Causes of World War 1 Worksheet

Grade 9 – 10 history · the MAIN causes

Name: Date: Score: / 26

Why one shooting became a world war

In June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo. Within six weeks most of Europe was at war. Assassinations were not rare; the question historians ask is why this one had that effect.

The answer is that four long-running pressures had made Europe ready to ignite. **Militarism**: armies had grown enormously and war was widely seen as a legitimate tool of policy. **Alliances**: rival groups of states had promised to defend one another, so a local quarrel pulled in distant powers automatically. **Imperialism**: the same states were competing for colonies and resources. **Nationalism**: ethnic groups inside large empires wanted states of their own, and the empires meant to stop them. Students usually learn these as MAIN.

The distinction that matters is between a **trigger** and a cause. Sarajevo was the trigger. Without the four pressures behind it, it would have been a crime rather than a catastrophe.

Part A — Vocabulary match each term to its meaning (8 marks)

1. Militarism	_____	A. An agreement between states to support each other
2. Alliance	_____	B. Extending control over other territories and peoples
3. Imperialism	_____	C. A final demand with a threat if it is refused
4. Nationalism	_____	D. Calling up and moving armies ready for war
5. Mobilisation	_____	E. The immediate event that sets off a larger conflict
6. Ultimatum	_____	F. Building up armed forces and valuing military strength
7. Arms race	_____	G. Rival states competing to build larger forces
8. Trigger	_____	H. Strong loyalty to one’s nation, often above others

Part B — Fill in the blanks (6 marks)

1. The four long-term causes are often remembered as _____.

2. Competing to build larger navies and armies is an arms _____.

3. An agreement between states to defend each other is an _____.

4. The war began in _____ and ended in 1918.

5. The assassination at Sarajevo was the _____, not the underlying cause.

6. Calling up armies and moving them into position is called _____.

Part C — Which cause? write militarism, alliances, imperialism or nationalism (6 marks)

Description	Which of MAIN
European powers more than doubled their armies between 1890 and 1914	
Rival groups of states promised to defend one another if attacked	
European states competed for colonies and raw materials overseas	
Ethnic groups within large empires demanded their own states	
Britain and Germany raced to build the larger battle fleet	
A local dispute drew in states that had promised to support each other	

Part D — Think it through (6 marks)

1. Explain the difference between a trigger and an underlying cause, using Sarajevo as your example.

2. Alliances were meant to prevent war by making it too risky. Explain how they helped spread one instead.

3. Of the four MAIN causes, which do you consider most important, and why? There is no single correct answer — you are marked on the reasoning.

Causes of World War 1 Worksheet — Answer Key

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Part A — Vocabulary

1. **Militarism** → F
2. **Alliance** → A
3. **Imperialism** → B
4. **Nationalism** → H
5. **Mobilisation** → D
6. **Ultimatum** → C
7. **Arms race** → G
8. **Trigger** → E

Part B — Fill in the blanks

1. **MAIN**
2. **race**
3. **alliance**
4. **1914**
5. **trigger**
6. **mobilisation**

Part C — Which cause?

1. European powers more than doubled their armies between 1890 and 1914 → **Militarism**
2. Rival groups of states promised to defend one another if attacked → **Alliances**
3. European states competed for colonies and raw materials overseas → **Imperialism**
4. Ethnic groups within large empires demanded their own states → **Nationalism**
5. Britain and Germany raced to build the larger battle fleet → **Militarism**
6. A local dispute drew in states that had promised to support each other → **Alliances**

Part D — Think it through

1. **A trigger sets off a situation already primed; a cause created that situation.**
   Sarajevo lit the fuse. Militarism, alliances, imperialism and nationalism had spent decades laying the explosive. Without them the assassination would have been a serious crime and nothing more.
2. **A promise to defend an ally turns a local war into a general one automatically.**
   Each state honouring its commitments drew in the next. Deterrence works only if the threat stops the first move; once it fails, the same promises guarantee that everyone is involved.
3. **Any of the four, argued properly.**
   Alliances best explain how the war spread so fast. Nationalism best explains why the Balkans were volatile. Militarism explains why armies were ready to move in weeks. Imperialism explains the rivalry underneath. Mark the reasoning and the use of evidence, not the choice.