

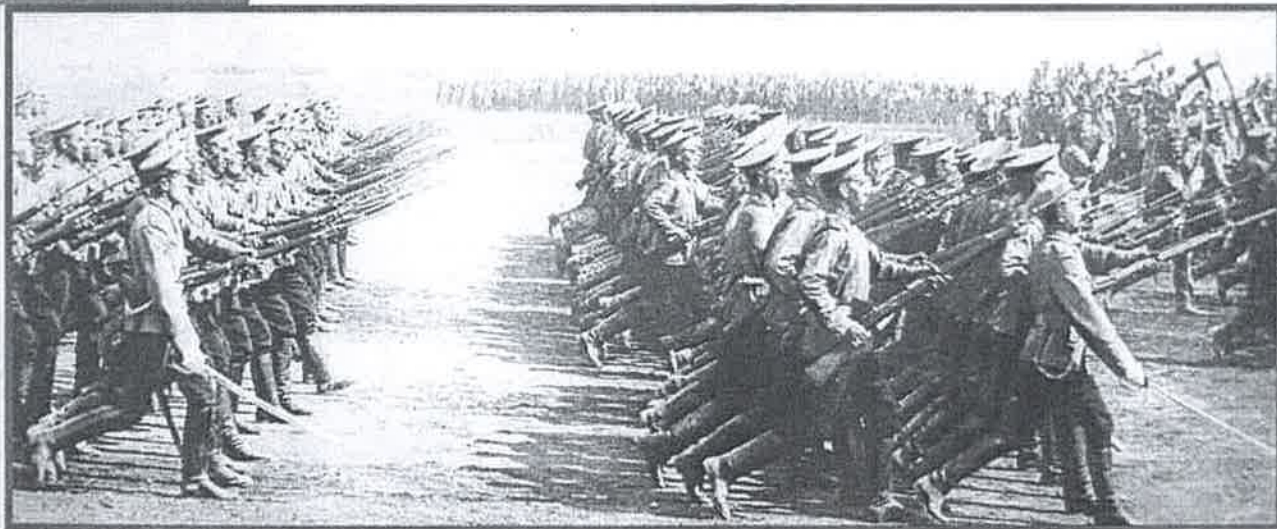
The Schlieffen Plan

The **alliance** system meant that a dispute between any two European powers ran the risk of developing into a confrontation all across Europe. Germany made conflict even more likely in 1905 when it secretly adopted a new **military strategy known as the Schlieffen plan**. After the Franco-Russian alliance, Germany created the plan because it realized that it might have to fight a war on two fronts.

Waging war on two fronts

The plan was named after Count Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the German general staff and the highest-ranking military commander from 1891 to 1905. As early as 1892, he realized that Germany might have to divide its military forces in the event of a war. One army would be needed to fight the Russians on the nation's eastern border, and another would have to fight the French in the west. The obvious danger was that Germany's forces, weakened by the split, would be crushed like a nut in a nutcracker.

Russian troops on parade in 1914. German fears of Russian military strength lay behind the formulation of the Schlieffen plan. The plan was designed to avoid the risk of Germany fighting a war on two fronts.



Von Schlieffen's solution was based on the idea that **attack is often the best form of defense**. He knew that **Russia, because of its size and its inefficient transportation system, would be slow to mobilize in the event of war**. The best estimates suggested that the process would take at least six weeks. The Schlieffen plan proposed that **German forces should take advantage of this delay to deliver a knockout blow to France, the enemy in the west**. Then, with France defeated, **Germany would be free to concentrate all its armies against Russia on the Eastern Front**, where they could use their combined might to bring the Russian steamroller to a halt.

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