military power could be used to deprive France of some of her colonies, especially in Africa.

France specifically entered into a military alliance with Russia to discourage a German attack on France.

France believed Austria-Hungary was using the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as an excuse to attack the much weaker Serbia, as part of a plan to control southeast Europe. France also believed Austria was encouraged in this by Germany.

Russia

Russia had the largest army by far in Europe, as well as the largest population. However, Russia's economy was backward, with very little industry and few railroads. Aware of this problem. The Russian government knew it would take far longer for Russia to mobilize her army in the event of war than it would take Austria-Hungary and/or Germany to mobilize hers.

Russia did not fear Austria-Hungary, but was extremely nervous about Germany, which had grown to become the world's #3 economic power (behind the U.S. and Britain) and possessed the most technologically advanced army in the world, as well as the second largest army in Europe. Russia was particularly nervous about the rise in size of the German navy. Russia's only "warm water" access to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean were through the North Sea, past Germany, and through the Black sea, which bordered southeastern Europe. Russia feared that if Germany (or Austria-Hungary, which Russia believed was controlled by German) gained control of the southeastern Slavic nations of Serbia, Romania, etc., that Germany could cut Russia off from trade in the event of war. Russia had entered into a military alliance with the small Slavic nation of Serbia partly due to their common Slavic roots, but also as a deterrent to Austria-Hungary from grabbing Southeast Europe. Although Russia did not fear Austria-Hungary's army, it realized Serbia was no match for Austria-Hungary.

Russia also realized that Germany's army could move very quickly and Russia was aware that Germany and Austria-Hungary were military allies.

Russia realized the Serbian government was unpredictable, but did not believe that Serbia would actively support the Black Hand's assassination of Franz Ferdinand. In reality, Russia did not want a unified Slavic southeast Europe, but neither did she want German control of southeast Europe. She also was afraid radical "terrorist" groups posed a threat to Russia, where such groups had long opposed the Russian monarchy (one terrorist group had assassinated Tsar Alexander half a century before).

Russia had entered into an alliance with France specifically to deter a German attack on Russia. The Russian government did not believe that Germany would actually go to war if Austria-Hungary started a war if it meant a two-front war, but also realized that Russia's only chance to survive such as war was to mobilize its troops close to its borders with Germany. Some elements in the Russian government believed that a war with Austria (but not with Germany) would benefit Russia by uniting the country behind the Tsar.

UNITED STATES

The United States had no military alliances anywhere in the world; in fact, the U.S. had not had a military alliance since the Presidency of George Washington, who advised future presidents to not enter into such alliances. Also, since 1820, the United States had pursued in foreign policy the Monroe Doctrine, which called for Europe to stay out of the Americas, but in return the U.S. to stay out of Europe's affairs.

Despite our long-standing policies, the U.S. was now a world power, with territories in the Pacific and Caribbean and with world-wide trade. The number one economic power in the world, we had a larger population than any European country except Russia. Despite this, our Navy – though growing – was only the 5th largest in the world and our army was very small.

Americans had a distaste for the idea of "empire" and saw most European major powers as empires. However, we had long-standing ethnic, language, and trade ties with Britain, and, to a lesser extent, with France. Germany, on the other hand, was seen as a militaristic monarchy, with no democratic traditions. In addition, the U.S. government saw Germany's pursuit of colonies in the Pacific as a danger to American interests in the Pacific. Most ordinary Americans, however, were vehemently isolationist and saw no need for involvement by the U.S. in Europe.

Although America traded worldwide, a huge percentage of our trade was with the British and French Empires, and relatively little with Germany.

The American government did not view any of the European nations – including Germany – as a threat to American security. In fact, only Britain – with its navy – realistically could do much harm to the U.S. in a war. However, the government – and the public – did tend to see Britain and France as more enlightened (as democracies) than Germany, with its near absolute monarchy.