The First World War was a global military conflict centred on Europe which began on the 28th July 1914 and continued until the 11th November 1918. All the world’s most powerful nations were engaged in the conflict, forming two opposing alliances. The Allies (focused around the Entente; Great Britain, France and Russia) and the Central Powers (originally focused around the triple alliance; Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy). More than 70 million soldiers, including 60 million European, were mobilised in one of the largest wars in history. More than 9 million soldiers were killed, largely due to the huge technical advances in firepower which were unmatched in terms of mobility. This was the seventh deadliest conflict in world history and paved the way for various political changes such as revolutions in the affected countries.

Long term causes of the war include imperialistic foreign policy on the part of the world powers, such as the British, German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian Empires, France and Italy. The murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austro-Hungary, on the 28th June 2914 by a Serb nationalist was the direct catalyst for the outbreak of war. It resulted in an ultimatum to the Kingdom of Serbia. With Germany’s support, Austro-Hungary prepared an ultimatum which Serbia, in principle, could not accept. With the support of France, Russia encouraged Serbia to reject Austria’s ultimatum. Several alliances which had formed over the previous decades were invoked and within a few weeks, the world powers were at war. By means of the great powers’ colonies, the conflict quickly spread across the globe.

The conflict began on the 28th July with the Austro-Hungarian invasion of Serbia, followed by Russia’s general mobilisation on the 30th July. The 1st August saw Germany forced to mobilise and thereafter followed the German invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg and France, as well as a Russian attack on Germany. Once the German march on Paris was halted, the Western Front found itself in a

stalemate war of attrition with trench lines which barely moved until 1917. In the East, the Russian army made successful advances on the Austro-Hungarian forces but were forced back by the German army. Further fronts opened after the Ottoman Empire joined the war in 1914, Italy and Bulgaria in 1915 and Romania in 1916. The Russian Empire collapsed in 1917 and Russia left the war after the October Revolution later that year. After a German offensive along the Western Front in 1918, the USA entered the war and the Allies drove back the German army in a series of successful offensives. Germany, which had its own problems with revolutionaries at that point, agreed to a ceasefire on the 11th November 1918, which later became known as Armistice Day. The war ended in victory for the Allies.

At the end of the war, four large empires – German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman – had become militarily and politically defeated and ceased to exist. The subsequent states of Germany and Russia lost large parts of their territory, whilst the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires were completely liquidated. The map of central Europe was redrawn with far fewer states. The League of Nations was formed in the hope of preventing any further such conflict. The European nationalism and dissolution of empires and the consequences of Germany’s defeat and the Treaty of Versailles are commonly accepted factors which contributed to the Second World War.