



History

Paper 2K (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 03 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0 05/01/16

Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 2K (AS): Specimen question paper

03 'The main reason why a local conflict in the Balkans led to a general war in Europe in 1914 was Tsarist Russia's decision to back Serbia.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

The Russian decision to back Serbia did change what many believed would be a small and localised conflict into general war in Europe. However, the same could be said of Germany's decision to back Austria-Hungary. There had been increasing tensions across Europe for a long time, nationalism was high and all the major Powers had been increasing military spending. It could have been any number of localised events that caused the war.

The assassination of the Archduke threatened war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. However, Russia was the backer of the Serbs in the Balkans and it was their support that gave the Serbs the confidence to reject the ultimatum. Russia had backed down previously during the Bosnian Crisis of 1908 and was determined to stand firm this time. However, Russia was weak militarily, couldn't risk a large scale war alone and knew that she had to consult Britain and France before taking any action. The Tsar himself constantly changed his mind and his advisers could not agree on the correct course of action. Serbia considered giving in to all of Austria-Hungary's demands and it was the Russians who encouraged them to stall for time and finally to resist one of the terms – refusing to allow Austrian judicial interference. It was the rejection of the full terms of the ultimatum that led to the outbreak of hostilities between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and this was due to the Russian decision to back Serbia. However, at this stage it might still have remained a localised war. It was Russia who mobilised first whilst negotiations with Germany were ongoing. Germany took this as a declaration of war.

Germany was at least equally to blame due to their backing of Austria-Hungary. The Kaiser made it clear that Germany would stand by their ally and the 'blank cheque' was issued. This led to a deliberately harsh ultimatum that they anticipated would be rejected, giving them an excuse for war. The war party in Germany had long been advocating a preventative war against Russia and many believed war was inevitable given the prevailing tension. The Schlieffen Plan relied on a speedy mobilisation so better to attack first. However, it may be that Germany hoped Russia would back down again in the face of German and Austrian unity. They certainly believed that Britain would not get involved. Nevertheless, Austria-Hungary would not have risked war with Russia and Serbia without German backing so Germany was very much to blame. It was the German decision to mobilise against Russia, having claimed that Russian mobilisation left them no choice, which triggered the French to honour their commitment to their ally. Germany also asked Austria to mobilise against Russia too.

The Austrians themselves wanted war against Serbia to restore their control over the Balkans. Serbia

had doubled in size after the last Balkan War and their existence was seen as a threat to the empire. Any excuse to launch an attack on Serbia would be welcome and some even think that the decision to send Franz Ferdinand to Sarajevo was deliberately provocative. It 'something' happened, Austria would have its excuse. It would not risk war without German backing however, so Germany was more responsible.

This might still have remained a localised conflict were it not for the alliances that had formed in Europe, the growing tension between the Great Powers and the increased militarisation on all sides. The French PM visited Russia during the July Crisis and offered his backing. He also tried to persuade the British to do the same but they declined. Once Germany declared war on Russia, the Franco-Russian alliance committed France. Britain did not want to go to war with Germany over Serbia, however this view changed once the Germans invaded Belgium.

Germany issued an ultimatum to France to surrender control of their border forts and accept that Germany was acting defensively so France was under no obligation to help Russia. However, the mobilisation of the Schlieffen Plan continued and it was this clearly because Germany did not expect France to comply and had to be ready to attack first. This brought Britain into the war and led to a general war in Europe.

Whilst Russian backing of Serbia clearly played a part in the outbreak of the First World War, German backing of Austria was more responsible. Austria wanted war against Serbia and German support meant they could launch an attack without fear of facing Russia alone. Germany was keen to fight Russia before she became too strong and the Schlieffen Plan was directly responsible for the entry of both France and Britain into the war.

Commentary – Level 4

This is a strong response, relevant, analytical with judgement. It also has appropriate range. It does lack some development in parts and is somewhat less than fully convincing about the position of Russia and, critically, that it had no plans for partial mobilisation. This apart, this is a strong response to the question. It is a strong Level 4.