World History · GS - I

How far is it correct to say that the First World War was fought essentially for the preservation of balance of power?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - I	World History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

balance of power, European alliances, German rise, Triple Alliance, Triple Entente, nationalism, imperialism, militarism, Balkan crisis, Sarajevo assassination, July Crisis

Model Answer

Introduction

The First World War (1914–1918) was rooted in the unstable European international system. Preservation and adjustment of the balance of power was an important factor, but the war cannot be explained exclusively through this objective.

Balance of Power as a Major Factor

The rise of Germany after unification altered the existing European power structure. European states consequently formed competing alliances:

1. **Triple Alliance:** Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.
2. **Triple Entente:** Britain, France and Russia.

France sought security against German power, Britain was increasingly concerned about German naval and strategic expansion, while Russia and Austria-Hungary competed for influence in the Balkans. Thus, alliance politics reflected attempts to prevent excessive dominance by any one power.

Other Forces Behind the War

Nationalism: Serbian nationalism and competing national aspirations destabilised the Balkans, particularly within the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Imperialism: Colonial and economic competition increased rivalry among European powers.

Militarism: Arms races and military planning made diplomatic crises more difficult to contain.

Balkan instability: The weakening of the Ottoman Empire created a power vacuum and intensified Austro-Russian and Serbian rivalries.

Immediate cause: The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in June 1914 triggered the July Crisis. Austria-Hungary's action against Serbia activated a chain of mobilisation and declarations of war.

Conclusion

Therefore, the balance of power was an important structural element of the First World War, but it interacted with nationalism, imperialism, militarism and Balkan rivalries. The war was consequently **not fought essentially for one single objective**, but emerged from the cumulative breakdown of European diplomacy and security.

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