How and why did the Alliance System form?

L/O – To understand the key features of the alliance system before 1914

Starter – How was the most powerful nation in Europe? Who was second?
An alliance is an agreement between one or more states to work together.

Alliances usually involve making promises to protect the other country against nations who are not in the alliance.

These promises are usually made by the signing of treaties.
Why were Alliances made?

The aim of forming alliances was to achieve collective security – having alliances with other powerful countries deterred your enemies from attacking you.

If a country started a war with one nation it would have to fight all its allies as well.

Alliances were often made in reaction to national rivalries – when one country felt threatened by another, it often looked to secure friendships with other nations.

By 1900, Europe was full of national rivalries.
Why were alliances made?

There were two main sources of national rivalries:

The creation of Germany in 1871 out of the many smaller Germanic states had been opposed by France, resulting in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. The Germans invaded France and forced the French to sign a humiliating peace treaty. This meant that France and Germany hated each other.

The **Ottoman** (Turkish) **Empire** in Eastern Europe was crumbling. Russia sought to take advantage of this to expand west into the Balkans. Austria-Hungary wanted to prevent Russian expansion.
Click on each person to see a brief summary of their country's attitudes to the rest of Europe in 1900. Press start to begin.
A dinner party

Can you remember which of these countries didn’t get on? Seat them at this dinner table without placing enemy nations next to each other. Press start to begin.
The Rise of Germany

• By 1900, the Great Powers in Europe were beginning to divide themselves into two separate groups. A major cause of this had been the growth in power of Germany and its rivalry with other powers, particularly France.

• Before 1871, Germany was a collection of small, independent states. On 18th January 1871, these states were brought together as a single country by its famous chancellor, Otto von Bismarck.
German Unification 1871

• As part of unification, the King of Prussia, **Wilhelm I**, was crowned emperor (or Kaiser in German).

• Also in 1871, Germany defeated France in war. The Germans made France **pay 200 million francs compensation** and give the border territories of **Alsace and Lorraine** to Germany.
Isolating France

• The Germans knew that France would look for revenge as soon as possible.

• To prevent this, Bismarck made agreements with other countries so that France would have no allies with which to fight against Germany in the future.
The Dual Alliance

The **Dual Alliance** was created in 1879, when Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire signed a treaty promising to help each other if either nation was attacked by Russia.

They also promised ‘**benevolent neutrality**’ if one of them was attacked by any other country. This meant that if, for example, France attacked Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire would side with Germany, but would not actually fight.

Both Germany and Austria-Hungary were worried about Russia but for different reasons.
The Dual Alliance

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany

Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary

We are worried that Russia and France will team up to surround and attack us.

We are worried about Russia’s influence in the Balkans. That is too near!
Look at this map showing threats to Germany and Austria.

Why do you think the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires formed an alliance?
The Triple Alliance

In 1882, Italy joined the alliance, now making it the **Triple Alliance**.

Italy was a **new nation** and was looking to take advantage of any European problems in the Mediterranean or in the Balkans to increase its territory.

With powerful friends like Germany and Austria-Hungary, this would be much easier.

However, despite joining the alliance, Italy was still anxious to maintain **good relations** with Britain and France.

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**Why do you think Italy was likely to switch to other European alliances if the conditions were right?**
| Germany and Russia had fought a war in 1870–71. |  |
| The Germans did not get on well with the French. |  |
| Germany was ruled by Kaiser Wilhelm II. |  |
| Austria-Hungary was ruled by Tsar Nicholas II. |  |
| Germany and Austria-Hungary were worried about being encircled by France and Britain. |  |
| Italy joined the Triple Alliance because they were worried about Britain’s navy. |  |
| The Austro-Hungarians were mainly worried about Russian ambitions in the Balkans. |  |
| Italy was not fully committed to the Triple Alliance. |  |
The Franco-Russian Alliance

The other alliance that shaped European politics at the turn of the century was the alliance between Russia and France.

France and Russia were not natural allies. Russia was ruled by an autocratic monarch (the Tsar) whilst France was a democratic republic.

They were also geographically distant, being at opposite ends of Europe.

However, they were brought together by their mutual dislike of Germany and Austria-Hungary.
The Franco-Russian Alliance

Russia and France first signed an **entente** in **1891** in which they promised to consult each other in the event of a crisis in Europe.

In **1894**, the French and Russians consolidated their relationship by signing an **alliance** (a stronger agreement). Each promised military assistance if the other was invaded. This was called the **‘Dual Entente’**.

The idea was to create a **balance of power** between the German-Austrian-Italian alliance and the Russian-French alliance.

*Who do you think was in the stronger position: the French and Russians or the Germans, Austro-Hungarians and Italians?*
The Triple Entente

Where does **Britain** come in?

Strangely, it didn’t at first. In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, Britain distanced itself from European issues. There were several reasons for this:

- Britain was an island and had the strongest navy in the world. There was little chance of being invaded.
- Britain was wealthy and highly industrialized. Its navy and empire gave it a strong global trading position.
- The British were mostly concerned with running their vast global empire.

These factors meant that the British did not feel they needed allies.
What created the Triple Entente?

However, in the early years of the 20th Century, Britain ended its isolation from European events and became involved in the alliance system. This was largely because of the growing power of Germany:

- The Germans began trying to gain an empire of their own, which they felt was necessary if Germany was to become a great world power.
- Germany supported the Boers who were fighting the British in South Africa.
- Growing German militarism – Germany started expanding its armed forces, especially its navy.

Britain felt its naval supremacy and global empire were being threatened.
The Triple Entente

In 1904, Britain signed an agreement with France. This was called the Entente Cordiale. It was not a full alliance but it showed a warming of relations between France and Britain.

In 1907 Britain signed another similar agreement with Russia. This was the Anglo-Russian Entente.

These agreements between Britain, France and Russia created the Triple Entente.

The ententes did not have the same weight as the alliance between Germany and Austro-Hungary. Britain was not committed to giving military assistance to either France or Russia.
Map Quiz

Answer the questions by selecting the correct countries on the map.
Press start to begin.

start
solve
Chronology Quiz

Drag each agreement or alliance into the space corresponding to the year in which it was signed. Press start to begin.

start
What did all this mean?

The key idea in the alliance system was **collective security**. It was thought that because all the major European powers had strong allies, a major war could not break out. An attack on one power would lead to a counteroffensive not only by that country, but their allies too – the stakes were just too high.

However, the alliance system can also be seen to have **increased** the threat of war...
War Scenarios

The alliance system meant that a small conflict could quickly escalate. Follow these two war scenarios to see why. Press start to begin.
France, Britain or Russia?

I have a very long border with Germany. This makes my country vulnerable to an attack.
France, Britain or Russia?

Germany has an alliance with Austria and I am alone. An ally on the eastern borders of these countries would help to protect me from them.
France, Britain or Russia?

All the other countries of Europe have allies. I am beginning to worry about being left out and isolated.
France, Britain or Russia?

I have a border with Germany and Austria her ally. I am worried that I might have to fight both of these countries.
France, Britain or Russia?

I have settled my disagreements with the French over territories in Africa. An agreement with the French seems like a sensible next step.
France, Britain or Russia?

Germany attacked me once, defeated me and made me sign a humiliating peace treaty. I am worried that this might happen again.
France, Britain or Russia?

The Kaiser says he wants Germany to have a “place in the sun”. He really means an overseas Empire. I am worried that he might try to take territory away from my Empire.
France, Britain or Russia?

My people are desperate to get revenge on Germany.