

Document Packet - Who Was Responsible for Starting WWI?

Document 1

The following is an extract from a lengthy assessment of Russia's diplomatic position as viewed in early 1914 by P.N. Durnovo, a member of the tsar's State Council of senior advisers. The memorandum is interesting on two counts; for its brilliant and prophetic statement on the possible collapse of the monarchy as a result of a war with Germany (as indicated in the extract) and for its attempt to persuade the tsar (not included in the extract) that Russia's best interests, including the avoidance of war, lay with realizing that the "English orientation of our diplomacy is in essence profoundly wrong" and that therefore the proper course lay with a rapprochement with Germany.

(a) The central factor of the period of world history which we are now passing (through) is the rivalry between England and Germany. This rivalry must inevitably lead to an armed conflict between them . . . (and) cannot in any case be confined to a duel between England and Germany alone . . . The future Anglo-German war will be transformed into an armed conflict between the two groups of powers, one with a German, the other with an English orientation. . .

The fundamental groupings in a future war are self-evident: Russia, France, and England, on the one side; Germany, Austria, and Turkey, on the other. . . . It is more likely that other powers, too, will participate in that war, depending upon circumstances as they may exist at the war's outbreak . . . Italy, if she has any conception of her real interest, will not enter on the side of Germany. . .

. . . the struggle with Germany presents great difficulties for us and will require incalculable sacrifices. The war will not catch our opponent napping and the stage of his preparedness will probably exceed the most exaggerated of our expectations . . . The main burden of the war will undoubtedly fall on us, since England is hardly capable of large-scale participation in a continental war, while France, poor in manpower, will probably confine itself to strictly defensive tactics, in view of the enormous losses by which war will be attended under the present conditions of military technique . . . And what is more, one should not exclude the possibility of America or Japan entering [the war] on the side of Germany's opponents . .

Are we prepared for so stubborn a struggle as the future war of the European nations will undoubtedly prove to be? We must answer this question, without evasion, in the negative. . . . In this respect we must note, first of all, the insufficiency of our military supplies . . . since the procurement plans are still far from being fulfilled, owing to the low productivity of our factories. . . . (and) the blockade of the Baltic as well as the Black Sea will make impossible the importation from abroad of the defensive materials we lack. . . . The network of strategic railways is inadequate . . . Every war up till now has invariably been accompanied by something new in the realm of military technique, but the technical backwardness of our industries will not create favorable conditions for our adopting the new inventions. . .

(b) A struggle between Russia and Germany is profoundly undesirable for both sides, as involving a weakening a monarchical principle. It should not be forgotten that Russia and Germany are the representatives of the conservative principle in the civilized world, as opposed to the democratic

principle, embodied in England one must foresee that . . a general European war is mortally dangerous both for Russia and Germany, no matter who wins. It is our firm conviction . . . that there must inevitably break out in the defeated country a social revolution which, by the very nature of things, will spread to the country of the victor. . . .

An especially favorable soil for social upheavals is found, of course, in Russia, where the masses undoubtedly profess the principles of an unconscious sort of socialism . . . any revolutionary movement will inevitable degenerate into a socialist movement . . . The peasant dreams of obtaining free a share of somebody else's land; the workman, of getting hold of the entire capital and profits of the manufacturer. . . . If these slogans are scattered far and wide . . and the government permits agitation along these lines, Russia undoubtedly will be flung into anarchy such as she suffered in the ever memorable period of troubles in 1905-1906. War with Germany would create exceptionally favorable conditions for such agitation. . . .

. . in the event of defeat, the possibility of which in a struggle with a foe like Germany cannot be overlooked, social revolution in its most extreme form is inevitable. . . . It will start with all disasters being attributed to the government. In the legislative institutions a bitter campaign against the government will begin, which will result in revolutionary agitation throughout the country. There will immediately ensue Socialist slogans--which alone are capable of . . rallying the masses--first the complete reapportionment of land and then the reapportionment of all valuables and property. The defeated army . . . will prove to be too demoralized to serve as a bulwark of law and order. The legislative institutions and the . . opposition parties . . . will be powerless to stem the rising popular tide . . and Russia will be flung into hopeless anarchy, the outcome of which cannot be foreseen.

SOURCE: Advice to the Tsar, Nicholas II, from State Councilor Durnovo, 1914.

Document 2

June 28, 1914	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the A-H throne, is assassinated in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princeps, a Serbian nationalist.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A-H sends a special emissary to Berlin --> the Germans promised their full support. ◆ French President and British Prime Minister promise Russia their full support.
July 23, 1914	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Austrian ultimatum --> Serbia has 48 hours to respond
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Serbia replies to Austria's ultimatum. ◆ Britain proposes an international conference to address the growing crisis. ◆ The Germans proclaim that the problem was between A-H and Serbia.

July 28, 1914	♦ A-H declares war on Serbia.
July 29, 1914	♦ Russia orders a partial mobilization of her troops, making it clear that it was aimed only at A-H.
July 30, 1914	♦ Russia realizes she was not prepared for a partial call-up and announces a general mobilization instead.
July 31, 1914	♦ Germany declares herself in a state of military readiness and sends Russia an ultimatum demanding demobilization of Russia's army within 12 hours. ♦ Germany asks France what course she would take in a Russo-German war. ♦ France responds that she would act in her own interests and then begins to mobilize her own troops, but holds them back six miles from the Franco-German border to prevent an incident.
August 1, 1914	♦ Germany mobilizes her troops and declares war on Russia.
August 2, 1914	♦ Germany invades Luxembourg and sends an ultimatum to Belgium demanding unobstructed passage for her troops.
August 3, 1914	♦ Germany declares war on France and invades Belgium.
August 4, 1914	♦ Britain declares war on Germany. ♦ Within 48 hours, each nation had two million soldiers under orders!!

Document 3

Article 1. This organization has been created with the object of realizing the national ideal: The union of all the Serbs. All Serbs without distinction of sex, religion, place of birth, and all who are sincerely devoted to this cause, may become members.

Article 2. This organization prefers terrorist action to intellectual propaganda and for this reason must be kept absolutely secret from persons who do not belong to it.

Article 3. This organization bears the name "Union or Death."

Article 4. To accomplish its task, the organization:

1. Brings influence to bear on Government circles, on the various social classes and on the whole social life of the Kingdom of Serbia, regarded as Piedmont.

2. Organizes revolutionary action in all territories inhabited by Serbs.
3. Outside the frontiers of Serbia uses every means available to fight the adversaries of this idea.
4. Maintains amicable relations with all states, peoples, organizations, and individuals who entertain feelings of friendship towards Serbia and the Serbian element.
5. Lends help and support in every way possible to all people and all organizations struggling for their national liberation and for their union.

Article 5. A central Committee having its headquarters at Belgrade is at the head of this organization and exercises executive authority. . . .

Article 25. Members of the organization are not known to each other personally. It is only the members of the Central Committee who are known to one another.

Article 26. In the organization itself the members are known by numbers. Only the Central Committee at Belgrade is to know their names. . . .

Article 31. Anyone who once enters the organization may never withdraw from it. . . .

Article 33. When the Central Committee at Belgrade has pronounced penalty of death [on one of the members] the only matter of importance is that the execution take place without fail. ...

SOURCE: Statutes of "The Black Hand," early 20c.

Document 4

The ultimatum begins with a description of various acts of hostility directed against Austria-Hungary by Serbia. Then it describes the direct involvement of Serbian government officials in the assassination of the Archduke:

It is clear from the statements and confessions of the criminal authors of the assassination of the 28th of June, that the murder at Sarajevo was conceived at Belgrade, that the murderers received the weapons and the bombs with which they were equipped from Serbian officers and officials who belonged to the *Narodna Odbrana*, and, finally, that the dispatch of the criminals and of their weapons to Bosnia was arranged and effected under the conduct of Serbian frontier authorities.

The Austro-Hungarian ultimatum then lists ten specific demands, all of which Serbia must agree

to within 48 hours or face war:

The Royal Serbian Government will furthermore pledge itself:

1. to suppress every publication which shall incite hatred and contempt of the Monarchy, and the general tendency of which shall be directed against the territorial integrity of the latter;
2. to proceed at once to the dissolution of the *Narodna Odbrana*, to confiscate all of its means of propaganda, and in the same manner to proceed against the other unions and associations in Serbia which occupy themselves with propaganda against Austria-Hungary; .
..
3. to eliminate without delay from public instruction in Serbia, everything, whether connected with the teaching corps or with the methods of teaching, that serves or may serve to nourish the propaganda against Austria-Hungary;
4. to remove from the military and administrative service in general all officers and officials who have been guilty of carrying on the propaganda against Austria-Hungary, whose names the Imperial and Royal Government reserves the right to make known to the Royal Government when communicating the material evidence now in its possession;
5. to agree to the cooperation in Serbia of the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government in the suppression of the subversive movement directed against the integrity of the Monarchy;
6. to institute a judicial inquiry against every participant in the conspiracy of the 28th of June who may be found in Serbian territory; the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government delegated for this purpose will take part in the proceedings held for this purpose;
7. to undertake with all haste the arrest of Major Voislav Tankositch and of Milan Ciganovitch, a Serbian official, who have been compromised by the results of the inquiry;
8. by efficient measures to prevent the participation of Serbian authorities in the smuggling of weapons and explosives across the frontier; to dismiss from the service and to punish severely those members of the Frontier Service at Schabats and Losnitza who assisted the authors of the crime of Sarajevo to cross the frontier.
9. to make explanations to the Imperial and Royal Government concerning the unjustifiable utterances of high Serbian functionaries in Serbia and abroad who, without regard for their official position, have not hesitated to express themselves in a manner hostile toward Austria-Hungary since the assassination of the 28th of June;
10. to inform the Imperial and Royal Government without delay of the execution of the measures comprised in the foregoing points.

The Imperial and Royal Government (A-H) awaits the reply of the Royal Government (S) by Saturday, the twenty-fifth . . . , at 6:00 PM, at the latest.

SOURCE: Austrian Ultimatum to the Serbian government.

Document 5

The Royal Serbian Government have received the communication of the Imperial and Royal Government . . . and are convinced that their reply will remove any misunderstanding which may threaten to impair the good neighborly relations between the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Kingdom of Serbia. . . .

The Royal Government have been pained and surprised at the statements, according to which members of the kingdom of Serbia are supposed to have participated in the preparations for the crime committed at Sarajevo . . .

The Royal Government of Serbia condemn all propaganda which may be directed against Austria-Hungary, that is to say, all such tendencies as aim at ultimately detaching from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy territories which form part thereof, and they sincerely deplore the baneful consequences of these criminal movements. . . .

1) [The Royal Serbian Government further undertake] to introduce at the first regular convocation of the Diet (parliament) a provision into the press law providing for the most severe punishments of the incitement to hatred or contempt of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

2) The Royal government will dissolve the "Narodna Odbrana" Society and every other society which may be directing its efforts against Austria-Hungary.

3) The Royal Serbian Government undertake to remove without delay from their public educational establishments in Serbia all that serves or could serve to foment propaganda against Austria-Hungary whenever the Imperial and Royal Government furnish them with facts and proofs of this propaganda.

4) The Royal Government also agree to remove from military service all such persons as the judicial enquiry may have proved to be guilty of acts directed against the integrity of the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy . . .

5) The Royal Government must confess that they do not clearly grasp the meaning or the scope of the demand made by the Imperial and Royal Government that Serbia shall undertake to accept the collaboration of the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government upon their territory, but they declare that they will admit such collaboration as agrees with the principle of international law, with criminal procedure and with good neighborly relations.

6) . . . As regards the participation in this enquiry of Austro-Hungarian agents or authorities . . . the Royal Government cannot accept such an arrangement as it would be a violation of the constitution and of the law of criminal procedure; nevertheless in concrete cases communications as to the results of the investigation in question might be given to the Austro-Hungarian authorities.

7) . . . If the Imperial and Royal Government are not satisfied with this reply, the Serbian Government, considering that it is not to the common interest to precipitate the solution of this question, are ready, as always, to accept a pacific understanding, either by referring this question to the decision of the International Tribunal of The Hague, or to the Great Powers . . .

SOURCE: Serbian response to the Austrian ultimatum, July 25, 1914.

Document 6

Tsar to Kaiser, July 29, 1:00 A.M.

Peter's Court Palais, 29 July 1914

Sa Majesté l'Empereur
Neues Palais

Am glad you are back. In this serious moment, I appeal to you to help me. An ignoble war has been declared to a weak country. The indignation in Russia shared fully by me is enormous. I foresee that very soon I shall be overwhelmed by the pressure forced upon me and be forced to take extreme measures which will lead to war. To try and avoid such a calamity as a European war I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to stop your allies from going too far.

Nicky

Kaiser to Tsar, July 29, 1:45 A.M.

This and the previous telegraph crossed.

28. July 1914

It is with the gravest concern that I hear of the impression which the action of Austria against Serbia is creating in your country. The unscrupulous agitation that has been going on in Serbia for years has resulted in the outrageous crime, to which Archduke Francis Ferdinand fell a victim. The spirit that led Serbians to murder their own king and his wife still dominates the country. You will doubtless agree with me that we both, you and me, have a common interest as well as all Sovereigns to insist that all the persons morally responsible for the dastardly murder should receive their deserved punishment. In this case politics plays no part at all.

On the other hand, I fully understand how difficult it is for you and your Government to face the drift of your public opinion. Therefore, with regard to the hearty and tender friendship which binds us both from long ago with firm ties, I am exerting my utmost influence to induce the Austrians to deal straightly to arrive to a satisfactory understanding with you. I confidently hope that you will help me in my efforts to smooth over difficulties that may still arise.

Your very sincere and devoted friend and cousin

Willy

Kaiser to Tsar, July 29, 6:30 P.M.

Berlin, 29. July 1914

I received your telegram and share your wish that peace should be maintained. But as I told you in my first telegram, I cannot consider Austria's action against Serbia an "ignoble" war. Austria knows by experience that Serbian promises on a paper are wholly unreliable. I understand its action must be judged as trending to get full guarantee that the Serbian promises shall become real facts. This my reasoning is borne out by the statement of the Austrian cabinet that Austria does not want to make any territorial conquests at the expense of Serbia. I therefore suggest that it would be quite possible for Russia to remain a spectator of the Austro-Serbian conflict without involving Europe in the most horrible war she ever witnessed. I think a direct understanding between your Government and Vienna possible and desirable, and as I already telegraphed to you, my Government is continuing its exercises to promote it. Of course military measures on the part of Russia would be looked upon by Austria as a calamity we both wish to avoid and jeopardize my position as mediator which I readily accepted on your appeal to my friendship and my help.

Willy

Tsar to Kaiser, July 29, 8:20 P.M.

Peter's Court Palace, 29 July 1914

Thanks for your telegram conciliatory and friendly. Whereas official message presented today by your ambassador to my minister was conveyed in a very different tone. Beg you to explain this divergency! It would be right to give over the Austro-Serbian problem to the Hague conference. Trust in your wisdom and friendship.

Your loving Nicky

Tsar to Kaiser, July 30, 1:20 A.M.

Peter's Court Palais, 30 July 1914

Thank you heartily for your quick answer. Am sending Tatischev this evening with instructions. The military measures which have now come into force were decided five days ago for reasons of defense

on account of Austria's preparations. I hope from all my heart that these measures won't in any way interfere with your part as mediator which I greatly value. We need your strong pressure on Austria to come to an understanding with us.

Nicky

Kaiser to Tsar, July 30, 1:20 A.M.

Berlin, 30. July 1914

Best thanks for telegram. It is quite out of the question that my ambassadors language could have been in contradiction with the tenor of my telegram. Count Pourtalès was instructed to draw the attention of your government to the danger & grave consequences involved by a mobilization; I said the same in my telegram to you. Austria has only mobilized against Servia & only a part of her army. If, as it is now the case, according to the communication by you & your Government, Russia mobilizes against Austria, my role as mediator you kindly entrusted me with, & which I accepted at you[r] express prayer, will be endangered if not ruined. The whole weight of the decision lies solely on you[r] shoulders now, who have to bear the responsibility for Peace or War.

Willy

Kaiser to Tsar, July 31

Berlin, 31. July 1914

On your appeal to my friendship and your call for assistance began to mediate between your and the Austro-Hungarian Government. While this action was proceeding your troops were mobilized against Austro-Hungary, my ally. thereby, as I have already pointed out to you, my mediation has been made almost illusory.

I have nevertheless continued my action. I now receive authentic news of serious preparations for war on my Eastern frontier. Responsibility for the safety of my empire forces preventive measures of defense upon me. In my endeavors to maintain the peace of the world I have gone to the utmost limit possible. The responsibility for the disaster which is now threatening the whole civilized world will not be laid at my door. In this moment it still lies in your power to avert it. Nobody is threatening the honor or power of Russia who can well afford to await the result of my mediation. My friendship for you and your empire, transmitted to me by my grandfather on his deathbed has always been sacred to me and I have honestly often backed up Russia when she was in serious trouble especially in her last war.

The peace of Europe may still be maintained by you, if Russia will agree to stop the military measures which must threaten Germany and Austro-Hungary.

Willy

Tsar to Kaiser, July 31

This and the previous telegram crossed.

Petersburg, Palace, 31 July 1914

Sa Majesté l'Empereur, Neues Palais

I thank you heartily for your mediation which begins to give one hope that all may yet end peacefully. It is *technically* impossible to stop our military preparations which were obligatory owing to Austria's mobilization. We are far from wishing war. As long as the negotiations with Austria on Serbia's account are taking place my troops shall not make any *provocative* action. I give you my solemn word for this. I put all my trust in Gods mercy and hope in your successful mediation in Vienna for the welfare of our countries and for the peace of Europe.

Your affectionate
Nicky

Tsar to Kaiser, August 1

Peter's Court, Palace, 1 August 1914

Sa Majesté l'Empereur
Berlin

I received your telegram. Understand you are obliged to mobilize but wish to have the same guarantee from you as I gave you, that these measures **do not** mean war and that we shall continue negotiating for the benefit of our countries and universal peace deal to all our hearts. Our long proved friendship must succeed, with God's help, in avoiding bloodshed. Anxiously, full of confidence await your answer.

Nicky

Kaiser to Tsar, August 1

Berlin, 1. August 1914

Thanks for your telegram. I yesterday pointed out to your government the way by which alone war may be avoided. Although I requested an answer for noon today, no telegram from my ambassador conveying an answer from your Government has reached me as yet. I therefore have been obliged to mobilize my army.

Immediate affirmative clear and unmistakable answer from your government is the only way to avoid endless misery. Until I have received this answer alas, I am unable to discuss the subject of your telegram. As a matter of fact I must request you to immediately order your troops on no account to

commit the slightest act of trespassing over our frontiers.

Willy

SOURCE: "Willy"-“Nicky” letters, summer, 1914.

Document 7

Former generations as well as those who stand here today have often seen the soldiers of the First Guard Regiment and My Guards at this place. We were brought together then by an oath of allegiance which we swore before God. Today all have gathered to pray for the triumph of our weapons, for now that oath must be proved to the last drop of blood. The sword, which I have left in its scabbard for decades, shall decide.

I expect My First Guard Regiment on Foot and My Guards to add a new page of fame to their glorious history. The celebration today finds us confident in God in the Highest and remembering the glorious days of Leuthen, Chium, and St. Privat. Our ancient fame is an appeal to the German people and their sword. And the entire German nation to the last man has grasped the sword. And so I draw the sword which with the help of God I have kept in its scabbard for decades. [At this point the Kaiser drew his sword from its scabbard and held it high above his head.]

The sword is drawn, and I cannot sheathe it again without victory and honor. All of you shall and will see to it that only in honor is it returned to the scabbard. You are my guarantee that I can dictate peace to my enemies. Up and at the enemy! Down with the enemies of Brandenburg!

Three cheers for our army!

SOURCE: Kaiser Wilhelm II, August 18, 1914.