

QUESTION: 4

18/1/25

Examine system of alliances and counter alliances in late 19th & early 20th century. How far were these alliances responsible for outbreak of WW-1 in 1914?

Introduction:

Germany got unified in 1870 post ratification of the **Frankfurt Treaty 1871**. Bismarck adopted a "no-war" strategy and maintained status quo until early 1880s. Later, he was dismissed by Wilhelm-II, who was a **Weltpolitik**. Such German hegemonic perceptions brought about a system of alliances and counter-alliances in Europe.

Alliance System:

(1) FIRST THIRD EMPERORS LEAGUE 1873:

This was a reaffirmation of the Holy Alliance. **Germany, Russia and Austria** joined in the league.

Agenda:

The sole agenda rotated around the reincubation of France and its behaviour towards other great powers.

(2) ~~DUAL ALLIANCE: (1878)~~

^{Germany} ~~Britain~~ and ^{Austria} ~~France~~ entered into a **Secret alliance** to preserve interests

(2) DUAL ALLIANCE (1878)

Austria and Germany enter into an alliance, mainly to contain Russian ambitions in the Balkans.

(3) SECOND THIRD EMPEROR'S LEAGUE (1881-1887)

Britain participated as an observer state in this league. The Austrians wanted to preserve Ottoman Empire but Gladstone (British PM) did not want so.

Benevolent Neutrality:

Germany decided it was to contain Russian agendas in Balkan Region through alliance and not confrontation.

So, they mutually agreed to be neutral in case of war with a third party.

(4) MEDITERRANEAN ALLIANCE (1878):

Participants:

Later on, they include ~~the~~ Britain with Germany, Italy and Austria to contain Russia in the Balkan Region.

(5) TRIPLE ALLIANCE (1882):

Germany, Austria and Italy enter into a triple alliance agreement.

Wilhelm-II was interested in Italy and also wanted to contain French who were trying to intervene in Tunisia.

(6) REINSURANCE TREATY (1887)

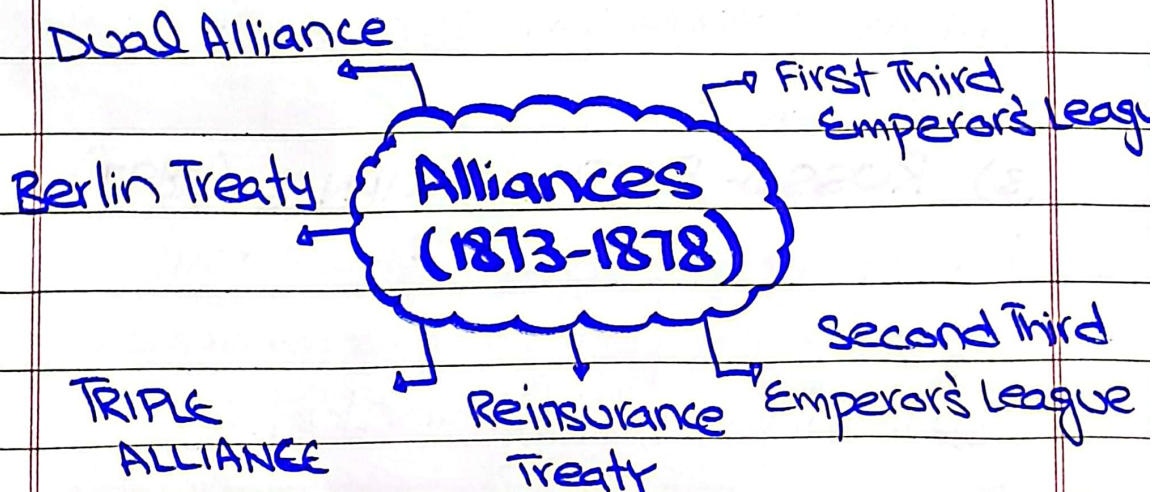
Germany and Russia enter into a secret alliance. The decided terms stated that both countries would remain neutral when the other goes to war.

Limitations:

i) French Attack: If Germany attacks France, Russia would not remain neutral.

ii) Austrian Attack:

If Russia invaded Austria, Germany would not remain neutral.



COUNTER ALLIANCE SYSTEM (1894-1907):

(1) RUSSIA - FRANCE ALLIANCE (1894):

France and Russia decide to enter an alliance and mend their disputes, mainly territorial.

(2) FRANCE-BRITAIN ~ ENTENTE CORDIAL:

Britain, gradually exiting its strategy of "splendid isolation" in 1890's when Germany portrayed hegemonic interests.

They decided to enter an alliance to preserve status quo and sort out differences:

Suez Issue ~ Egypt:

France had invested in construction of Suez Canal but Egypt remained a British colony.

Fashoda Issue ~ Sudan:

British colonies in Sudan were fighting French forces.

(3) RUSSO-BRITISH ALLIANCE: (1897)

Finally, Anglo-Soviets decided on quitting conflict over dominance in Tibet, Iran and Afghanistan.

(4) ENTENTE CORDIALE:

France surrendered in Egypt and decided it to be a British colony.

Britain returned Morocco to France.

This was followed by the

Moroccan Crisis in 1905.

(5) TRIPLE ENTENTE 1907:

Three States namely, Britain, France and Russia joined hands in all domains; economic, military, to form Triple Entente post Moroccan Crisis.

Alliance System and Outbreak of WW-1:

The system of alliances and counter alliances marked the outbreak of WW-1. Others validate this idea:

"The major element of WW-1 was system of secret alliances."

N/D Mahajan

This system is responsible for major conflicts and wars even before the official start of

WW-I. They include:

BOSNIAN CRISIS 1908:

Austria annexed Bosnia. Turned out Serbia had prior interests in the region. Russia backed Serbia; so Germany **in lieu of Dual Alliance** stepped in to back Austria.

Luckily, the crisis did not escalate into a full-fledged war.

Other examples include the Moroccan Crisis, where Wilhelm II's "**open-door speech**" strengthened alliances between France and Britain.

Thus,

Serbian nationalism negatively gained momentum but its bases lied in alliance system. Eventually, an all out war broke-out.

"The two sides had no absolute aims or flexibility on diplomatic fronts"

- Henry Kissinger: Diplomacy

Other factors like Nationalism and Imperialism were also responsible.