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| **HA Resource Hub Submission Form** | | | |
| **Resource Title: WW1 37 days decision making exercise** | | | **Age Range: A level / able KS4** |
| **Author name and email contact:**  Helen Snelson  [enquiries@history.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@history.org.uk) | **Resource Details: (e.g. how many documents does it consist of? In which order?)**  **8 pages of text in order** | | |
| **Necessary prior learning to complete this:**  Causes of WW1 to 28th June 1914 – or this can be done first and then the detail unpicked. | | **What does it lead to next?**  Detailed study and/or own theories about the causation of WW1 and/or a study of the historical interpretations of the causes of WW1. | |
| **Explanation: How should this resource be used?**  In class the pieces of paper are revealed one by one – read them to get the idea. Online, this may have to be a read, pause, read, for A level students. It introduces students to some of the characters, events and places of the 1914 causation story. Students could simply use it to stimulate questions for further research, or the teacher could then set up discussion. It’s all based on the BBC ’37 days’ docudrama, which is being made available on the BBC for the duration of the crisis. | | | |

**Why did a local conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia escalate into a European and then global war?**

This is a huge historical question. It has been, and remains today, the source of intense debate. There is no right or simple answer. The evidence can be used to support many, complex answers. The dreadful scale of the conflict that ensued, and its impact upon our world today, has ensured that trying to understand how it happened remains a lively and fascinating topic. The quest to understand will probably never end. This activity will help you to better understand the short period know as the July Crisis. Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28th June 1914, Europe entered a period of a few weeks when decisions were made that resulted in most of Europe being at war by the start of August. It is easy to look back and judge with hindsight, but what was it like to be making decisions during that period without a knowledge of what was to come?

**The task**

On 28th June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was assassinated. 37 days later, Germany, Britain, France and Russia (the major powers of Europe at the time) were at war with each other. How did this happen? You are now going to make a series of decisions to follow through the events that led to war. You will follow the steps of some of the leading characters involved, and some of the decisions they made, during this crucial period. As you take this journey, try to remember that these characters were operating in a world with telephone and telegraph, but not 24 hour news and instant mass communication. They were acting on the information they had before them and, crucially, they did not know what was going to happen. Switch off hindsight, we are going back to 1914!

**Decision 1 – 28th June 1914**

Britain is the most powerful country in the world. The British Foreign Office receives 250 telegrams every hour. These are transmitted from every part of the globe via Morse code. You are a civil servant and you have to choose which ones to bring to the attention of the Foreign Minister. The Foreign Office has just received a telegram to say that Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire has been shot while on a visit to the Imperial province of Bosnia-Hercegovina.

Do you:

1) Put it to one side as there is no information as yet as to who the assassin was and this is not the first assassination of a royal in recent years.

2) Get the telegram to the Minister immediately as, if the Archduke has been killed by a Serb, the government in Vienna will be very angry and he will need to be thinking about that.

**Information 1**

What did you do? In London the civil servants chose number 2), although they did not interrupt the Minister’s dinner. On the 29th June it was confirmed that the assassin was a Serb, Gavrilo Princip, who wanted all Serbs to be part of independent Serbia. Optimists thought that Austria-Hungary would not risk action against Serbia because Serbia had a powerful ally, Russia. Pessimists thought that with the Archduke dead, the ‘hawks’ in Vienna would now seize the chance of an excuse to crush Serbia.

*Think: why might European leaders believe that a Balkan crisis could be sorted out without war?*

**Decision 2 – 3rd July 1914**

In Berlin the Chancellor Bethmann von Hollweg is talking with his advisers. The Chancellor knows that Kaiser Wilhelm II will be personally affected by the death of his hunting partner the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand. How should he be advised and encouraged? Discussions are focusing on whether the Serb government might be behind the assassination, what the Russians might do, and what the Kaiser would want. The leading men in Germany see the world as a threatening place; they feel encircled by the alliance of Russia and France, for example. However, the Kaiser is about to go on holiday; it is that time of year in Europe after all.

Do you:

1) Decide to wait and see, holding back any announcements until there is more information. After all, unless handled carefully this could risk a wider European war.

2) Offer Austria-Hungary Germany’s full support for anything it wants to do in relation to punishing Serbia. This assassination is an outrage and swift action could stop any further such attempts.

**Information 2**

What did you do? In Berlin they chose 2). Austria-Hungary was given full support on the 5th-6th July. This is sometimes known as the ‘blank cheque’. The Kaiser seems to have thought that Serbia should be crushed, but was concerned how other Great Powers would react if this was not done quickly. He seems to have thought that if Austria-Hungary took swift action, then they could capitalise on the considerable sympathy across Europe towards Austria-Hungary due to what had happened to the Archduke. He seems to have hoped that other powers, especially Russia, would not have time to act, and that they would secretly be relieved it was all over swiftly and that Europe could move on.

* *Think: what does this action tell you about Kaiser Wilhelm II’s attitude to war as government policy?*

**Decision 3 – 6th July 1914**

In Vienna the old Emperor Franz-Joseph receives the news of the ‘blank cheque’. What should he do?

1) Wait for a few weeks as it is the army holiday season. It is ‘harvest leave’ time and many soldiers will not return to duty until the 25th July. Bringing them back early could cause chaos in the country and alert the rest of the world to the plans for action.

2) Call back and send in the troops on a swift attack on Belgrade to crush the Serb government before anyone else has chance to act.

**Information 3**

What did you do? In Vienna the decision was made to wait. In other European capitals there was concern about what might be happening, there was suspicion that Germany might be involved, but it did not stop diplomats and ministers starting to back up and go on holiday, or at least, make sure they got to their cricket matches (in the case of the British Foreign Minister Edward Grey at least!) Meanwhile, in Vienna they knew that the French President and Prime Minister would board a ship to travel back from Russia to France on 23rd July. At that point, they would be hard to contact while at sea for a few days.

* *Think: how might slow communication help or hinder diplomacy?*

**Decision 4 – 15th July 1914**

In Vienna the decision to take military action against Serbia has still not been taken. Tisza, the Prime Minister of Hungary, is very much against the idea. He fears that win or lose, Hungary will not benefit. Discussions are being held about sending Serbia an ultimatum – a set of demands. What should those demands be?

1) So tough that Serbia could never meet the ultimatum and so Austria-Hungary would definitely launch a military attack. Also, not take too much care about proving that Serbia was behind the assassination.

2) Tough, but not so tough that attack is inevitable. Also, take time to gather the evidence to prove to the international community that Serbia was behind the assassination and that therefore Austria-Hungary is justified in its actions.

**Information 4**

What did you decide? In Vienna they chose 1). However, at first they kept this decision secret and even told the newspapers to tone down their comments about Serbia. In London, the Foreign Minister, Edward Grey, hoped that the countries would be prepared to hold talks about the situation. German military men, such as von Moltke, feared that Vienna’s failure to get on with an attack would make the conflict more complicated. Neither in Germany, nor in Britain, did diplomacy have to be decided by Parliament.

* *Think: how might secret decision making help or hinder diplomacy?*

**Decision 5 – 23rd July 1914**

The Austro-Hungarian Empire has presented its ultimatum to Serbia. It is clear to every diplomat in Europe that the Ultimatum is impossible for Serbia to meet. Austria-Hungary wants war and Germany has restated its full support for its ally. In London Foreign Minister Edward Grey is now focusing upon how to avoid the coming Balkan conflict from spreading to the rest of Europe. He has a great sense of honour and has made personal commitments to work with France. He regards Kaiser Wilhelm II as unstable. His first duty is to protect Britain and her Empire. Should he:

1) Continue to use the influence of the UK to try to organise a Great Power conference to negotiate a peaceful solution?

2) Prepare the British fleet and army for a possible war?

**Information 5**

What did you decide? Actually, Edward Grey did both. However, Germany refused to participate in a Great Power conference and that idea died. It is possible that the suggestion was kept from the Kaiser himself.

* *Think: how can international diplomacy work if some powers do not want to engage?*

**Decision 6 – 26th July 1914 (London)**

The delay in attacking Serbia has given Russia time to engage. She is also dismissive of the error-filled report that places the blame on Serbia for the assassination. In London there is concern about what Russia will do and news is arriving of some Russian mobilisation. Britain has had an alliance with Russia since 1907, but it is not close. There is still suspicion in Britain about Russia’s intentions towards India. Russia is something of a mystery and, as an absolute regime, quite an uncomfortable ally for a democracy. What stance should Britain take?

1) Announce that a German war with Russia will mean war with the UK too, in order to frighten Germany from making any military moves.

2) Keep silent as taking sides could inflame Germany and cause her to declare war.

**Information 6**

What did you decide? Grey decided upon 2).

* *Think: might Germany have stepped back from implementing the Schlieffen Plan if she had been sure that the UK was going to fight?*

**Decision 7 – 26th July 1914 (Berlin)**

Meanwhile in Berlin, Kaiser Wilhelm II is shocked by Russian mobilisation. His military advisers, such as Von Moltke, do not seem to be so shocked. The Kaiser now has to decide:

1) That Germany will not respond as all the Russian mobilised troops are facing towards Austria-Hungary.

2) That Germany will mobilise as, now Russian troops are on the move, it would be very easy to call troops up against Germany too.

**Information 7**

What did you decide? Kaiser Wilhelm decided upon 2). His military advisers argued that this could be a good time to go to war. Germany was encircled by an enemy alliance. Russia was gaining industrial strength year by year. This would be a good time to break the encirclement.

* *Think: to what extent were longer term fears and perceptions informing the decisions made during the July Crisis?*

**Decision 8 – 28th July 1914**

The German ambassador to the UK has been told by Edward Grey that Britain will find it very hard to stand aside if Germany goes to war with France. In Berlin this now calls into question whether Germany can be successful in a war against three major powers. The Kaiser listens to his advisers and has to decide:

1) Whether to swap telegrams with his cousin the Tsar Nicholas of Russia to try to avert war.

2) Whether to order the full mobilisation of the German army.

**Information 8**

What did you decide? The Kaiser did both. The so-called Willy-Nicky telegrams are still much debated. 10 were sent between the two rulers from 29th July to 1st August.\* Were they a serious attempt to keep the peace? Do they actually show that both men were not in control of events, which were now being dictated by military advisers they dare not face down, and the speed of modern communications meaning that mobilisation was happening more quickly than expected?

* *Think: how much were people in control of the descent into war in 1914?*

**Decision 9 – 29th July 1914**

The UK has told France that it will not necessarily get involved in a war. This is very alarming to the French as they have a naval agreement with Britain. If Britain does not get involved, then the French northern coast will be vulnerable, as the British navy protects the Channel on behalf of both countries. Meanwhile in Berlin it is not clear if the French intend to join in the war against Germany on the side of their ally, Russia. Should Germany:

1) Plan to mobilise against France to make sure that France could be crushed if it did decide to fight.

2) Keep troops away from France in the hope that they will keep out of the war.

**Information 9**

What did you decide? In Berlin they decided on 1). The military attitude in Europe at the time was that offence was the best form of defence. The German military high command had developed a military plan, called the Schlieffen Plan. It was a plan to deal with the encirclement of Germany by an enemy alliance. Germany calculated that France would be swift to mobilise, but easy to defeat. The plan was to make a swift, surprise attack through the neutral country of Belgium and defeat France. Then the whole of the German army could be turned on Russia. It was calculated that Russia would be slower to mobilise, but that once it did, it would be harder to defeat than France.

* *Think: how much did this attitude of offence being the best form of defence, contribute to the escalation of the conflict from a regional to a European war?*

**Decision 10 – 1st August 1914**

The British Government is meeting in Cabinet (the name for its meetings). Many of the Cabinet have only recently become aware of how much military cooperation Grey has allowed with the French. Austria-Hungary and Russia are now at war and so the focus is upon how to avoid a war between Germany and France. The Liberal Party is in government and some of them are opposed to joining a European war as a point of principle. Others are prepared to consider war. Anyway, if the Liberal government splits and loses power over the issue, it is clear that the Conservative Party can form a government and they would be prepared to go to war. Should the Cabinet decide to:

1) Send France a message that it will not support her in a war.

2) Send France a message saying that it will support her in a war.

**Information 10**

The Cabinet did not come to a decision. Therefore in Berlin the German government was left to decide whether to risk war with France, not knowing if Britain would get involved or not. There seems to have been confusion over a bad telephone line which led the German government to believe that Britain would definitely keep out if the war did not involve France. However, France mobilised that evening and German troops had entered neutral Luxembourg.

* *Think: at what point does a European war seem to become inevitable?*

**Decision 11 – 2nd August 1914**

The Bank of England is advising the Government that a war with Germany will wreck the UK economy as Germany is the UK’s largest trading partner. Will staying out of a fight between France and Germany allow the UK to be an ‘honest broker’ to preserve its Great Power status? Or, will staying out risk being out of control of what went on in Europe? While tough decisions are being considered in London, they are also being considered in Berlin. Germany’s socialists now have to choose between international workers’ solidarity and nationalism. The French socialist Jean Jaures has been a loud voice calling for European socialists to avoid a war between the Empires. He was assassinated 3 days ago. Now Germany’s socialist representatives in the Reichstag have to decide:

1) Vote to allow the German Government the war credit money it needs to fight.

2) Stand by socialist, rather than nationalist and patriotic, principles and try to avoid ‘an imperialist war’.

**Information 11**

What did you decide? The socialist deputies in the Reichstag decided upon 1). Meanwhile, back in London Edward Grey has decided that Britain must support France in a European war. He has persuaded some other Cabinet colleagues. He threatens to resign and bring down the government if others will not agree. Still no formal announcement is made by the UK.

* *Think: how much power do individual leaders have over the decision to go to war?*

**Decision 12 – 3rd August 1914**

Germany launches the Schlieffen Plan by sending troops into neutral Belgium. For some of the British Cabinet this is a game-changer. Britain has a treaty dating back to 1839 protecting the neutrality of Belgium. Many argue that Britain cannot stand by while an aggressive European power gains control of the ports across the Channel. It is a risk to the security of Britain. Still some Cabinet members refuse to agree to war. What will you do?

1) Issue an ultimatum to Germany stating that if she does not pull back by 11 PM on 4th August then Britain will declare war.

2) Delay making a decision.

**Information 12**

What did you decide? Britain issued the ultimatum on 4th August and declared war on Germany at 11PM. Edward Grey said of the declarations of war: ‘The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our life-time.’

* *Think: in this decision making exercise certain characters and events have been selected to give you a flavour of the times without an overwhelming amount of reading. What are the gaps in this interpretation?*

**Final slide:**

The July Crisis is much debated. Were individuals to blame? Was technology moving too fast for the politicians? Where old hatreds and resentments too strong to be resisted? Were warmongers manipulating the crisis? Did internal issues within the countries lead them to war? Was there a strong military culture that had made war in Europe a certainty?

The historian Margaret Macmillan concludes her book ‘The War that Ended Peace’ (2013) by saying: “We can accuse those who took Europe into war of two things. First, a failure of imagination, in not seeing how destructive such a conflict would be and second, their lack of courage to stand up to those who said there was no choice left but to go to war. There are always choices.” How far do you agree with her conclusion?