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  By Graydon A. Tunstall
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY GUILTY

The Austro-Hungarian Ultimatum to Serbia

Vienna, July 22, 1914

Your Excellency will present the following note to the Royal Government on the afternoon of Thursday, July 23:

On the 31st of March, 1909, the Royal Serbian Minister at the Court of Vienna made, in the name of his Government, the following declaration to the Imperial and Royal Government:

Serbia recognizes that her rights were not affected by the state of affairs created in Bosnia, and states that she will accordingly accommodate herself to the decisions to be reached by the Powers in connection with Article 25 of the Treaty of Berlin. Serbia, in accepting the advice of the Great Powers, binds herself to desist from the attitude of protest and opposition which she has assumed with regard to the annexation since October last, and she furthermore binds herself to alter the tendency of her present policy toward Austria-Hungary, and to live on the footing of friendly and neighborly relations with the latter in the future.

Now the history of the past few years, and particularly the painful events of the 28th of June, have proved the existence of a subversive movement in Serbia, whose object it is to separate certain portions of its territory from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This movement, which came into being under the very eyes of the Serbian Government, subsequently found expression outside of the territory of the Kingdom in acts of terrorism, in a number of attempts at assassination, and in murders.

It is clear from the statements and confessions of the criminal authors of the assassination of the twenty-eighth of June, that the murder at Sarajevo was conceived at Belgrade, that the murderers received the weapons and the bombs with which they were equipped from Serbian officers and officials who belonged to the Narodna Odbrana, and, finally, that the dispatch of the criminals and of their weapons to Bosnia was arranged and effected under the conduct of Serbian frontier authorities.

The results brought out by the inquiry no longer permit the Imperial and Royal Government to maintain the attitude of patient tolerance which it has observed for years toward those agitations which center at Belgrade and are spread thence into the territories of the Monarchy. Instead, these results impose upon the Imperial and Royal Government the obligation to put an end to those intrigues, which constitute a standing menace to the peace of the Monarchy.

The Royal Serbian Government will furthermore pledge itself:

1. to suppress every publication which shall incite to hatred and contempt of the Monarchy, and the general tendency of which shall be directed against the territorial integrity of the latter;

2. to proceed at once to the dissolution of the Narodna Odbrana to confiscate all of its means of propaganda, and in the same manner to proceed against the other unions and associations in Serbia which occupy themselves with propaganda against Austria-Hungary; the Royal Government will take such measures as are necessary to make sure that the dissolved associations may not continue their activities under other names or in other forms;

3. to eliminate without delay from public instruction in Serbia, everything, whether connected with the teaching corps or with the methods of teaching, that serves or may serve to nourish the propaganda against Austria-Hungary;

4. to remove from the military and administrative service in general all officers and officials who have been guilty of carrying on the propaganda against Austria-Hungary, whose names the Imperial and Royal Government reserves the right to make known to the Royal Government when communicating the material evidence now in its possession;
5. to agree to the cooperation in Serbia of the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government in the suppression of the subversive movement directed against the integrity of the Monarchy;

6. to institute a judicial inquiry against every participant in the conspiracy of the twenty-eighth of June who may be found in Serbian territory; the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government delegated for this purpose will take part in the proceedings held for this purpose;

7. to undertake with all haste the arrest of Major Voislav Tankosic and of one Milan Ciganovitch, a Serbian official, who have been compromised by the results of the inquiry;

8. by efficient measures to prevent the participation of Serbian authorities in the smuggling of weapons and explosives across the frontier; to dismiss from the service and to punish severely those members of the Frontier Service at Schabats and Losnitza who assisted the authors of the crime of Sarajevo to cross the frontier;

9. to make explanations to the Imperial and Royal Government concerning the unjustifiable utterances of high Serbian functionaries in Serbia and abroad, who, without regard for their official position, have not hesitated to express themselves in a manner hostile toward Austria-Hungary since the assassination of the twenty-eighth of June;

10. to inform the Imperial and Royal Government without delay of the execution of the measures comprised in the foregoing points.

The Imperial and Royal Government awaits the reply of the Royal Government by Saturday, the twenty-fifth instant, at 6 p.m., at the latest.
The July Crisis: The Russian Viewpoint

Statement by M. Sazonov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, August 2, 1914

... The Russian Government, to whom the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador at St. Petersburg had communicated the text of the note [i.e., the ultimatum to Serbia] seventeen hours after its presentation at Belgrade, having taken note of the demands contained therein, could not but perceive that some of these demands were impossible of execution as regards their substance, whilst others were presented in a form which was incompatible with the dignity of an independent State. Russia considered that the humiliation of Serbia, involved in these demands, and equally the evident intention of Austria-Hungary to secure her own hegemony in the Balkans, which underlay her conditions, were inadmissible. The Russian Government, therefore, pointed out to Austria-Hungary in the most friendly manner that it would be desirable to re-examine the points contained in the Austro-Hungarian note. The Austro-Hungarian Government did not see their way to agree to a discussion of the note...

Despite the fact that Serbia had reprobated the crime, and had shown herself ready to give Austria satisfaction to an extent beyond the expectations, not only of Russia, but also of the other Powers—despite these facts, the Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade considered the Serbian reply insufficient.

Russia let it be clearly understood that she could accept a peaceful settlement of the question only so far as it involved no humiliation of Serbia as an independent State. Unhappily all the efforts of the Russian Government to this end were fruitless. The Austro-Hungarian Government, which had shunned any attempt at conciliatory intervention by the Powers in the Austrian dispute with Serbia, proceeded to mobilize and declared war officially against Serbia, and the following day Belgrade [the Serb capital] was bombarded. The manifesto which accompanied the declaration of war openly accuses Serbia of having prepared and carried out the crime of Sarajevo. Such an accusation of a crime at common law, launched against a whole people and a whole State, aroused, by its evident inanity, widespread sympathy for Serbia throughout all classes of European society.

In consequence of this behavior of the Austro-Hungarian Government, in spite of Russia's declaration that she could not remain indifferent to the fate of Serbia, the Russian Government considered it necessary to order mobilization [against Austria] ... This decision was rendered necessary by the fact that since the date when the Austro-Hungarian note was communicated to the Serbian Government, and since the first steps taken by Russia, five days had elapsed, and yet the Vienna Cabinet had not taken one step to meet Russia halfway in her efforts towards peace. Indeed, quite the contrary; for the mobilization of half of the Austro-Hungarian army had been ordered....

When questioned by the German Ambassador as to the conditions on which we would still agree to suspend our preparations, the [Russian] Minister for Foreign Affairs declared that these conditions were Austria's recognition that the Austro-Serbian question had assumed a European character, and a declaration by her that she agreed not to insist upon such of her demands as were incompatible with the sovereign rights of Serbia. Germany considered this Russian proposal unacceptable to Austria-Hungary.

The failure of our proposals for peace compelled us to extend the scope of our precautionary military measures. The Berlin Cabinet questioned us on this, and we replied that Russia was compelled to begin preparations so as to be ready for every emergency.

But while taking this precautionary step, Russia did not on that account abandon her strenuous efforts to find some solution of the situation, and she announced that she was ready to accent any proposed settlement of the problem that might be put forward, provided it complied with the conditions laid down by her.

In spite of this conciliatory communication, the German Government on the 31st July demanded of the Russian Government that they should suspend their military measures by midday on the 1st August and threatened, should they fail to comply, to proceed to general mobilization.

On the following day, the 1st August, the German Ambassador, on behalf of his Government, forwarded a declaration of war to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.
The July Crisis: The Serbian Viewpoint

Statement of Prime Minister Pashitch, July 19, 1914 (to be transmitted to foreign governments via Serbia’s accredited ambassadors):

Immediately after the Sarajevo outrage the Austro-Hungarian press began to accuse Serbia of that detestable crime, which, in the opinion of that press, was the direct result of the Great Serbian idea. The Austrian press further contended that that idea was spread and propagated by various [nationalist] associations, such as the "Narodna Odbrana," . . . which were tolerated by the Serbian Government.

On learning of the murder, the Serbian Royal Family, as well as the Serbian Government, sent messages of condolence, and at the same time expressed severe condemnation of and horror at the crime that had been committed. Nevertheless, the press of the [Austro-Hungarian] Monarchy continued to hold Serbia responsible for the Sarajevo outrage. Moreover, the Austro-Hungarian press began to spread various false reports, designed to mislead public opinion, which provoked the Belgrade press to reply in self-defense, and sometimes to active hostility in a spirit of embitterment aroused by the misrepresentation of what had occurred. . . . the Serbian Government hastened to warn the press in Belgrade, and to recommend it to remain calm and to confine itself to simple denials and to the suppression of false and misleading reports. The action of the Serbian Government was ineffectual in the case of some of the less important papers. . . (being) unable to avert these polemics between the Serbian and the Austrian press, seeing that Serbian law, and the provisions of the constitution itself, guarantee the complete independence of the press and prohibit all measures of control and the seizure of newspapers. . . .

The Serbian Government at once expressed their readiness to hand over to justice any of their subjects who might be proved to have played a part in the Sarajevo outrage. The Serbian Government further stated that they had prepared a more drastic law against the misuse of explosives.

. . . During the whole of this period, from the date of the perpetration of the outrage until to-day, not once did the Austro-Hungarian Government apply to the Serbian Government for their assistance in the matter. They did not demand that any of the accomplices should be subjected to an enquiry, or that they should be handed over to trial. . . . It is evident . . . that Austria is contemplating some action, but it is not clear in what sense. It is not stated whether the measures which are to be taken-more especially military measures-will depend upon the reply and the conciliatory attitude of the Serbian Government. But an armed conflict is being hinted at in the event of the Serbian Government being unable to give a categorically satisfactory reply. . . .

The Serbian Government consider that their vital interests require that peace and tranquillity in the Balkans should be firmly and lastingly established. And for this very reason they fear lest the excited state of public opinion in Austria-Hungary may induce the Austrian Government to (take a line of action) which may humiliate the dignity of Serbia as a State, and to put forward demands which could not be accepted.

I have the honor therefore to request you to impress upon the Government to which you are accredited our desire to maintain friendly relations with Austria-Hungary, and to suppress every attempt against the peace and public safety of the neighboring Monarchy. We will likewise meet the wishes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the event of our being requested to subject to trial in our independent Courts any accomplices in the outrage who are in Serbia-should such, of course, exist.

But we can never comply with demands which may be directed against the dignity of Serbia, and which would be unacceptable to any country which respects and maintains its independence.

Actuated by the desire that good neighborly relations may be firmly established and maintained, we beg the friendly Governments to take note of these declarations and to act in a conciliatory sense should occasion or necessity arise.

Source: The Serbian Blue Book (from Collected Diplomatic Documents relating to the outbreak of the European War, British Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 7860, 1915)
Did Austria-Hungary's abandonment of great-power status to concentrate on the Balkans play a major role in generating the Great War?

Viewpoint: Yes. Austria-Hungary in 1914 had become, de facto, another Balkan power, and it was correspondingly indifferent to the consequences of its actions in Europe. (Graydon A. Tunstall, University of South Florida)

In 1914 Austria-Hungary had become a de facto Balkan power. Furthermore, it was correspondingly indifferent to the consequences of its actions after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo (28 June) for Europe as a whole. World War I became inevitable when leading Viennese statesmen determined that war be declared on Serbia in July 1914. Their goal was to put an end to the years of Great Serbian agitation that threatened the Dual Monarchy (Austria-Hungary), thus destroying the militant South Slav movement while responding aggressively to the assassination. In July Vienna was first to opt for war, indeed a Balkan War, despite the implications of that decision. Dual Monarchy leaders unanimously favored a localized war with Serbia but differed greatly on how exactly to realize it.

Throughout the prewar period (1871-1914) the Dual Monarchy lagged behind its European counterparts in their accelerated armaments race, though only the populations of Russia and Germany exceeded that of Austria-Hungary. The defense budget of the empire equaled only one-fourth that of Germany or Russia, one-third that of Great Britain or France, and even less than that of Italy.

The military weakness of Austria-Hungary would have a profound effect on Viennese foreign policy and lead to growing dependence on German support. The debilitating military position of Russia following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) greatly influenced the Dual Monarchy's foreign policy. Likewise, the steady military recovery of Russia presented a major dilemma to Habsburg diplomatic and army leaders throughout the Bosnian Crisis (1908-1909), the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and, specifically, during the July 1914 crisis.

As the main supporter of the dynasty and its power position, the Habsburg army was critical to maintaining unity within the empire and keeping its multinational populace kaisertreu (loyal to the emperor). After 1912, however, nationality problems, particularly the South Slav question, increasingly came to disrupt domestic, diplomatic, and military matters. The Habsburg army, deficient both qualitatively and quantitatively compared to those of the other Great Powers, required many more reservists in the event of an armed conflict. Such military shortcomings would prove potentially fatal to a multinational army.

The Balkans also served as a focal point for Viennese diplomatic relations with its German ally. The major difficulty facing Habsburg diplomats in the prewar period was inconsistent support of Germany for critical Balkan decisions. This policy became particularly manifest during the Balkan Wars. Nevertheless, regular contact among the allied Chiefs of the General Staffs, primarily in the form of written communiqués beginning during the Bosnian Crisis, continued uninterrupted. The combination of the German drive for Weltpolitik (world politics) and the Austro-Hungarian Balkan policy created the tinderbox for a European war.

The role of Germany, as perceived by Vienna, was to prevent Russian intervention in a localized Balkan military campaign. This mission was particularly important at a time when Viennese Balkan policy had been disrupted by the growth in prestige, territory, and population of Serbia as a result of the Balkan Wars. Bulgaria and Turkey, earlier buffers against Serbia, had suffered disastrous military setbacks. Equally disturbing was the apparent loss of Romania to the Triple Alliance. The position of Bucharest was paramount to the Austro-Hungarian military agenda against Russia. Its strategic function was to anchor the Habsburg right flank in a "War Case Russia." Major attention of Vienna, however, was focused on the Balkans.

An energetic Viennese foreign policy in the Balkans dating from the Bosnian Crisis depended upon the support of Berlin. In 1913 the German backing of Balkan policies led both civilian and military leaders in Austria-Hungary to assume a more aggressive stance. This policy had disastrous consequences during the July 1914 crisis.

In 1903 the Serbian royal family was assassinated, and Serbia reversed its diplomatic dependence upon Vienna. The provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, home to the majority of Serbs in the Habsburg monarchy, became magnets for the exploding Great Serb propaganda and agitation and the foci of Viennese policy. The provinces served as outposts for an active Habsburg Balkan policy and attracted expanding Great Serb propaganda and agitation.
The brutal murder of Serbian king Alexander and his wife in 1903 and the accession of the rival family to the throne by a military coup transformed Austrian-Hungarian-Serbian relations. The new Belgrade government immediately sought to emancipate itself from the shadow of Habsburg economic dominance. Suppressing this "Greater Serbia" agitation became a primary objective of Viennese policy toward Belgrade.

In Great Power relations, German policy strongly influenced the formulation of the Triple Entente, with the Dual Monarchy increasingly regarded as merely a German ally. This alliance heralded the slow demise of the Great Power status of Austria-Hungary, as it was first buffeted by unfolding Balkan events and then the realization that it could not control them.

Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Alois Aehrenthal's dynamic Balkan policy, initiated in 1906, became a core component of Viennese foreign policy, thus Balkan matters took precedent over other foreign-affairs concerns. The Bosnian Crisis, the Balkan Wars, and the July 1914 crisis can all be attributed to his forceful Balkan strategy and Vienna attempting to maintain the policy even after Aehrenthal's death in 1911.

Shortly after assuming office, Aehrenthal's energetic diplomatic efforts produced an Austro-Hungarian confrontation with Russia and Serbia, stemming from Habsburg reaction to the perceived threat of the Young Turk revolution (1908) in Turkey and its potential effect on the Balkan provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Aehrenthal sought to maintain Habsburg control of the provinces. His vigorous stance was fueled by his firm conviction that the Dual Monarchy's survival hinged upon its ability to demonstrate a new dynamism. As a result, Aehrenthal pursued a foreign policy fraught with risk, as Habsburg power and prestige became fatefully intertwined with the Balkan arena in the decade before the outbreak of World War I.

Convinced annexation would bolster the Great Power status of Vienna and increase its prestige in the Balkan region, Aehrenthal grabbed the two provinces in 1908. In addition, he believed that the annexation would prevent a Serbian unification of the South Slavs in the provinces and dampen the flourishing "Greater Serbia" aspirations.

The decisive outcome of the Bosnian Crisis resulted from the military weakness of Russia following the Russo-Japanese campaign. Foremost, Habsburg-Romanov relations suffered a serious setback, ending an era of cooperation in the Balkans that was replaced by mutual suspicion and personal antipathy. Habsburg relations with Serbia also became inflamed.

Support by Berlin of Vienna during the Bosnian Crisis set a dangerous precedent in Habsburg-Hohenzollern relations. The energetic Viennese foreign policy in the Balkans increasingly became dependent on the goodwill of Germany, a further indication of the slipping Great Power situation for Vienna.

The Habsburg military leadership increasingly regarded a war with Serbia as inevitable. The first radical revision to Balkan military planning also introduced the growing possibility of Vienna facing a two-front war against both Russia and Serbia (War Case R + B). This scenario, however, presented an unsolvable military dilemma. Austro-Hungarian armies were incapable of launching successful offensives against both opponents.

Habsburg strategic military planning, ostensibly flexible as a result of the increasing danger of a two-front war, designated Serbia as a secondary foe should the far more dangerous Russia intervene militarily in a Balkan conflict. This strategy, however, did not take into account Franz Conrad von Hützendorf's (Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, 1906-1911, 1912-1917) personal obsession with Serbia. Indeed, though Russia posed a far greater military threat, Serbia endangered the all-important Habsburg prestige and standing in the Balkan Peninsula. Conrad gradually increased the allocation of military units to be deployed in the Balkans, at the cost of those to be utilized against Russia, to 40 percent of all troop units in the event of war.

The Balkan Wars revealed the Dual Monarchy's growing diplomatic isolation as Berlin at first displayed indifference to the perceived Balkan problems of Vienna. Thus, Count Leopold Berchtold, Foreign Minister following Aehrenthal's death, had no choice but to adopt a "wait and see" attitude at the commencement of the First Balkan War.

Vienna aggressively sought to preserve its Great Power, as well as its Balkan, position. This stance slowly came to mean utilizing a show of force, if necessary, in its diplomatic dealings in an effort to maintain waning prestige and to counter increasingly failed Balkan diplomatic efforts. As a result of the Balkan Wars, Turkey and Bulgaria, previously military counterweights to Serbia, were militarily neutralized. Romania, allied to the Triple Alliance since
1883 and projected to be a major military factor against Russia, increasingly inclined away from Viennese diplomatic leadership. The once-favorable Balkan military balance now tipped against Vienna and Berlin. Thus, during the winter of 1913 and early on into 1914 an atmosphere of apprehension hovered over Vienna and increased the belief that the very existence of the Dual Monarchy was now at stake. Its power in its "sphere of influence," the Balkans, became increasingly challenged.

Intensifying pressure to utilize the military option encouraged Viennese leaders to contemplate a military response to the escalating chronic and demoralizing South Slav situation. The use of force was deemed acceptable if it was needed to halt Serbian machinations. A new militant Habsburg attitude was rapidly forming. Both civilian and military leaders assumed a more aggressive stance. This trend produced disastrous results during the July 1914 crisis.

The role of Germany as a military ally to prevent Russian intervention in a localized Balkan military campaign became particularly important when Viennese policy was disrupted by the growth in Serbian prestige, territory, and population as a result of the Balkan Wars. The long-term results of the 1912-1913 period of cataclysmic upheaval did not bode well for Vienna. Serbia had become a potentially more powerful military power. Its ethnic brethren in the South Slavic territories made the anti-Habsburg policy of Serbia appear to be a life-or-death threat to Vienna.

The consequences of the Habsburg diplomatic moves began to materialize. For example, Romania began casting a more-covetous eye toward Transylvania. The question of maintaining loyalty to the Dual Monarchy in an age of growing nationalistic aspirations became critical to Habsburg diplomacy during 1914—a direct result of the Balkan Wars.

The three Balkan crises solidified the Viennese conviction that only forceful diplomacy, coupled with partial mobilization, threats of invasion, or the issuance of ultimatums, would be effective against a recalcitrant Serbia. Balkan policy making increasingly assumed a more-militant attitude. In just a few months the loss of prestige and self-esteem caused a shift in Habsburg diplomacy from one of caution and prudence to one of desperation, illusion, and exhaustion. Increasingly, armed force appeared to offer the only solution to the predicament of Vienna in the Balkans. This outlook set a dangerous precedent for the July 1914 crisis, as the South Slav provinces became viewed as a source of grave danger to the long-term viability of the Dual Monarchy.

In June 1914 Austria-Hungary became fixated on the more-assertive foreign policy of Russia. The following month, after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the militarized diplomacy of Vienna, ostensibly so successful on three occasions during the Balkan Wars, opted for war on the assumption that the situation would only worsen in time. Austria-Hungary concluded that the Russian and Serbian threats would better be dealt with sooner rather than later. A key factor in understanding the Viennese position in July 1914 is that they would not and could not launch a war against Serbia without German support vis-à-vis Russia, and that, once support had been obtained, Vienna could focus its full attention on preparing to launch a Balkan war that hopefully remained localized regardless of the circumstances.

Once all the leading figures had literally determined that there would be war against Serbia during the first days of July, the die was cast. On 5 July the Hoyos mission to Berlin to receive German backing proved to be successful. With their support secured, Berchtold took control over the next measures and deflected any interference. The Hoyos mission provided the key event that unleashed war.

The point to be emphasized is that, early in the July crisis, the decision to resolve the Serbian problem by a declaration of war emanated from Vienna. Once Germany issued its infamous "blank check" assuring the protection of Austria-Hungary against Russia, Vienna determined the timing and manner of future measures by cutting off any unwanted options.

In fact, by 7 July a major Common Ministerial Council had determined that Austria-Hungary would begin hostilities. Unanswered were the significant questions of "when" and "how." A final decision could not be reached because the powerful Hungarian prime minister István Tisza balked at the decision for war without careful diplomatic preparation. The next week was utilized to convince Tisza to join the other members in their determination to settle militarily accounts with Serbia.

A 19 July Ministerial Council meeting, now with Tisza's approval, agreed to issue purposely an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia. The mandate, with a forty-eight-hour deadline to respond, was delivered on 23 July. Delivery
of the ultimatum was delayed because of a meeting held between the French president and foreign minister with Russian leaders in St. Petersburg to prevent collusion.

The delivery of the ultimatum to Belgrade was accompanied by troubling reports reaching Vienna regarding Russian military measures. Habsburg leaders, nonetheless, continued to pursue their Balkan military campaign plans, hoping that a rapid invasion of Serbia would preclude Russian armed intervention. In addition, Viennese leaders anticipated that allied German support would keep St. Petersburg in line.

However, the partial mobilization was proclaimed on 25 July and the first mobilization day on 28 July, but the actual invasion of Serbia could not occur until August because of the terrible railroad situation (only one rail line led to the Serbian frontier). The diplomatic situation could not last that long. The result was disastrous military defeats on both fronts during the first campaigns.

By 1914 Austria-Hungary was fighting for its preservation. Its sphere of influence was reduced to the Balkans: the Dual Monarchy's days as a Great Power were over. The prolonged conflict of World War I sounded its death knell—and the conflict was initiated by the Austro-Hungarians all for it to remain a Balkan power!