The 48-hour ultimatum placed on Serbia by Austria-Hungary during the July Crisis (July 1914)

Historical Security Council

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Introduction

On July 23rd, 1914 Austria-Hungary, with support from Germany, delivered a 48-hour ultimatum to the nation of Serbia. The preamble referred to Serbia’s permitting the anti-Austrian criminal activities of secret societies and press propaganda to go unchallenged. In the document, Austria-Hungary clearly states three goals of their empire. The first was for Serbia to take responsibility for the murder of Franz Ferdinand, the second being the right to police ‘anti-Austrian’ groups in Serbia, and the third was the right to persecute conspirators in Austrian court. If these requests were not met, Austria-Hungary would invade the nation. By the next day, all other nations in the world knew of the ultimatum and began making plans to mobilize their military and prepare for possible war. After Serbia denied the ultimatum, Austria-Hungary was forced to invade Serbia sparking the conflict that is known as World War I.

Council

The Historical Security Council for OCMUNC XII will feature fifteen nations. The nations in attendance will be Austria-Hungary, Belgium, the British Empire, Bulgaria, China, France, the German Empire, Greece, Italy, the Ottoman Empire, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and the United States; note that none of the nations above will have veto power. Although the United Nations was not around in 1914, it is the obligation of the body to create a resolution and act as a delegation of the United Nations, had it existed. Your role as a delegate in the United Nations Security Council of 1914 is to react to this situation in a diplomatic fashion. You must protect regional and global safety while not infringing on the rights of any nation. The first day of the conference will be July 23rd, 1914. As our council progresses, events occur all
over the world. Be prepared to deal with the current situation as well as others that may arise along the course of the next few days.

**History**

Archduke Franz Ferdinand traveled to Sarajevo, Bosnia in June 1914 to inspect the imperial forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, territories bordering the Ottoman Empire, Montenegro, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the unstable Balkan region. These former Ottoman territories were annexed by Austria-Hungary in 1908. This annexation, formally known as the Bosnian Crisis, caused much unrest in Serbia, as the nation viewed the annexation as a threat from Austria and mobilized their army to respond to this perceived threat. The crisis began in July 1908 when the Committee of Union and Progress, the so-called Young Turks, staged a revolution in Constantinople, established a constitutional government, and inaugurated a reform program.¹

The Committee of Union and Progress first began as a secret society in 1889 by a collection of medical students and doctors devoted to overthrowing the absolute rule of Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II. Abdul Hamid II was determined to cease the regression of the Ottoman Empire and decided that the best way to aid the empire was through a revival of Islam throughout the Muslim world and pan-Islamic unity, centered on the notion of a strong caliphate (an Islamic state led by a supreme religious and political leader). Through his leadership, the empire viewed reform in the bureaucracy and population registration as well as the opening of new schools and colleges. Hamid also began the Hijaz Railway project to help Muslims in their pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca, a fundamental journey in the religion of Islam. Though the

Ottoman Empire greatly benefited from these reforms, Abdul Hamid II began atrocities that would damage the empire and his political career.

This began with the Armenian Massacres in 1894-1896 that were committed against the Armenian population of the empire, as they were protesting for economic and social reforms for equality. More than 100,000 were killed as a result. He later began the use of a secret police to silence dissent. With these inhuman actions, as well as others, the Committee of Union and Progress staged a revolution, as stated above, in 1908. Due to the revolution, the Ottoman Empire became increasingly weak and Baron Aloys von Aerenthal, foreign minister of Austria-Hungary, saw his empire’s chance to assert its dominance in the Balkans by means of annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Aehrenthal later met with the Russian foreign minister, Alexander Izvolsky, to end any objections to the annexation in exchange for Austria-Hungary to have no objections to opening the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits to Russian warships.

Russia needed the support of Austria-Hungary as the empire was going against the 1841 convention that banned men-of-wars from using the Bosporus and Dardanelles, trapping the Russian Navy in the Black Sea. If Russia was to break this agreement without any support, they would have provoked Britain who had a major naval presence. With the support of Austria-Hungary, this became less of a threat. Though the agreement was made, the annexation occurred before Izvolsky was able to converse with Britain and France about the use of the straits. Due to this, Ivolsky believed that Aehrenthal had tricked him and the citizens of the Russian Empire expressed strong opposition towards the annexation. As a form of revenge, Ivolsky suggested that Serbia should receive territorial compensation from Austria-Hungary to balance the land that was annexed. Austria-Hungary refused to do so and Germany began to support Austria-Hungary.

in its stance. Overall, Russia accomplished nothing but allowing themselves and Serbia to grow closer, and permanently damaging their relationship with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Congress of Berlin had met in 1878 to divide the enduring no-man’s-land of Europe, the Balkans, along lines more reflective of the then-current balance of power. This was done in order to halt further expansion of the Russian Empire after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 in which the empire tried to take advantage of changing European geopolitical conditions. Concerned with preventing future conflicts, the nations of that conference sought to minimize the Russian Empire’s power in which Otto van Bismarck took lead. Otto van Bismarck was the first chancellor of unified Germany and ultimately led the Berlin Conference for a display of German leadership in foreign affairs. He balanced the interests of Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary in hopes that a compromise could be made. Bismarck played the role of the mediator and did so well due to his diplomatic persona; he was a pacifist to international affairs unless they directly related to Germany.

There was a significant change in Bismarck in the duration of the conference and this was caused by his inability to trust the alliance made with the Russian Empire prior to the separation of the Balkan territories. As he could not rely on the alliance, Bismarck sought to form relations with as many potential enemies as possible. This began the alliances that would manifest themselves in the July Crisis and World War 1.

Ultimately, certain Bulgarian territories were given back to the Ottoman Empire, most importantly Macedonia. Albania and Thrace also remained Ottoman. Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro were recognized as independent, sovereign states. Austria-Hungary was given the right to occupy and administer Bosnia and Herzegovina temporarily, but the provinces officially

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remained possessions of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, when the annexation did occur on October 6, 1908, it led to the immediate involvement of seven other nations, specifically Russia, Britain, Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, France, and Germany.

The Turks, who had ruled Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Bulgaria for hundreds of years, were unhappy with the annexation and independence of Bulgaria. Due to the steady decline in the Ottoman Empire’s military and diplomatic powers over the past generations, the Turks could do little to cease the annexation other than protest and boycott Austrian trade. In 1909, the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary came to an agreement in which the Ottomans would accept the Austrian takeover in exchange for a financial settlement. Ultimately, the Bosnian Crisis permanently damaged relations between Austria-Hungary on one side and Russia and Serbia on the other.

Though the Turks were powerless to protest the empire of Austria-Hungary, a new organization was being formed in Serbia to protest the annexation. This formation began a mere two days after Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. On October 8, 1908, a group of Serbian men, many of whom were generals and officials, held a meeting at City Hall in Belgrade. They founded a semi-secret society-\textit{Narodna Odbrana} (National Defense), that gave Pan-Slavism (the principle or advocacy of the union of all Slavs or all Slavic peoples in one political organization) a focus and organization. The focus of the group was to recruit and train members of the organization for a possible war between Serbia and Austria-Hungary, as well as spread anti-Austrian propaganda. \textit{Narodna Odbrana} continued to work against Austria-Hungary until 1909 when the empire pressured the Serbian government to stop any anti-Austrian action.

In 1911, many old members from \textit{Narodna Odbrana} formed a new organization that would continue the terrorist actions called \textit{Ujedinjenje ili Smrt} (Unification or Death) that later
became known as the Black Hand. The organization grew rapidly and by 1914, there were several hundred members, a majority of which were Serbian army officers. Though the Black Hand originated from the original anti-Austrian group of 1908, they had a completely different goal: the creation of a Greater Serbia, by use of violence if needed. Violence became a major tactic of the group, and the Black Hand began training guerrillas, saboteurs, and arranged political murders. Training appeared to become useful later in the year 1914 when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

In the years following the Bosnian Crisis, a new leader of Austria-Hungary emerged. Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (December 18, 1863 - June 28, 1914) had the titles of Archduke of Austria-Este, Royal Prince of Hungary and Bohemia, and heir to the Austro-Hungarian Throne. He was born to the Archduke Karl Ludwig of Austria and his second wife Princess Maria Annunciata of Bourbon-Two Sicilies. When his cousin, Duke Francis V of Modena, died in 1875, Ferdinand was named the emperor’s closest heir, causing him to gain the last name Este and title of future Austro-Hungarian Emperor. As tensions rose between Serbia and Austro-Hungary, Ferdinand traveled to the city of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of June 1914. The purpose of the trip was to inspect the imperial armed forces stationed along the Serbian border, but Ferdinand also treated the visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina as the beginning

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of a campaign trail to rally support and nationalism for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, starting with the city of Sarajevo.

At this point in the time, the Black Hand organization that had originated in Serbia was creating a plan to assassinate Franz Ferdinand. Dragutin Dimitrijevic, the chief of the Intelligence Department in the Serbian Army and the head of the Black Hand, sent three men to assassinate Ferdinand. The three men were instructed to commit suicide after the killing of the Archduke and were each given a phial of cyanide, a form of poison, as well as a revolver and grenades. Dimitrijevic chose the men as they all suffered from tuberculosis and would not live very long; he did not wish for any men to live to tell about the event. The prime minister of Serbia was given advance warning of the assassination plot and though he was a sympathizer of the Black Hand’s objectives, he feared that war would begin if the plan proved successful. He therefore gave orders for the arrest of the three men as they left the country but these orders were never carried out.

On June 28, 1914, Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, were touring the city of Sarajevo in an open car with little security surrounding them. This gave The Black Hand a perfect opportunity to begin their plan. Their first assassination attempt was a bomb thrown at the car by Nedjelko Cabrinovic resulting in the injury of an officer and a few bystanders but failed to kill Ferdinand. Later that day, however, Ferdinand and his wife Sophie took another open car ride to the hospital in order to visit the injured officer. While driving, Ferdinands driver, who was unfamiliar with the city rides, took a wrong turn down Appel quay and Franzjosefstrasse, running into another member of The Black Hand, Gavirilo Princip. Princip saw the two royals and took his opportunity, firing at the Archduke and Duchess at point-
They both died within the hour. At the trial of the two attackers, they admitted to being followers of the “Pan-Slavist” movement. With the support of Russia, this organization aimed for the unity of all Slavic people.

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand, when news broke, shocked the world and caused many to support the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On July 5th, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany pledged his country’s unconditional support for whatever action Austria-Hungary would choose to do in the form of a telegram known as the “blank check.” Unfortunately, Austria-Hungary remained silent for a month before deciding what to do.

Ferdinand’s death was not greatly mourned by the government or the Emperor himself, Franz Josef, with whom he had never been close with and had frequent political disagreements. However, it did provide the empire to take action against Serbia, and they argued that the Serbian government was implicated in the machinations of the Black Hand and responsible for the death of Franz Ferdinand. It was then decided that the Austro-Hungarian Empire would take the opportunity to stamp their authority upon the Serbians and cement their influence on the Balkans permanently. This was the last crucial decision made before the day of July 23rd in which Serbia would be presented with an ultimatum.

Guided Questions

1. What was your country’s relationship with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia prior to the ultimatum?

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2. Is there substantial evidence to support the claim that the Serbian government has been funding the Black Hand?

3. What was your nation’s response to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand?

4. Does your nation hold a militaristic position in the conflict?

5. Economically, politically, militarily, and socially, who are your nation’s allies? Enemies?

6. How did your nation respond to the collapse of the Triple Alliance? The Ottoman Empire?