Failure of European Diplomacy: Printable Documents

**Important:** You do not need to print these documents if you are working online.

Letter from the Emperor of Austria-Hungary to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany (July 2, 1914)

*About the Document: A letter written by Emperor Franz Josef a few days after the assassination of his nephew in Sarajevo, Bosnia. The attachment included was written by the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs a month before the assassination and warns of Russian aggression.*

By Your warm and sympathetic condolence You have given me renewed proof that I have in You a sincere friend worthy of confidence and that I may count upon You in every hour of grave trial.

... I take the liberty of sending to You the subjoined mémoire prepared by my Minister of Foreign Affairs, which was drawn up before the terrible catastrophe of Sarajevo, and which now, following that tragic event, appears particularly worthy of attention.

The attack directed against my poor nephew is the direct consequence of the agitation carried on by the Russian and Serbian Pan-Slavists whose sole aim is the weakening of the Triple Alliance and the destruction of my Empire.

*The Annexe Mémoire written one month earlier*

Serbia whose policy has for years been animated by hostility toward Austria Hungary, and which is completely under Russian influence, has achieved an increase of territory and of population that exceeded by much her own expectations ...

The thought of freeing the Christian Balkan people from Turkish rule, in order to use them as a weapon against central Europe, has been for a long time the secret thought of Russian policy, by the traditional interest of Russia for these people.

... But while France seeks the weakening of the Monarchy, because that is favorable to her ideas of *révanche*, the designs of the empire of the Tsar have a much greater extent ...

... For these reasons those in charge of the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary are convinced that it is in the common interest of the Monarchy, as in that of Germany, to oppose energetically and in time in this phase of the Balkan crisis, the development foreseen and encouraged by Russia by a pre-concerted plan.

from "The Autograph Letter of Franz Josef to the Kaiser"
Austrian Ambassador's Report on Level of German Support (July 5, 1914)

About the Document: Austria-Hungary's ambassador met with the German kaiser a week after the assassination of the Austrian archduke. This report conveys his impressions on the question of German support for military action against Serbia.

After lunch, when I again called attention to the seriousness of the situation, the Kaiser authorized me to inform our gracious Majesty that we might in this case, as in all others, rely on Germany's full support ... as far as our action against Serbia was concerned ... Russia's attitude will no doubt be hostile, but to this he had been for years prepared, and should a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia be unavoidable, we might be convinced that Germany, our old faithful ally, would stand at our side. Russia at the time was in no way prepared for war, and would think twice before it appealed to arms. But it will certainly set other powers on to the Triple Alliance and add fuel to the fire in the Balkans. He understands perfectly well that His Apostolic Majesty in his well-known love of peace would be reluctant to march into Serbia; but if we had really recognized the necessity of warlike action against Serbia, would regret if we did not make use of the present moment, which is all in our favor.

from "The Blank Check" telegram

German Ambassador to Great Britain Describes the British Perspective (July 27, 1914)

About the Document: The British foreign minister commends Serbia's favorable response to the majority of the demands of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. Britain insists that Germany pressure Austria-Hungary to accept Serbia's response and withdraw its war threat to Serbia.

Sir E. Grey had me call on him just now and requested me to inform Your Excellency as follows:

The Serbian Chargé d'Affaires had just transmitted to him the text of the Serbian reply to the Austrian note. It appeared from the reply that Serbia had agreed to the Austrian demands to an extent such as he would never have believed possible; except in one point, the participation of Austrian officials in the investigation.

Should Austria fail to be satisfied with this reply, in other words, should this reply not be accepted at Vienna as a foundation for peaceful negotiations, or should Austria even proceed to the occupation of Belgrade ... it would then be absolutely evident that Austria was only seeking an excuse for crushing Serbia. And thus, that Russia and Russian influence in the Balkans were to be struck at through Serbia. It was plain that Russia could not regard such acquisition with equanimity, and would have to accept it as a direct challenge. The result would be the most frightful war that Europe had ever seen ...

Now he was turning to us with the request that we should make use of our influence at Vienna either to get them to accept the reply ... as satisfactory or as the basis for conferences. He was convinced that it lay in our hands to bring the matter to a settlement ...

I found the Minister irritated for the first time. He spoke with great seriousness and seemed absolutely to expect that we should successfully make use of our influence to settle the matter ...

Since we have already refused one English proposal for a conference, it is impossible for us to waive ... this English suggestion also. By refusing every proposition for mediation, we should be held responsible for the conflagration by the whole world, and be set forth as the instigators.

from "The Bethmann-Hollweg Telegram to the German Ambassador"
Personal Correspondence Between the German Kaiser and the Russian Czar (Summer 1914)

About the Document: With Europe on the brink of war in the summer of 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Czar Nicholas II of Russia engaged in a personal correspondence. The kaiser sought assurance from the czar that Russia would not militarily support Serbia in a war against Austria-Hungary. In the telegrams, Kaiser Wilhem II is "Willy," and Czar Nicholas II is "Nicky." Kaiser Wilhelm, Czar Nicholas, and King George V of England were cousins.

July 29, 1:00 A.M.
Tsar Nicholas to Kaiser Wilhelm

In this serious moment, I appeal to you to help me. An ignoble war has been declared to a weak country. The indignation in Russia shared fully by me is enormous. I foresee that very soon I shall be overwhelmed by the pressure forced upon me and be forced to take extreme measures which will lead to war. To try and avoid such a calamity as a European war I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to stop your allies from going too far.

Nicky

...

July 29, 6:30 P.M.
Kaiser Wilhelm to Tsar Nicholas

I received your telegram and share your wish that peace should be maintained. But as I told you in my first telegram, I cannot consider Austria's action against Servia an "ignoble" war. Austria knows by experience that Servian promises on paper are wholly unreliable. I therefore suggest that it would be quite possible for Russia to remain a spectator of the Austro-Servian conflict without involving Europe in the most horrible war she ever witnessed. Of course military measures on the part of Russia would be looked upon by Austria as a calamity we both wish to avoid and jeopardize my position as mediator which I readily accepted on your appeal to my friendship and my help.

Willy

July 29, 8:20 P.M.
Tsar Nicholas to Kaiser Wilhelm

Thanks for your telegram conciliatory and friendly. Whereas official message presented today by your ambassador to my minister was conveyed in a very different tone. Beg you to explain this divergency! It would be right to give over the Austro-Servian problem to the Hague conference. Trust in your wisdom and friendship.

Your loving Nicky

...

July 31, 1914
Kaiser Wilhelm to Tsar Nicholas

On your appeal to my friendship and your call for assistance began to mediate between your and the [A]ustro-[H]ungarian Government. While this action was proceeding your troops were mobilised against Austro-Hungary, my ally. [T]hereby, as I have already pointed out to you, my mediation has been made almost illusory.

I have nevertheless continued my action. I now receive authentic news of serious preparations for war on my Eastern frontier. Responsibility for the safety of my empire forces preventive measures of defense upon me. In my
endeavors to maintain the peace of the world I have gone to the utmost limit possible. The responsibility for the
disaster which is now threatening the whole civilized world will not be laid at my door. In this moment it still lies in
your power to avert it ...
Willy


August 1
Tsar Nicholas to Kaiser Wilhelm

I received your telegram. Understand you are obliged to mobilise but wish to have the same guarantee from you
as I gave you, that these measures do not mean war and that we shall continue negotiating for the benefit of our
countries and universal peace deal to all our hearts. Our long proved friendship must succeed, with God's help, in
avoiding bloodshed. Anxiously [sic], full of confidence await your answer.
Nicky

August 1
Kaiser Wilhelm to Tsar Nicholas

Thanks for your telegram. I yesterday pointed out to your government the way by which alone war may be
avoided. Although I requested an answer for noon today, no telegram from my ambassador conveying an answer
from your Government has reached me as yet. I therefore have been obliged to mobilise my army.

Immediate affirmative clear and unmistakable answer from your government is the only way to avoid endless
misery. Until I have received this answer alas, I am unable to discuss the subject of your telegram. As a matter of
fact I must request you to immediatly [sic] order your troops on no account to commit the slightest act of
trespassing over our frontiers.
Willy

from The Kaiser's Letters to the Tsar, copied from the government archives in Petrograd, and brought from
Russia

Kaiser Wilhelm Responds to Russian Mobilization (July 30, 1914)

About the Document: Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany received a telegram explaining that
Russia is mobilizing its troops in support of Serbia. This is a transcript of the kaiser's
candid responses, filling the margins of that telegram. These notations offer a rare
glimpse of the highly charged emotions running beneath the surface of official
communications on the eve of World War I.

If mobilization can no longer be retracted--WHICH IS NOT TRUE--why, then, did the Tsar appeal for my
mediation three days afterward without mention of the issuance of the mobilization order? That shows plainly that
the mobilization appeared to him to have been precipitate, and that after he made this move pro forma in our
direction for the sake of quieting his uneasy conscience, although he knew that it would no longer be of any use,
as he did not feel himself to be strong enough to STOP the mobilization. Frivolity and weakness are to plunge
the world into the most frightful war, which eventually aims at the destruction of Germany. For I have no doubt left
about it: England, Russia and France have AGREED among themselves ... to take the Austro-Serbian conflict for
an EXCUSE for waging a WAR OFextermination against us ... [E]ither we are shamefully to betray our
allies, SACRIFICE them to Russia-thereby breaking up the Triple Alliance, or we are to be attacked in common by
the Triple Entente for our FIDELITY TO OUR ALLIES and punished, whereby they will satisfy their jealousy by
joining in totally RUINING US ... So the famous " CIRCUMSCRIPTION" of Germany has finally become a
complete fact, despite every effort of our politicians and diplomats to prevent it. The net has been suddenly thrown over our head, and England sneeringly reaps the most brilliant success of her persistently prosecuted purely ANTI-GERMAN WORLD-POLICY, against which we have proved ourselves helpless, while she twists the noose of our political and economic destruction out of our fidelity to Austria, as we squirm ISOLATED in the net... All my warnings, all my pleas were voiced for nothing. Now comes England's so-called gratitude for it! From the dilemma raised by our fidelity to the venerable old Emperor of Austria we are brought into a situation which offers England the desired pretext for annihilating us under the hypocritical cloak of justice, namely, of helping France on account of the reputed "balance of power" in Europe, i.e., playing the card of all the European nations in England's favor against us!

from "Kaiser's Comments on the Outbreak of the World War"

French President’s Address Following German Declarations of War (August 4, 1914)

_GENTLEMEN,—France has just been the object of a violent and premeditated attack, which is an insolent defiance of the law of nations. Before any declaration of war has been sent to us, even before the German Ambassador had asked for his passports, our territory has been violated. The German Empire has waited till yesterday evening to give at this late stage the true name to a state of things which it had already created.

For more than forty years the French, in sincere love of peace, have buried at the bottom of their heart the desire for legitimate reparation.

...

On the very morrow of the day when we and our allies were publicly expressing our hope of seeing negotiations... Germany suddenly declared war upon Russia, she has invaded the territory of Luxemburg, she has outrageously insulted the noble Belgian nation, our neighbour and our friend, and attempted treacherously to fall upon us while we were in the midst of diplomatic conversation.

from "A Raymond Poincaré speech"