

## WWI Document Packet – Russia

### Document 1

The following excerpt is from a book by the American historian Sidney Bradshaw Fay, entitled *Origins of the World War*. It focuses on the problem, long debated by historians, of fixing responsibility for the outbreak of World War 1. This issue is complicated. Everyone agrees that the murder of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand by a Bosnian patriot at Sarajevo was the incident that touched off the war, but there is little agreement about the underlying causes of the war or the ultimate responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities.

Fay's two-volume work on the causes of the war, first published in 1928, has stood the test of time and critical scholarship. To Professor Fay's credit is the fact that he waited until official records of events were available. In his first volume he explored the long-range causes of the war, extending his study far back into the 19th century. He devoted his entire second volume to the immediate causes of the war and examined in detail the responsibilities of each major party.

#### Questions:

1. In what way was each of the nations involved partly responsible for the outbreak of hostilities?
2. Do you agree with Fay's analysis of individual responsibility?

None of the powers wanted a European War. Their governing rulers and ministers, with very few exceptions, all foresaw that it must be a frightful struggle, in which the political results were not absolutely certain, but in which the loss of life, suffering, and economic consequences were bound to be terrible.

Nevertheless, a European War broke out. Why? Because in each country political and military leaders did certain things which led to mobilizations and declarations of war, or failed to do certain things which might have prevented them. In this sense, all the European countries, in a greater or less degree, were responsible. One must abandon the dictum of the Versailles Treaty that Germany and her allies were solely responsible. It was a dictum exacted by victors from vanquished, under the influence of the blindness, ignorance, hatred, and the propagandist misconceptions to which war had given rise. It was based on evidence which was incomplete and not always sound. It is generally recognized by the best historical scholars in all countries to be no longer tenable or defensible. They are agreed that the responsibility for the War is a divided responsibility. But they still disagree very much as to the relative part of this responsibility that falls on each country and on each individual political or military leader.

Some writers like to fix positively in some precise mathematical fashion the exact responsibility for the war. This was done in one way by the framers of Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles. It has been done in other ways by those who would fix the responsibility in some relative fashion, as, for instance, Austria first, then Russia, France and Germany and England. But the present writer deprecates such efforts to assess by a precise formula a very complicated question, which is after all

more a matter of delicate shading than of definite white and black. . . . Moreover, even supposing that a general consensus of opinion might be reached as to the relative responsibility of any individual country or man for immediate causes connected with the July crisis of 1914, it is by no means necessarily true that the same relative responsibility would hold for the underlying causes, which for years had been tending toward the creation of a dangerous situation.

One may, however, sum up very briefly the most salient facts in regard to each country.

## Document 2

Russia was partly responsible for the Austro-Serbian conflict because of the frequent encouragement which she had given at Belgrade—that Serbian national unity would be ultimately achieved with Russian assistance at Austrian expense. This had led the Belgrade Cabinet to hope for Russian support in case of a war with Austria, and the hope did not prove vain in July, 1914. Before this, to be sure, in the Bosnian Crisis and during the Balkan Wars, Russia had put restraint upon Serbia, because Russia, exhausted by the effects of the Russo-Japanese War, was not yet ready for a European struggle with the Teutonic Powers. But in 1914 her armaments, though not yet completed, had made such progress that the militarists were confident of success, if they had French and British support. In the spring of 1914, the Minister of War, Sukhomlinov, had published an article in a Russian newspaper, though without signing his name, to the effect, "Russia is ready, France must be ready also." Austria was convinced that Russia would ultimately aid Serbia, unless the Serbian danger were dealt with energetically after the Archduke's murder; she knew that Russia was growing stronger every year; but she doubted whether the Tsar's armaments had yet reached the point at which Russia would dare to intervene; she would therefore run less risk of Russian intervention and a European War if she used the Archduke's assassination as an excuse for weakening Serbia, than if she should postpone action until the future.

Russia's responsibility lay also in the secret preparatory military measures which she was making at the same time that she was carrying on diplomatic negotiations. These alarmed Germany and Austria. But it was primarily Russia's general mobilization, made when Germany was trying to bring Austria to a settlement, which precipitated the final catastrophe, causing Germany to mobilize and declare war.

## Document 3

*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.