

In 1914, the **Balkan Peninsula**, in southeastern Europe, was a particularly tumultuous region: Formerly under the control of the Ottoman Empire which was declining in Europe, the area was under the influence of two competing powers, Russia and Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary, a large and diverse empire, was starting to lose control of its most nationalistic regions (Germans in Austria, Magyars in Hungary). In the Balkans, one of the most active ethnic groups were the Serbians who were ethnically similar to many Russians and referred to themselves as Slavs, or Slavic people. In 1908, Austria-Hungary *annexed* the twin Balkan provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This grab for territory and control angered the independent Balkan nation of Serbia – who considered Bosnia a Serb homeland – as well as Slavic Russia.

Upstart Serbia then doubled its territory in back-to-back **Balkan Wars** (1912 and 1913), further threatening Austro-Hungarian supremacy in the region. Meanwhile, Russia had entered into an alliance with France – who were angry over German annexation of their lands in the aftermath of the **Franco-Prussian War** in 1870-71 – and Great Britain, whose legendary naval dominance was threatened by Germany's growing navy. This **Triple Entente**, which squared off against the German-Austro-Hungarian alliance, meant that any regional conflict had the potential to turn into a general European war. As a result, the Balkans were known as the “*powder keg*” of Europe. A powder keg is a container for gunpowder which can erupt if there is a spark.



THE BALKANS AFTER THE SECOND BALKAN WAR

1. By 1914, what was happening to the power of the **Ottoman Empire** in Europe?
2. What angered **Serbia** in 1908?
3. What made **Austria-Hungary** feel threatened by 1914?
4. What event in the 1870s led to **France**'s anger?
5. In what way was **Great Britain** threatened by 1914?
6. What is a “**powder keg**”?
7. In what way was the **Balkan Peninsula** a powder keg?



THE BOILING POINT.