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**The assassination of Franz Ferdinand**

**Introduction**

History is rich with the tales about the royal assassinations all over the world, but few assassinations stirred the global peace. Franz Ferdinand the nephew of Austrian emperor Franz Joseph-I was assassinated along with his wife Sophie on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo that triggered one of the most horrible wars of the world: WWI. Ferdinand’s assassination is called the immediate cause of the great war and Serbia is held responsible for the assassination, but the historians have found that many other factors were more responsible for the war. The emergence of Germany as the strongest material power of Europe with its latest technology, the weak confederacy of the Austria-Hungary empire, and the Balkan crises contributed to the setting of the war. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand was preventable, and the Austrian authorities should be blamed for the start of the war as they behaved visionless and puppet while the serious decisions were being expected from them.

**Body**

**Franz Ferdinand, archduke of Austria-Este (1863-1914) was the eldest son of Archduke Charles Louise who was the brother of the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph-I. Franz Ferdinand won the opportunity of becoming heir to the Austrian throne when the actual heir Archduke Rudolph died unexpectedly in 1889. Ferdinand became the Inspector General of the army in 1913. His approach towards Russia was friendly and he was struggling to restore Austro-Russian understanding. British author Fid Backhouse notes that Ferdinand was active to confederate his empire, but the Hungarian reluctance to confederate Austria-Hungary and separatist movements in the empire was a big challenge before him. He was on a visit to Sarajevo (Bosnia) with his wife Sophie when they both were shot mortally by a high school student Princip from Serbia. All the conspirators of the murder were examined and punished in the Serbian court, but such measures by the Serbian authorities could not prevent the war because the Austrians were determined to start the war.**

Austrian authorities revealed their incompetence to prevent the preventable assassination of the Archduke that triggered WWI. Austria was facing internal setbacks since the Treaty of Prague (1866) when they submitted to the Prussian empire leaving much of its territory. Austria had become a fish market of principalities that had no strong feelings of consortium towards the emperor after the famous Dual Alliance (1879) that brought Hungary and Austria together. The Austrian emperor had some hope to mobilize the empire with the ascendance of Archduke Rudolf to the throne, but his unexpected death in 1889 opened the way for Franz Ferdinand who was not a competent aspirant in the view of the emperor. Their differences helped the conspirators to weaken the empire. The Austrian royals wanted to confederate the empire, but this suggestion was vetoed by the Hungarians who apprehended their subjugation. Franz Ferdinand was also a strong believer of the confederacy and he claimed that he would live and die for the confederacy. Francis Roy Bridge notes that the authorities were aware of the separatist movements in the empire and they did not take essential precautionary measures before the Archduke's visit. The date of the visit was not chosen wisely. That date reminded the Serbians their ignoble defeat at the hand of the Ottoman Turks back in the 14th century. Serbia was in a cold conflict with Austria since the Balkan crises of 1912-13. Balkan wars left Serbia as a free territory and then the Serbs were pushing for the union of the South Slavic peoples that would cause Austrian disintegration. All these facts were ignored by the Austrian authorities and so were undermined the grenade attacks on the morning of June 28, 1914. The guards did not know how to save the Archduke and they took wrong moves that threw Franz Ferdinand and his wife into the lap of death.

The post-assassination moves by the Austrian were more unprofessional. The emperor was not in the favor of any offensive, but his advisors like the foreign minister  [Leopold, Graf von Berchtold](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leopold-Count-von-Berchtold) pushed him to attack Serbia in July 1914 under the influence of Germany without comprehending that the Russian reaction could be more severe than they thought. Annika Mombauer writes in her article “July Crisis 1914” that the Austrian general Conrad Graf was assured by the German monarch William-II that Germany would stand behind Austria-Hungary if they start a war against Serbia. The Austrians became over-confident and they gave an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia that was partially accepted, but the Austrians used the unaccepted part of the demands as an excuse to wage war on Serbia. The Austrians were confident that Germany would deter Russia in the case of the Russian invasion, but they did not consider the French president’s state visit to Russia. The French president Raymond Poincare assured Russia that France would respect its alliance with Russia in the wake of war although they did not indicate any quick action against Austria-Hungary. Russia on the other side was in rage due to Austrian attack on Serbia and it declared on July 24 that Austria would not be allowed to crush Serbia. Serbia tried its best to halt war as it accepted the much of Austrian demands, but how a sovereign state like Serbia would, Karl Hjembo wonders, accept the other humiliating part of the demands. For instance, Austria-Hungary demanded the authority over dismissing any Serb official and they demanded the Austro-Hungarian officials' allocation in the Serbian territory. Austrian demands show that they were determined to leave no option for Serbia but war. Austria was too confident that it activated its forces on Russian frontier that directly provoked Russia to order mobilization of its army. Even Germany was unaware of these many consequences of the Austrian offensive. Russian armed mobilization led to the German general mobilization and the French mobilization. Thus, started the Great War that would continue for many years. A small country like Austria threw the great empires into the hell of terrible WWI.

One other argument about the start of WWI is that the assassination of the Archduke was a mere excuse by the powers that were already stretching their muscles to start a war. Empires like Germany, Britain, France, the Ottoman, and other states of Europe were enriched with the latest lethal weapons and their youths were craving to test those weapons on the battlefield. Famous European historian Annika Mombauer endorses this argument, and she says that the Europeans were preparing for wars as it was a wedding feast. Nevertheless, Austria played a pivotal role in starting the war and it cannot free itself from taking responsibility.

**Conclusion**

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie is considered the immediate cause of WWI, but the attitude of Austria towards Serbia after this assassination reveals that they were less mournful for the Archduke and more keen to humiliate Serbia. The Austrian authorities did not take any precautionary measures to prevent the assassination and they exploited this incident for mere political objectives. Apart from that, Austria behaved so irresponsibly after the assassination and it waged unjustifiable war on Serbia that led to the start of the First Great War and consumed millions of Europeans.

**Bibliography**

Herwig, Holger H. (2014) *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918*. A&C Black.

<https://books.google.com.pk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=4fTCAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=The+assassination+of+Franz+Ferdinand+in+Sarajevo+in+June+1914+was+entirely+preventable+and+much+of+the+blame+rests+with+the+Austrian+authorities&ots=FlGDd9UKjT&sig=vLoOQbxl7UHRvwEmWnGx2w9jxSo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false>

This is the second edition of the book that was originally published in 1997. Herwig believes that either no one should be blamed for the war or the whole of Europe because the war was the result of that power which had haunted the whole of Europe. The arms race in Europe was at the peak and all the Europeans knew that they would face a major war soon rather many were prepared joyously to test their power. War was glamorized by the masses of the continent where they could get the chance to show their chivalry. Unfortunately, the book concludes, no one apprehended the miserable consequences of that insanity that started after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand.

Mombauer, Annika. (2017) "July Crisis 1914."

<https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/pdf/1914-1918-Online-july_crisis_1914-2017-01-06.pdf>

A known European historian Annika Mombauer published her article “July Crises 1914” in 2017 to explore the causes of WWI. She believes that the European power was on its climax having so many strong empires and being the leading continent of the world. An arms race was everywhere in Europe and suspicions were penetrating the empires. Everyone in Europe was convinced that a great war is inevitable albeit some powers like France and Britain were struggling to avoid a major crash. Mombauer believes that the incidents of July 1914 are significant in searching for the causes of the war, but the context for the war was set before 1914 with the rise of the German empire and alliances throughout Europe. All the empires like Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary were exploiting the assassination of the Archduke that triggered the war. The article concludes that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the trigger of the war that was the only requirement of the war in such a context.

Bridge, Francis Roy (2002). *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914*. Vol. 6. Psychology Press,

<https://books.google.com.pk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Oo3SgBOD9M0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA8&dq=The+assassination+of+Franz+Ferdinand+in+Sarajevo+in+June+1914+was+entirely+preventable+and+much+of+the+blame+rests+with+the+Austrian+authorities&ots=nWuD9kXYWk&sig=D0wePFdxmozc4WL1OGcbXq78L-o&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Francis Roy Bridge's research article finds the reasons for WWI back in Treaty of Prague 1866 that ended long Austria-Prussian war. The author believes that Austria's submission to the Prussian terms weekend its status as an integrated empire and a week dual monarchy of principalities was striving for its existence. Franz Joseph considered 1866 as a turning point in both domestic and foreign affairs as he was striving to save what was left of monarchy after Sadowa. Austria was striving to have a strong confederacy at the start of the 20th century but its Hungarian part was not in this favor. Many separatist movements were another cause of uncertainty in the empire. Franz Ferdinand was a propagator of confederacy that brought him in the hitlist. Germany, according to Bridge, exploited the assassination of Franz Ferdinand to start the war which had its interests and a strong influence upon Austria.

Hjembo, Karl T. *Sarajevo 1914: An Examination of the Context by which Austria Hungary Responded to the Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand*. Air Command and Staff College Maxwell Air Force Base United States, 2014.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1023431>

The assassination of the Archduke of a weak empire like Austria-Hungary would not be considered a major event than the assassination of the American president William McKinley if there were no exploiters around. Austria had suffered at the hands of Germans earlier in 1866, but they forgot that misery in the wake of recent Balkan crises 1912-13. Austria was conjectural towards the rise of freedom movements in the empire. Austrians blamed Serbia for these movements and attacked Serbia considering that its strong ally Germany would checkmate any other strong enemy like Russia, but this anticipation did not prove much productive. Hjembo explores the causes of war more in the context where Ferdinand was assassinated and less in his assassination along with his wife Sophie.