

What Caused the First World War?

A dyadic approach to explaining the outbreak of the war
in light of the rivalry between Austria-Hungary and
Russia

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Abstract

- This study analyzes the outbreak of the First World War in terms of the dyadic relationship between the two rival countries of Austria-Hungary and Russia. It poses the specific question: How did World War I come about, and why did these two countries declare war on each other in the first place? It also analyzes whether war, from this perspective, could have been avoided. The main thesis argues that while Austria-Hungary and Russia had a fluctuating relationship over a long span of time, in the years leading up to the First World War, their rivalry and the outbreak of the war can be best explained through, not only their personal grievances, but their personal grievances coupled with whom they happened to align or misalign themselves with at the time. This, in turn, helps to understand that the war, in terms of this dyad, could have been avoided.

Austria-Hungary/Russia

- Austria-Hungary formally declared war on Russia on August 6, 1914, just 9 days after its declaration of war on Serbia/the official start of the war

Cause for Conflict

- The main precedence for tension was due to their own territorial ambitions in terms of expansion
- These amounting tensions, coupled with the circumstances of 1914, led to the outbreak of the war

Issue

- The main issue stemmed from unsettled grievances the two countries had with each other dating back to the 17th century
- Austria-Hungary wants war with Serbia to keep them in check
- Russia, due to its interest in the Turkish Straits, as well as its promise to protect Southern Slavs, comes to the rescue of the soon-to-be attacked Serbia as an ally

Key Dates

- Early 1700s-1768 - Start of Rivalry
- 1811 - Russia occupies Belgrade
- 1833 - Agreement of status quo (Ottoman Empire/Poland)
- 1849 - Russian intervention in Hungary
- 1853 - Crimean War
- 1859 - Piedmont attack in Italy
- 1870 - Franco-German War
- 1878 - Congress of Berlin
- 1880s-1890s (specifically 1885) - AUH gives Serbia & Bulgaria terms for peace



- Allied Powers
- Neutral Nations
- Central Powers

Rivals

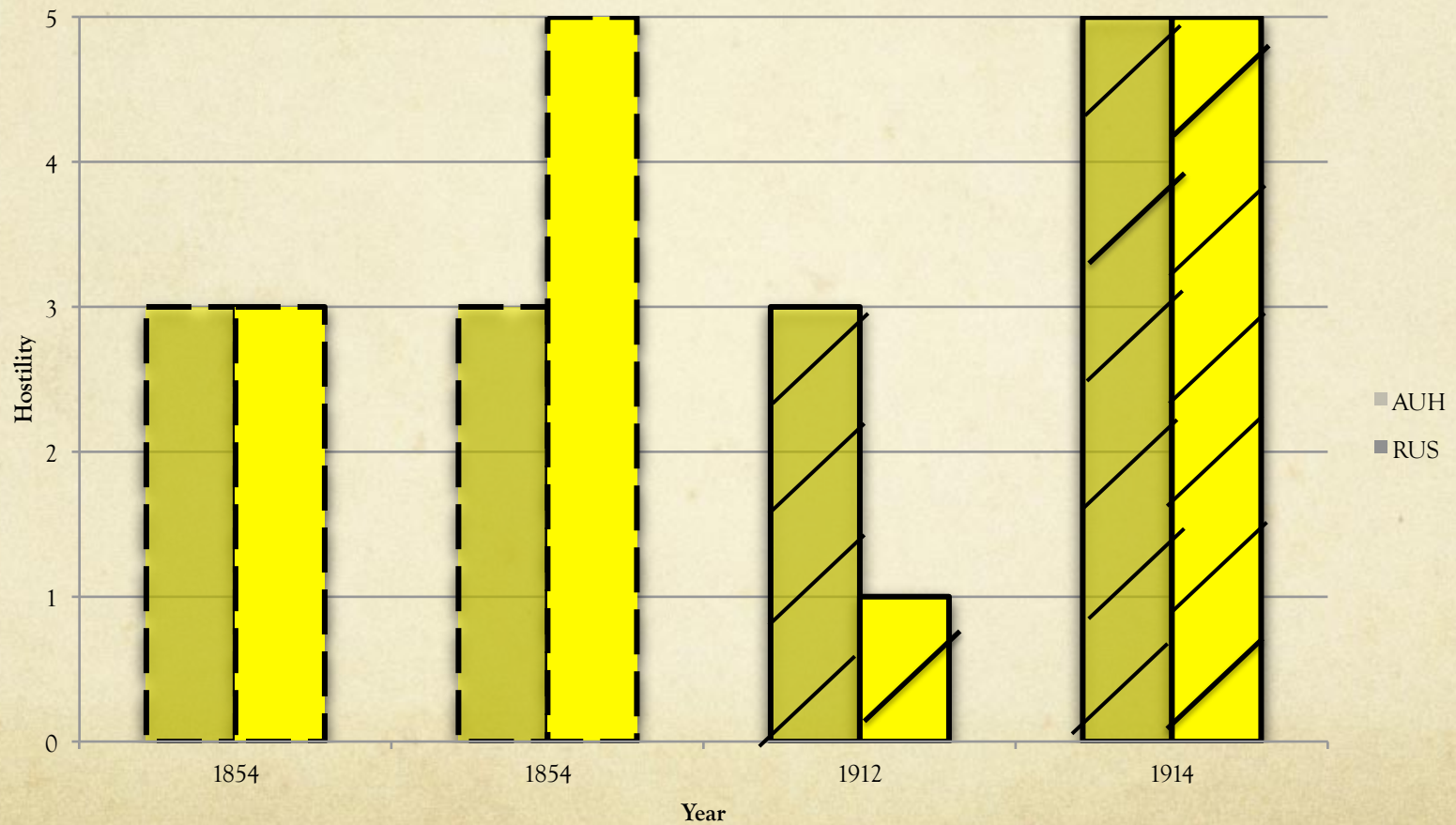
Austria Hungry-Russia
ENDURING RIVALRY
THOMPSON: 1768-1918

Austria Hungry-Russia
ISSUE
Dominate Issue: Policy
Thompson: Positional & Spatial

Source: Thompson and Dreyer; Handbook of International Rivalries

Rivals

AUH-RUS



Source: Thompson and Dreyer; Handbook of International Rivalries

Rivalry Focus Questions

- AUH and Russia's relations fluctuated over time
 - They essentially helped each other when it was beneficial to their country individually
- Thus, they follow Hensel's factors for changes in adversaries' relations
 - 1. Their rivalry was largely brought about by the outcomes and consequences of territorial wars that they chose to fight and the allies they chose

Rivalry Focus Questions (cont.)

- Hensel's factors for changes in adversaries' relations:
 - 2. The issues at stake regarding these Balkan crises and issues of territorial expansion did not have a perfect ending for either party
 - "Austria and Russia could cooperate in this endeavor or they could compete with one another, so they did both" (Thompson and Dreyer 28)

Rivalry Focus Questions (cont.)

- Hensel's factors for changes in adversaries' relations:
 - 3. External actors played a huge role in affecting their rivalry

Key Players Prior to the Outbreak of the War

- Austria-Hungary: Hardliners
 - Conrad - Chief of General Staff
 - Russia vs. German threat
 - Berchtold - Foreign Minister
 - Serbia provides legal basis for war
- Austria-Hungary: Accommodationists
 - Franz Josef - Emperor
 - AUH/GR v. Russia/Serbia - Coercive Diplomacy
 - Tisza - Hungarian Prime Minister
 - Transylvania

Key Players Prior to the Outbreak of the War

- Russia: Hardliners
 - Sazonov - Foreign Affairs minister
 - Krivoshein - Minister of Agriculture
- Russia: Accommodationists
 - Nicholas II - Tsar
 - Kokovtsov - Head of Council of Ministers
 - Economic development

Why does war occur in this dyad?

- War (in terms of the First World War) occurs in this dyad because both parties, while they would have been accepting of limited negotiations, neither wanted limited negotiations at the price of something more valuable – if that was the case, war was acceptable

Contagion

- Main player that brings AUH and Russia to war: Serbia
- Russia, though they mobilize, doesn't formally enter the war until more than a week after the initial declaration of war of AUH on Serbia
- They probably would not have fought without the ongoing war
 - The two countries had an unstable relationship for centuries, yet they were not constantly at war, even if they were at odds

Contagion

- Diffusion mechanisms
 - Alliance, Rivalries, Contiguity
 - Slide Into War Thesis
 - Coercive Diplomacy
 - Contingency (Otte)

Summary: Path to War

- Their rivalry stemmed from territorial ambitions, which eventually led to specific alignments being formed prior to WWI
 - Each step leads to the next, because if it weren't for the ambition, there would be no reason to fight
 - However, they did have ambition, and thus, they made decisions that would affect the outbreak of the war

Conclusion

- In the end, this dyad fought, not only because of underlying tension due to their strained relationship, but because of that paired with the actors they chose to support (specifically Russia supporting Serbia with legitimate action).
- What could have been a localized war inadvertently brought in more players due to alliances – thus, exemplifying the rivalry of the AUH-Russia dyad
- Once started, the war was near impossible to stop, due to the nature of the rivalry.
- Thus, war, in general is heavily influenced by interactions and individual decision-makers making judgments for the collective