

# Russia in the 1st world War

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Russia entered World War I in the three days succeeding July 28, 1914 — beginning with Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia, a Russian ally. Via St Pe tersburg, the Russian Empire sent an ultimatum to Vienna warning Austria-Hungary not to attack Serbia.

The threat to Belgium caused Britain to declare war on Germany on August 4. Russia declared war on Germany on August 7, 1914. *[citation needed]* The main belligerents had been established. The Ottoman Empire soon joined the Central Powers and fought Russia along their border.

Following the invasion of Serbia, Russia began to mobilize its very large reserve army. Consequently, on July 31, the German Empire in Berlin demanded Russian demobilization. There was no response; hence, on the same day, Germany declared war on Russia. In accordance with its war plan, Germany ignored Russia and moved first against France by declaring war on August 3, and by sending its main armies through Belgium to surround Paris.

Historians researching the causes of World War I have emphasised the role of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Scholarly consensus has typically minimised Russian involvement in the outbreak of this mass conflict. Key elements were Russia's defence of Orthodox Serbia, its pan-Slavic roles, its treaty obligations with France, and its concern with protecting its status as a great power.

However, historian [Sean McMeekin](#) has emphasised Russian plans to expand its empire southward and to seize Constantinople as an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>[1]</sup> Archduke [Franz Ferdinand](#), heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated by Bosnian Serbs on 28 June 1914 due to Austria-Hungary's annexation of the largely Slavic province.

Vienna was unable to find evidence that the Serbian state had sponsored this assassination but, one month later, it issued an ultimatum to Serbia, which it knew would be rejected and thus lead to war. Austria-Hungary deemed Serbia to be deserving of punishment for the assassination.

Although Russia had no formal treaty obligation to Serbia, it wanted to control the Balkans, and had a long-term perspective toward gaining a military advantage over Germany and Austria-Hungary. Russia had incentive to delay militarization, and the majority of its leaders wanted to avoid war. However, Russia had the support of France and feared that a failure to defend Serbia would lead to the loss of Russian credibility, constituting a major political defeat in its goal of controlling the Balkans.



Tsar Nicholas II mobilized Russian forces on 30 July 1914 to threaten Austria-Hungary if it invaded Serbia. Christopher Clark stated: "The Russian general mobilisation [of 30 July] was one of the most momentous decisions of the August crisis". The first general mobilization occurred before the German government had declared a state of impending war.

Germany felt threatened by Russia, responding with its own mobilization and a declaration of war on 1 August 1914. At the outset of hostilities, Russian forces led offensives against both Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The former emperor and his family were to be sent to England, but the Petrograd Soviet objected, and they were instead removed to Tobolsk, in western Siberia.

In April 1918 they were taken to Yekaterinburg in the Urals. As the Russian Civil War raged around them, White Russian forces approached the area and local Bolshevik authorities were ordered to prevent a rescue.