

QMUN V 2025

Briefing Paper – Historical Committee

The Issue of Militarism and the Arms/Naval Race

Background Information:

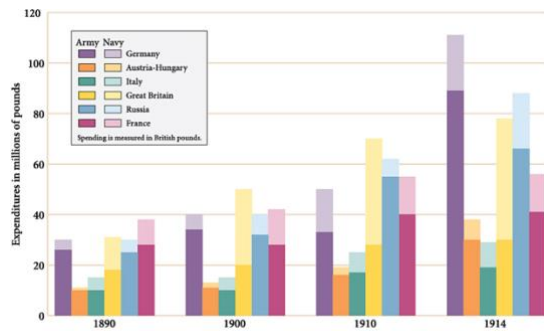
It is June 1906, and the first dreadnought battleship has been recently launched by Britain, with Germany also putting plans into place for its incorporation into their own naval fleet. This new class of battleships is far superior to anything that has been seen before, its fast, easily manoeuvrable design and increased capacity for artillery clearly indicating the extent to which the arms and naval race, driven by militaristic and nationalist aims, has escalated in the past three decades.



The Industrial Revolution of C.19th saw great advancement and expansion within industry, the armaments sector being in no way exempt from this. From the 1880s significant developments have taken place in the production of armaments, the invention of machine guns, long range artillery weapons, etc. promising that any future European or Global conflict will be more destructive and have more casualties than any which have come before it.

The impact of industrial developments in recent years has been extenuated by the generally nationalist and militarist foreign policies of, in particular, the ‘Great Powers’ (Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary) which have contributed to increased military expenditure and investment in new military technologies. Although, for millennia, European international relations have been underlined by conflict and desire for expansion, recent advancements in armaments have provided this longstanding state with new consequences. In addition to this, the formation, in opposition to one another, of (supposedly secret) alliance blocks across Europe (in the shape of the Triple-Alliance and Franco-Russian alliance) has also increased potential for a European or world war, giving opportunity to the destruction made possible by military expansion.

An arms race can be defined as competition between rival powers to keep pace with, or surpass, each other militarily. During the period of the late C.19th/early C.20th the desire to achieve this aim can generally be understood in line with matters of empire; Britain, for example, continues to expand its navy in an attempt to retain the naval supremacy that protected its economically crucial “place in the sun”, while the far younger nation of Germany challenges this action in aid of the establishment of its own empire and international influence.



Data Source: *The Hammond Atlas of the Twentieth Century* (London: Times Books, 1996), 29.

In a world of developing imperialism, strong navies are vital in achieving economic and political influence on an international scale. Consequently, naval rivalry has been a key aspect of the arms race of the first decade of C.20th.

The British 1889 Naval Defence Act, through formalising the ‘two power standard’, acted, in

a way, as a statement of intent from Britain to remain the strongest naval power in the world. This directly prompted increased naval expenditure from France, Russia, Japan, and the USA, all of whom viewed the expansive British navy as a threat to their own international interests. This response, in turn, only prompted further British expenditure, thus indicating the beginning of a naval arms race.

The race was further developed by the introduction of the Second German Naval Law in 1900 which, inspired by the kaiser’s twin admiration and hatred of British naval strength, set out plans to double the size of the German fleet in a manner which clearly suggested that Germany intended to become the primary opponent of the British navy.

As Britain, Germany, and all other nations have responded to each other’s military developments (both gains and, in the case of Russia, losses) in what is becoming a formidable arms race, tensions between nations have been steadily growing, leaving the state of international relations at a crucial crossroad; will the arms race and the move away from diplomatic approaches to peace that it implies continue to develop or, will we succeed where in 1899 we failed and manage to restore some sense of global peace?

Past Attempts at Solutions:

In 1899, the First Hague Peace Conference was convened on the recommendation of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia with the primary aim of limiting or reducing armaments. The conference was, however, evidently unsuccessful. This key issue failed to be addressed in the final act, while those declarations which were agreed upon were not ratified, leaving militaries, and so international tensions, to continue to grow.

Points to Consider:

- What actions can be taken to limit or stop the naval and arms races taking place?
- What can be done to address the nationalist and expansionist policies behind this display of militarism?
- What is the impact of the arms race on emerging nations such as those in the Balkans?

-How will the recent Moroccan crisis and Russo-Japanese war have influenced the aims and dynamics underlying international diplomacy?

Helpful Links:

<https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/strategy-and-arms-races-the-case-of-the-great-war/>

<https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/arms-race-prior-to-1914-armament-policy/>

<https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/naval-race-between-germany-and-great-britain-1898-1912/>

<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-finact-1899>

Note on the Historical Committee

A reminder to delegates that this historical committee will be debating as though it is 1906. Therefore, no 'future information' should be used/mentioned in debate. Building on this, the aim of the historical committee is not to recreate the past, but to learn from it, approaching issues and creating solutions as they had not been before. This is something to bear in mind when writing your resolutions.

Chair: Olivia Steele