What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

Background Essay Questions:
1. What is meant by the phrase “In 1900 Europeans believed the world was their oyster”?

2. World War I lasted four years. What were the war years?

3. The population of Chicago is about 3,000,000. How does that compare to the total number dead and wounded in WWI? (Give your answer as a fraction.)

4. Why might a balance of power prevent war?

5. Otto von Bismark once said that a great war might some day be caused by “some damned foolish thing in the Balkans.” Was he right? Explain.

6. How did the assassination of the Archduke of Austria-Hungary lead to war between Russia and Germany?

7. Define these terms:
   - Balance of power:
   - Entente:
   - Balkans:
   - Nationalism:
   - Ethnic:
   - Spark:

Timeline:
- 1858—Full British rule of India beings.
- 1865—End of American Civil War
- 1871—Franco-Prussian War (France v. Germany)
- 1902—End of Boer War between British and South African Dutch
- 1914—Beginning of World War I (also known as the Great War)
- 1918—End of World War I
- 1919—Versailles Peace Treaty
- 1939—Beginning of World War II
Document A: European Alliances, 1914 (map)
1. The map shows the alliance arrangement in Europe in 1914. In what year did World War I begin?

2. What countries made up the Triple Alliance? What countries made up the Triple Entente?

3. Germany worried about one day having to fight a war on two fronts or two different borders. According to the map, was this fear justified?

4. Italy would switch sides in 1915. Whom did this hurt?

5. If this map were your only evidence, how could you use it to describe one possible underlying cause of WWI?

Document B: “The Crime of the Ages”
1. What is the significance of the date of this cartoon? What is the name and nationality of the cartoonist? Explain their significance.

2. What is the “Crime of the Ages”?

3. How can the cartoon be used to describe the chain of events that led to war?

4. What does the hand in the upper left corner represent?

5. According to the cartoon, what was the underlying cause for war? Explain.

Document C: Growth in Armaments, 1890-1914
1. In millions of British pounds, how much did Germany and Austria-Hungary spend in 1890? In 1914?

2. How much did Great Britain, Russia, and France spend in 1890? In 1914?

3. Which nation spent the greatest percent on its navy? Why would it do that?
4. Is there evidence in the chart to support the thesis that an arms buildup (militarism) was an underlying cause of WWI? Explain.

5. How can an argument be made that an arms build-up might lead to peace? Explain.

**Document D: “The Hammer or the Anvil”**

1. Why is von Bulow worried about England, France, and Russia?

2. What is an anvil? What does von Bulow mean when he says Germany will be “a hammer or an anvil”?

3. Judging from the document, who is Germany likely to “hammer”?

4. One half-century earlier, the Englishman Charles Darwin introduced his idea of evolution, which was based on the idea of survival of the fittest. Do you think von Bulow believed this idea? Explain.

5. How can you use this document to make an argument that the arms build-up was a more important underlying cause than the network of alliances?

**Document E: The British Octopus**

1. In what language, and in what year, was this cartoon created?

2. Translate each of the following:
   - Freiheit der Meere:
   - England der Blutsauger der Welt:

3. What is the main point being made by the cartoonist?

4. In Document C, examine British naval expenses in 1914. Do the Germans have reason to worry about freedom of the seas? Explain,
5. What does this document suggest is an underlying cause of WWI? Explain.

**Document F: Size of Colonial Empires in 1913**

1. What was the total area of British colonies in 1913?

2. What was the combined area of colonies held by the nations of the Triple Entente? What was the combined area of colonies held by Germany and Austria-Hungary?

3. In what different ways could a large colonial population help the economy of the mother country?

4. How can you use this document to argue that imperialism (colonization) was one underlying cause of WWI?

5. How can you use Documents E and F to argue that colonialism was more important than alliances and arms build-ups as the underlying cause of WWI?

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On a separate sheet of paper, write a 5 paragraph essay answering the following prompt. Be sure to cite at least one document per paragraph (two would be best). Staple your essay to this packet when finished.

**What were the three main causes of World War I?**

Structure your essay in this way:

- Introduction
- Paragraph 1: first cause
- Paragraph 2: second cause
- Paragraph 3: third cause
- Conclusion

**Consult the DBQ Planner handout in your “Helpful Resources” packet**