

Stephen Van Evera / for 17.42

GREAT WARS OF EUROPEAN HISTORY, 1740-

1. The War of Austrian Succession, 1739-1748. Prussia and allies vs. Austria and allies. Prussia seeks Silesia in order to grow Prussian power, increase Prussian security. Prussia wins, gains Silesia.

2. The Seven Years' War: Anglo-French, 1756-1763. Britain v. France. Brits win.

3. The Seven Years' War: Continental, 1756-1763. Prussia v. Austria, Russia, France. Austria tries to recover Silesia, fails. It ends in a bloody draw.

4. American Revolution, 1775-1783. U.S. colonies v. Britain. U.S. wins independence. But this was more of a sidebar than a great war.

5. French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1792-1815. France vs. Austria, Prussia, Russia, Britain, others. France loses. French monarchy restored, several million people killed. Causes: revolutionary France and its oligarchic neighbors each feared subversion by the other. France attacked others when it felt it had a fleeting advantage. The French also hoped they could spread revolution throughout Europe. In short security fears and perceived offensive opportunities, plus windows, fueled the war. Aftermath: the Concert of Europe.

6. Crimean War, 1854-56. Russia v. Britain, France, Ottoman Empire (Turkey). Britain, France & Ottoman Empire defeat Russia. 825,000 people killed. Main cause: a tangle of misperceptions. (1) "The Russians Are Coming!" The British and French held ill-founded fears of Russia. (a) They had illusions of Russian power: "Russia is the strongest state in Europe!" Russia actually was mired in backwardness, no where close to being top dog. (b) They had illusions of Russian expansionism: "Russia plans to carve up Turkey!" Russia had no such plans. (2) "The French are coming!" Russia, thinking back to 1792-1815, had ill-founded fears of a "revolutionary" France and wrongly thought that Britain and Austria shared these fears. (3) "The Turks Are Collapsing." Russia falsely expected Turkey's imminent demise. Turkey actually took decades to collapse. Other causes: (4) Religious conflict--"The Quarrel of the Monks," 1690-1852. Catholics and Orthodox Christians quarrel over control of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and other Christian holy sites in Palestine. France favors Catholics, Russia backs Orthodox. Landlord Turkey must referee. The trouble starts

here. (5) Russia uses bullying tactics against Turkey over Orthodox religious rights issues. This leads others to wrongly believe Russia has wider aggressive intentions. (6) The French leader (Napoleon III) is an insecure and irresponsible demagogue who inflames religious issues to play to the French crowd--a symptom of the fact that France is in early process of democratizing? (7) Russia seeks agreement on how to partition Turkey, suggests a Russian-British agreement on terms of partition. Britain doesn't think the Ottoman empire's collapse is immediate and believes Russia's suggestions that it be partitioned is a veiled threat to destroy it. This causes false British alarm at Russian intent.

7. Wars of German Unification, 1864-1871. Prussia v. Denmark, 1864, Prussia wins. Prussia v. Austria, 1866, Prussia wins. Prussia v. France, 1870-71, 250,000 killed, Prussia wins.

8. World War I, 1914-1918. The Central Powers (Germany and Austria) v. the Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia). Entente wins. 20 million people killed.

9. World War II, 1939-1945. The Axis allies (Germany, Italy, Japan) v. Grand Alliance (Britain, France, Poland, USSR, United States, others). Allies win.
35-60 million people killed.

10. Cold War, 1947-1989. Soviet Union v. NATO, Japan and others. Hot wars waged as part of the Cold War: Korea 1950-53 (2-4 million killed), Vietnam 1945-75 (2.5 million killed), Afghanistan 1979-92 (1 million killed), Angola 1975-91 (1 million killed), Cambodia 1979-89 (64,000 killed), Nicaragua 1983-91 (30,000 killed), El Salvador 1979-89 (70,000 killed), Guatemala 1954-96 (200,000 killed), Indonesia 1965 (500,000 killed), East Timor 1975-1999 (200,000 killed), and others. NATO wins.

11. The War of Civilizations ("War on Terror")? 2001-.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu/>

17.42 Causes and Prevention of War
Spring 2018

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.