Some have emphasized the role of Western* economic interests in seeking overseas markets for industrial production and investment capital as well as raw materials that were in short supply at home. Others have focused on the activities of Christian missionaries who penetrated the interior of the colonial world in search of souls to save, only to require military protection from their home governments when the indigenous nonbelievers violently resisted conversion. Others have seen the prospect of strategic advantage—in the form both of military manpower recruitable from the native population and of bases of operation abroad—as the principal motivating factor for this expansion abroad. Still others have stressed the role of national pride and the search for national prestige. But whatever the source of the imperialist impulse, its consequence was unmistakable: the extension of European power and influence throughout the southern half of the globe.

The British Empire at Its Height

The first two nations to achieve in this way the position of "world power" were Great Britain and France. Both had established coastal footholds in Asia and Africa during the first wave of European imperial expansion: Britain had disposed of its surplus population during its industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by sending large numbers of its nationals to the inhabitable coastlands of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and southern Africa. To the motley collection of islands and coastal enclaves in Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific that had been acquired by Britain during this earlier era was added the subcontinent of India, which had come under effective British control by the middle of the nineteenth century. By that time, France had added the North African territory of Algeria to the remnants of its seventeenth-century empire.

But it was only after the opening of the Suez Canal (built by the French between 1859 and 1869 and brought under joint Anglo-French financial control in 1875) that authorities in London and Paris began in earnest to promote the cause of imperial expansion. Henceforth, the sea route running through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean—a much safer and more economical route than the passage around the Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip of Africa—came to be regarded by Britain's governing class as a "lifeline" to its possessions in Asia. It was indeed a lifeline in a very real sense: Since its transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Great Britain customarily produced no more than 30 percent of the food consumed by its population and an even smaller proportion of the raw materials required by its industries. A considerable portion of its imported foodstuffs and industrial raw materials came from its Asian and Pacific possessions (India, Australia, and New Zealand), and the island nation's very survival seemed to depend on its ability to keep open the sea-lanes over which these vital supplies were transported. Moreover, to pay for these enormous imports of food and raw materials, Britain's manufactured products had to be assured unimpeded access to their export markets overseas. For both these reasons, it was deemed essential by the ruling elite of Victorian England that control of the sea-lanes to the Far East

*The term "Western" shall be employed in this study to designate that portion of the northern hemisphere inhabited by Europeans or immigrants of European stock.

be firmly in British hands. This implied the preservation of naval domination of the Mediterranean–Suez–Red Sea–Indian Ocean route as well as the establishment of strategically located bases and refueling stations along the way.

By the end of the nineteenth century, this national obsession with protecting the passage to India, East Asia, and Australia had resulted in the acquisition of a long string of islands, coastal enclaves, and their hinterlands along the southern rim of Asia and the east coast of Africa as well as control of the Egyptian land bridge connecting the two continents and its canal linking the seas. These strategically situated outposts of British imperialism—Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, and Suez in the Mediterranean; Aden and British Somaliland on opposite shores of the Red Sea; Kenya, India, Burma, Malaya, and Singapore along the Indian Ocean basin—enabled this small island nation to obtain and preserve effective control of the largest empire in the history of the world.

A third motivating factor for British imperialism—in addition to the quest for foodstuffs, raw materials, naval bases, and refueling stations—was the search for undeveloped areas for investment that could absorb the huge amounts of capital that had accumulated in Britain in the form of profits from industrial enterprise. The regions of Africa and Asia that had recently been opened to European penetration were in dire need of investment capital to build the transportation and communication systems that were a prerequisite of economic modernization. In short order, the major financial institutions of London began to invest heavily in railroad and road construction, the improvement of ports and harbors, and other ventures undertaken by British firms as part of the preliminary process of colonial development. In this way, thousands of British investors were led to believe that their financial well-being depended on guaranteed markets for capital investment in the empire.

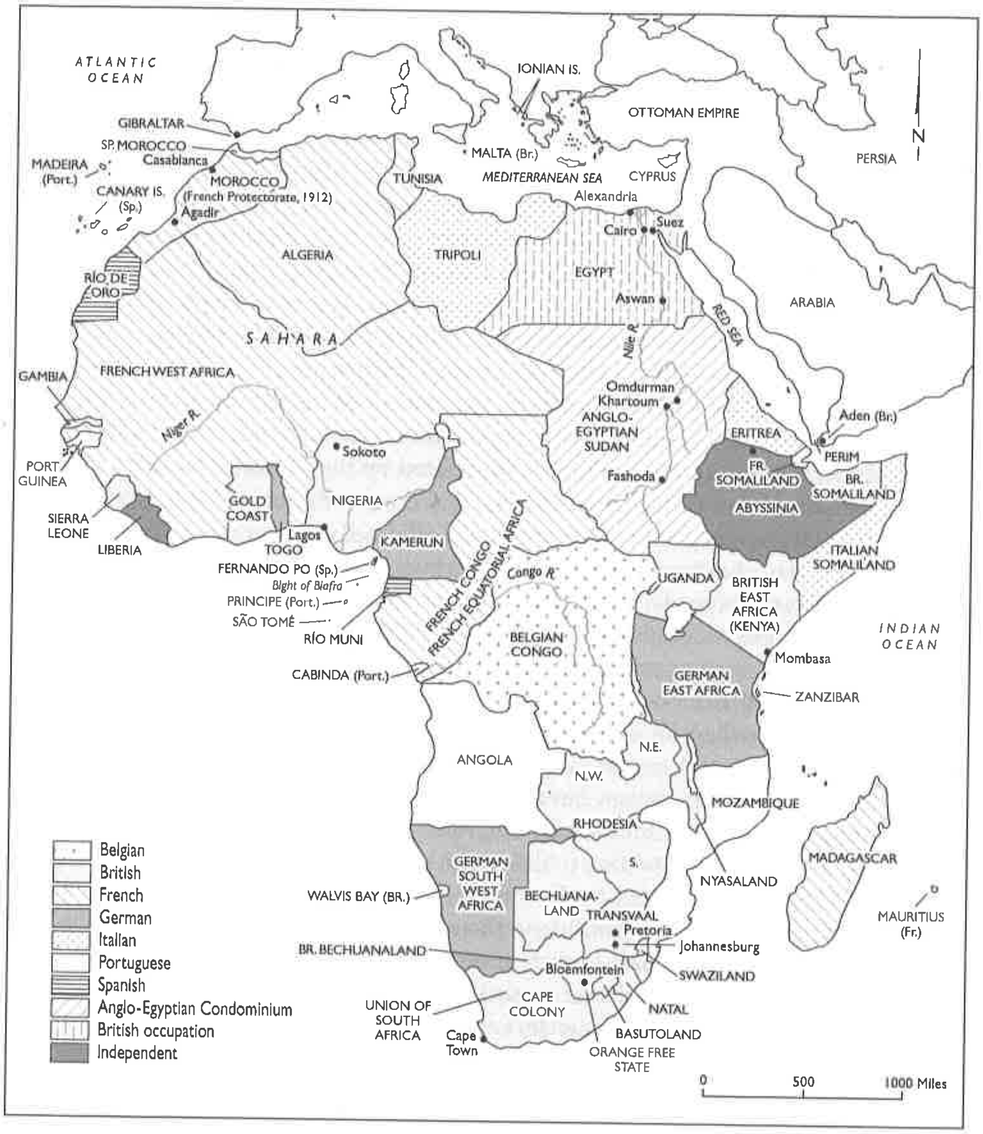
All manner of ideological justifications for the spectacular expansion of British power were advanced by the morally upright Victorians. There was much talk of the solemn responsibility to provide the uncivilized, backward peoples of the colonial world with the fruits of Britain's superior culture, in particular the spiritual inspiration of Christianity and the political benefits of enlightened administration. Some altruistic missionaries and idealistic civil servants seem genuinely to have conceived of their role as that of rescuing the indigenous populations of the non-European world from the superstitions of their primitive religions and the barbarity of their native customs. But the self-justifying invocations of the "white man's burden" barely concealed the underlying motivation for British colonial expansion, which was primarily economic in nature. Despite the rhetoric of religious conversion and political reform, British colonial policy was designed to leave the preexisting social and cultural arrangements untouched and intact. All that mattered to the government in London was that that imperial system contribute to the efficient operation of the worldwide network of trade and investment on which (it was thought) Great Britain depended for its economic prosperity if not its national survival.

France's "Civilizing Mission"

The reasons for France's acquisition of a colonial empire in the latter part of the nineteenth century are less evident. Self-sufficient in food and far behind Great Britain in industrial development, France was much less dependent on foreign trade for its economic well-being. It had no demonstrable commercial incentive to seek guaranteed markets overseas for manufactured goods it could not produce in sufficient quantity or sources of foodstuffs it did not require. Nor did the French financial community seek colonial outlets for accumulated capital in the manner of the large London banking houses. By and large, that portion of French domestic savings that was invested abroad between 1871 and 1914 went not to distant regions of the southern hemisphere but rather to the state treasuries of Southern and Eastern Europe as well as Russia. This was so for two reasons: First, these established governments were presumed, wrongly as it turned out, to afford greater security for investment than more speculative ventures in far-off lands in various stages of political disorganization. More important, the flow of private capital to the developing regions of Eastern Europe was actively promoted by the French government, which to a far greater degree than its British counterpart regarded foreign investment as an instrument of diplomacy. If there was no good economic reason for France to covet a colonial empire in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, there was a persuasive diplomatic reason to direct its financial resources eastward. France's vulnerable position in a Europe dominated by the powerful German Empire that had been formed at its own expense after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) dictated a perpetual preoccupation with continental affairs. By encouraging private investment in the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish empires, as well as in the fledgling states of the Balkan peninsula, the French government endeavored to surround its only antagonist in Europe, Germany, with a ring of states dependent on France's financial support and therefore amenable to its diplomatic influence.

Yet in spite of this preoccupation with the German menace in Europe, France simultaneously embarked on a campaign of colonial expansion that left it in possession of the world's second largest empire by the beginning of the twentieth century. Historians of French imperialism have sought to explain this paradox by emphasizing a motivating factor that does not lend itself to statistical confirmation in the manner of trade patterns or capital flows. This is the intangible phenomenon of the search for prestige. Abruptly displaced by Germany in 1871 as the dominant power on the European continent, France (according to this analysis) sought the psychological compensation of territorial conquest in distant regions of the non-European world where local authorities lacked the political organization and military power to offer effective resistance. "France," in this instance, is meant not the government in Paris (which appears to have endorsed this colonial policy belatedly and somewhat reluctantly) but rather the military commanders and merchants on the spot who pursued their own particular interests. One observer went so far as to describe the French empire as having been built by "bored army officers looking for excitement"; he might have added, "and by railroad builders and traders in search of quick profits."

In any event, by the turn of the twentieth century, approximately a third of the continent of Africa, a large section of Southeast Asia (consolidated politically as "French Indochina"), and a few island chains in the South Pacific had been brought under French control. While imperial Germany was busy consolidating its dominant position on the continent of Europe, France had joined Great Britain in a scramble for control of much of the rest of the non-European world. It is not surprising that French imperialism had received the amiable encouragement of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the architect of his country's continental hegemony. It served to divert French attention from European concerns, particularly the unhealed wound to French national pride



European Penetration of Africa to 1914

represented by the loss of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany after the Franco-Prussian War. It also increased the likelihood of tension between France and England in regard to overlapping colonial claims and therefore reduced the possibility of those two nations joining forces to oppose Germany in Europe.

Germany's Quest for a "Place in the Sun"

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, Britain and France had been joined in this massive land grab by two other European states that sought to carve out for themselves a share of the remaining unclaimed territory of the non-Western world.

The first of these was Germany itself. In the years following Bismarck's retirement in 1890, the impetuous young German emperor, William II, grew increasingly dissatisfied with his erstwhile chancellor's "continental policy." The strategy that had effectively preserved German dominance in Europe began to appear outdated in the age of imperialism. Britain and France were rapidly bringing under their control vast colonial domains containing millions of people and unknown quantities of valuable resources. In 1897, the German kaiser caused a sensation by announcing that his nation would no longer be content with its exclusively European role. Henceforth it would conduct a *Weltpolitik*, a "world policy" that was designed to project Germany's military, economic, and political power into the worldwide competition for empire. In response to London publicists' boastful characterization of Britain's colonial domain as "the empire on which the sun never sets," William II asserted imperial Germany's claim to "a place in the sun." Within a few months, this bold declaration of Germany's new global policy was translated into action. Plans were drawn up for the construction of a German navy that would contest British domination of the high seas. The Chinese port of Kiao-Chow on the Yellow Sea was seized as a potential refueling station for a future German Far Eastern fleet. The German Empire, which since its inception in 1871 had operated as the arbiter of European affairs, abruptly put the other great powers on notice that it intended to play an active role on the world stage.

Each subsequent reassertion of Germany's international ambitions increased the sense of insecurity in London and Paris. In 1898, the kaiser took the occasion of a much-publicized visit to the Ottoman Empire to declare himself "protector" of the 300 million Muslim inhabitants of the earth. This benevolent announcement represented a direct challenge to British and French positions in North Africa and the Middle East. A year later, a German firm acquired from the Ottoman sultan a concession for the construction of a railroad extending from European Turkey to the Persian Gulf. German economic penetration of the Turkish Empire was interpreted by the British and the French as a first step toward German expansion southward into the Mediterranean and that portion of the non-European world that they had reserved for themselves.

The prospect of the dominant land power in Europe challenging Anglo-French imperial interests in Africa and Asia had precisely the effect that Bismarck had feared it would. The kaiser's *Weltpolitik* prompted the leaders of the two imperial nations to resolve their own conflicting claims to colonial territory in the interests of opposing Germany's bid for a global role. France was above all else interested in securing British cooperation in resisting the expansion of German power on the continent. Britain sought French support against Germany's newly acquired naval and colonial ambitions. All that stood in the way of such a mutually beneficial understanding was Anglo-French antagonism along the southern shore of the Mediterranean that had developed during the period of imperial expansion. British control of the two approaches to that body of water (by means of naval bases at Gibraltar at the western end and Alexandria at the eastern) conflicted with France's new imperial interests in Morocco and old ones in Egypt dating from the Napoleonic era. The two powers finally reached an amicable resolution of their North African rivalry in April 1904. France recognized the British occupation of Egypt (with guarantees of French access to the Suez Canal) in exchange for Britain's endorsement of French designs on Morocco (with guarantees of French disinterest in a buffer zone adjacent to Gibraltar that was eventually transferred to innocuous Spain). In March 1906, at a conference of the great powers that had been convened to adjudicate Germany's challenge to France's claim of priority in Morocco, the British government solidly supported the French, and the Germans were forced to back down. Two months earlier, the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, took the extraordinary step of authorizing conversations between the British and French general staffs for the purpose of coordinating strategic plans in preparation for a possible war on the continent. Though London was careful to remind Paris that the Anglo-French entente was not an alliance implying any obligation on Britain's part to defend France, the two nations began to cooperate closely in an effort to check the expansion of German power in Europe as well as in the colonial world.

Russia's Search for Warm Water Ports

The other great power of Europe to conduct a policy of imperial expansion during the second half of the nineteenth century was Russia. While the seafaring nations of Western Europe projected their power across the oceans of the world, the Slavs of Russia had expanded from their home base west of the Ural Mountains into the great empty spaces of Asia. This territorial aggrandizement brought under the control of the European Russians a vast collection of foreign peoples with different religions, languages, and traditions who submitted to Russian rule because they lacked the military power to resist it, just as the indigenous inhabitants of North America proved incapable of blocking the relentless expansion of the American frontier from the Atlantic seaboard to the shores of the Pacific. But as the Russian Empire's expanding frontier began to approach the open seas that lay beyond the Eurasian land mass—the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific—it began to press against the competing interests of other expansionist states. Great Britain in particular was intent on protecting the sea communications to its empire in Asia and therefore strove to prevent Russia from securing a position of power along that route. The result of this British policy, often pursued in partnership with France, was that Russia was condemned to endure one of the most debilitating geographical handicaps imaginable for a state with ambitions of becoming a world power: During the winter months, when ice froze most of her major ports on the Baltic Sea, the North Pacific, and the Arctic Ocean, Russia lacked sufficient harbors to accommodate its navy and merchant marine.

The principal year-round, ice-free ports that Russia did possess were located on the Black Sea. But the narrow body of water connecting these ports to the Mediterranean—the Bosporus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles, collectively designated in diplomatic parlance as "the Straits"—could be closed at will by whatever power occupied its two shores. For centuries, that had been the empire of Ottoman Turkey. Turkish sovereignty over the Straits and the adjacent Balkan peninsula in Southern Europe thus deprived Russia of a secure outlet for its foreign trade and naval power in the Mediterranean. It was to break out of this geographical straitjacket that the Russian tsars pursued during the second half of the nineteenth century an active policy in the southwestern corner of their empire, striving to extend Russian influence in the Balkans and to compel the Turkish government to open the Straits to Russian warships and close them to those of other powers.

The geographical attraction that the Balkan peninsula and the Turkish Straits had for Russia was reinforced by an ideological attraction as well: The largest nationality

England, which had earlier been faced with the alternative of socioeconomic decline or accession to the industrial class through intermarriage or business partnership.

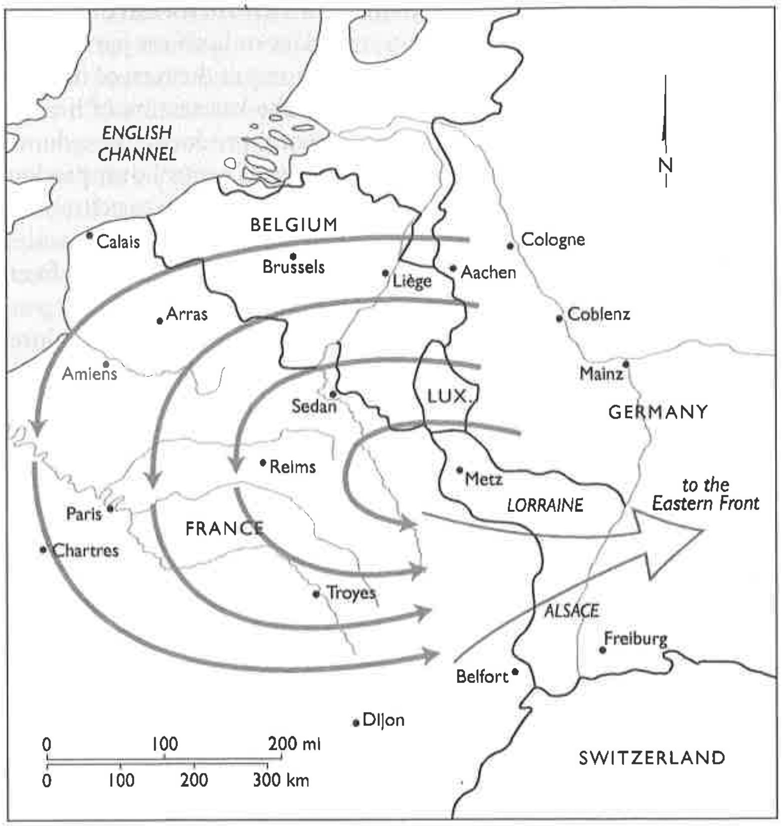
The second striking feature of the German economy at the turn of the century was the extent of its concentration and centralization. The key sectors of heavy industry (iron, steel, coal, armaments, chemicals, and electrical products) were dominated by a handful of gigantic firms that had acquired a degree of control over production and distribution unmatched in the industrial world of that time. The cartelization of heavy industry was actively promoted by the imperial government through a wide range of public subsidies and protective legislation. At the same time, the German financial system was undergoing a similar process of concentration. By 1913 the four largest banking houses controlled 65 percent of the capital reserves of the nation and were closely linked to the oligopolistic industrial firms of the Rhineland-Westphalia complex through a system of interlocking directorates.

Economic and Strategic Anxieties

This formidable concentration of economic power, which united heavy industry, big agriculture, and high finance in a close partnership with the government, produced a spectacular spurt of economic growth in the quarter century before the First World War. A comparison with other industrial nations reveals that Germany had far outdistanced its continental rivals and had overtaken Great Britain as the most productive economic power in Europe. But the future of this economic dynamism seemed threatened by an ominous statistic: Between 1887 and 1912, while the value of German exports increased 185.4 percent per year, the value of German imports rose 243.8 percent. This dramatic surge in imports, which far surpassed that of any other industrial country, signified to the industrial magnates and their government patrons that German prosperity was becoming critically dependent on foreign sources of industrial raw materials and foodstuffs. Equally as disconcerting was the shift in the direction of Germany's foreign trade away from Europe and toward distant markets and sources of supply in the southern hemisphere.

These circumstances were not in themselves sufficient cause for alarm. After all, Great Britain had managed to prosper amid an even more pronounced dependence on imports from far-off lands by exporting its manufactured surpluses in exchange. Theoretically, Germany needed only to expand its exports of finished industrial products to cover its mounting trade deficit. But therein lay what many German industrialists feared was the insuperable limit to future economic growth. The markets of the world were being penetrated, dominated, and increasingly monopolized by the three global economic powers: the United States in Latin America; Great Britain in East and South Africa and in South Asia; and (to a lesser extent) France in West Africa, the Balkans, and Russia. Soon the Russian and Japanese empires could be expected to enter the competition for economic advantage in the Far East. Where could Germany turn for new sources of raw materials and foodstuffs as well as the markets for its manufactured products with which to pay for them?

Virtually every attempt to expand Germany's economic power beyond its traditional sphere of activity met with disappointment after the turn of the century. Efforts to penetrate the economies of North Africa, the Balkan states, and the Ottoman Empire encountered stiff competition from British and French firms that had previously



The Schlieffen Plan in World War I

obtained footholds there. In the two decades before 1914, France had become the principal source of capital investment for the fledgling nations of the Balkan peninsula as well as for the Russian Empire as it entered the first stage of industrialization. These financial relationships began to incite German fears of economic encirclement by Slavic states to the east and south bankrolled by the traditional Gallic enemy to the west. Even the Ottoman Empire, a prime object of German economic ambition since the turn of the century, had begun to receive massive infusions of British and French capital. The fear of economic encirclement in Europe and the Middle East was heightened by ominous indications that the remainder of the world was being informally partitioned into spheres of economic interest by Great Britain, France, the United States, and Japan.

This concern about the limits to German economic growth coincided with the mounting apprehension in military circles about the undeniable fact that the German Empire was losing its margin of strategic superiority in Europe over the combined armed forces of France and Russia. The Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894 had imposed on German strategic planners the heavy burden that Bismarck's diplomacy had successfully avoided, namely, that of having to contemplate the possibility of a war on two fronts. With France and Russia committed to defend each other against a German military attack, the necessity to divide Germany's forces between east and west seemed to preclude the type of rapid breakthrough that had been achieved against France in 1870 when France had no ally in the east. Count Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the imperial general staff from 1892 to 1906, had devised a war plan that purported to overcome the strategic disadvantage caused by the Franco-Russian Alliance. It envisioned the concentration of German military power in the west with the expectation that the numerically inferior French army could be defeated within a six-week period, after which the bulk of the German forces could be transferred to the eastern front to meet the Russian army before it could penetrate Germany's denuded eastern defenses. The Schlieffen Plan rested on two critical assumptions. The first was the preservation of overwhelming German numerical superiority against France. The second was the inability of the Russian Empire, with its primitive system of land transportation, to project its numerically superior army into German territory before the knockout blow in the west. To the consternation of German military strategists, both of these assumptions were undermined by developments in the years before 1914. In 1913 France extended the period of national military service from two to three years. This meant that, despite its stationary population, France would be able to field a frontline army equal to the size of the German army by 1915 or 1916. In the meantime, the Russian government had launched, with French financial assistance, an ambitious program of strategic railway construction linking central Russia with the western frontier. Since the peacetime size of the Russian army exceeded that of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies combined, the possibility that at some future date this mass military force could be rapidly transported to the German border undermined the strategic assumptions of the Schlieffen Plan and caused considerable anxiety among military circles in Berlin.

An Occasion for Preventive War

It was but a short step from this apprehension of economic encirclement and military inferiority to the advocacy of preventive war. The temptation of a quick, surgical strike against France in the manner of 1870 was reinforced by the conviction that a delay of two or three years might prove fatal to Germany's preeminent position in Europe. With France and Russia removed as counterweights to Germany on the continent, Germany could proceed to rearrange the balance of power to suit its military and economic requirements. The cause of economic expansion and preventive war received strong support from numerous pressure groups in German society that represented a wide range of socioeconomic and professional interests. The officers' corps of the army, in conjunction with expansionist-minded civilians in the Pan-German League, pressed for territorial annexations that would simultaneously remove the strategic menace of France and Russia. The upper echelons of the navy, supported by the propagandistic activities of the Navy League, advocated the construction of a fleet equal to Great Britain's and the acquisition of bases and coaling stations abroad. The interlocked interests of heavy industry and high finance encouraged the government to obtain, by diplomatic pressure if possible or military means if necessary, privileged access to the resources and markets of the continent that the German economy required to sustain its dynamic growth.

Amid this atmosphere of fear mingled with ambition, the long-simmering dispute between Germany's ally Austria-Hungary and the independent Balkan kingdom of Serbia boiled over in the summer of 1914 in such a way as to furnish the Reich with