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Notes for UG semester 6

Analyse the causes of the First World War. Was this war inevitable ?

The First World War (1914–1918) was the result of a complex interaction of political, economic, military, and ideological factors. No single cause was responsible; rather, several long-term and immediate causes together led to the outbreak of war.

Militarism played a major role, as European powers built large standing armies and navies. The arms race, especially between Germany and Britain, created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. Military plans like Germany's Schlieffen Plan encouraged quick and aggressive action.

Alliance System divided Europe into two hostile camps—Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) and Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia). These alliances turned a local conflict into a general European war.

Imperialism intensified rivalries among European nations. Competition for colonies and markets increased hostility, particularly between Germany, Britain, and France.

Nationalism was a powerful force, especially in the Balkans. Slavic nationalism threatened the stability of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while aggressive nationalism in Germany and France fueled mutual hatred.

Immediate Cause was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary at Sarajevo in June 1914. Austria's declaration of war on Serbia triggered a chain reaction due to alliances.

Historians differ on this question. Many argue that the war was not inevitable, as diplomacy could have resolved tensions. However, the combination of militarism, rigid alliances, imperial rivalries, and intense nationalism made Europe highly unstable. The failure of diplomatic efforts during the July Crisis of 1914 ultimately turned a regional conflict into a world war.

Thus, while the war could have been avoided in theory, the prevailing international environment made it highly likely.