Background Information
Historians have long debated the causes of the First World War. The spark that started the war was provided by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. But there were also longer-term causes such as the situation in the Balkans, imperial rivalry, the alliance system and the naval race.

Tension in the Balkans

SOURCE A


1. Study Source A.
What is the message of this cartoon? Explain your answer by referring to details in the cartoon and to elements of your background knowledge.
The Alliance System

SOURCE B

A British cartoon published at the time of the signing of the Entente Cordiale in 1904. The caption to the cartoon read ‘Let Germany be careful now’.

SOURCE C

The division of the Great Powers into two well-balanced groups with close relations between the members of each, is a check on dangerous ambitions or sudden outbreak of race hatred. All governments know that a war of one group against another would be a terrible disaster. They know too, that to secure the support of the other members of their own group for such a conflict, they must first satisfy them that the quarrel is necessary and just.

From an English newspaper, April 1914.

2. Study Sources B and C. Does Source C make you surprised by the message of the cartoon (Source B)? Explain your answer using the sources and your knowledge.
The Arms Race

SOURCE D
At first the British ignored the German naval build-up, but the Second Naval Law of 1900, which called for a doubling of the German battleship fleet by 1916, opened their eyes. An important reason for the German naval initiative was to challenge Britain by becoming a major threat. Britain responded to this in 1906 by launching the battleship HMS Dreadnought which could out-gun and out-race any battleship afloat. Not surprisingly, the Germans were horrified. These fears were made worse by the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907. The Germans felt they were being surrounded by a coalition of hostile powers. This ‘encirclement’ theory was an important motive for Germany’s aggressive tendencies in the early 1900s. The naval race was part of the general arms race. Germany set the pace. In 1874, she had an army of 400,000; by 1914, it had risen to 800,000. A massive increase in armaments followed. More destructive weapons were developed. Germany and Austria-Hungary secretly specialised in the production of enormous howitzers and mortars. Military expenditure intensified after 1910 with Germany and Austria-Hungary doubling their spending on arms.

From a recent history book.

3. Study Source D. Who does the author of this source think was responsible for the increasing tension between Britain and Germany? Explain your answer using the source.

SOURCE E
Building a battle-fleet was necessary if we wanted to become a sea-power. Sea power was needed to protect trade, as other states had realised long before we did. Our surrounded and threatened position convinced me that no time was to be lost in turning ourselves into a sea-power. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the English would have treated us any better, and have allowed our economic growth to have proceeded unchecked if we had no fleet.

Admiral von Tirpitz writing in his memoirs which were published in 1919. Von Tirpitz was the member of the German government in charge of the navy until 1916 when he resigned.

SOURCE F
What did Germany want this great navy for? Against whom, except us, could she use it? There was a deep and growing feeling that the Germans meant mischief. Moreover, we realised that reluctance on our part to build ships would be seen by Germany as a sign of weakness.

Winston Churchill writing in 1933. Churchill was the member of the British government in charge of the navy from 1911 to 1915.

4. Study Sources E and F. Is one of these sources more reliable than the other? Explain your answer using the sources and your knowledge.
Colonial Rivalry

SOURCE G

A cartoon about the Second Moroccan Crisis, published in 1911.

SOURCE H

A cartoon about the Second Moroccan Crisis published in August 1911. The figure representing Germany is saying ‘Oh No! It’s rock. I thought it was going to be paper.’

4. Study Sources G and H. Both of these cartoons are about the Second Moroccan Crisis. Which one is British and which is German? Explain your answer using the sources and your knowledge.
The Role of the Kaiser

**SOURCE I**
Germany is a young and growing empire. She has a world-wide commerce which is rapidly expanding. Germany must have a powerful fleet to protect that commerce and her many interests in even the most distant seas. She expects those interests to go on growing, and she must be able to support them in any part of the world. Who knows what may take place in the Pacific in the days to come. Look at the rise of Japan; think of the possible reawakening of China. Only those powers that have great navies will be listened to with respect when the future of the Pacific comes to be solved; and if for that reason only, Germany must have a powerful fleet. It may even be that England herself will be glad that Germany has a fleet when they speak together on the same side in the great debates of the future.

*Kaiser Wilhelm II being interviewed by a British newspaper in 1908.*

**SOURCE J**
The German Emperor is worrying me; he is like a battleship running at full power, but with no rudder, and he will run into something some day and cause a catastrophe. He has the strongest army in the world and the Germans don’t like being laughed at and are looking for somebody on whom to use their strength. After a big war a nation doesn’t want another for a generation or more. Now it is 38 years since Germany had her last war, and she is very strong and very restless, like a person whose boots are too small for him. I don’t think there will be war at present, but it will be difficult to keep the peace of Europe for another five years.

*Sir Edward Grey replying to the Kaiser’s comments in Source D. Grey was the member of the British government in charge of foreign policy.*

5. Study Sources I and J. These two sources are biased. Does this mean they cannot be believed? Explain your answer using the sources and your knowledge.

6. Study all the sources. How far do these sources support the idea that the naval race was the major cause of the First World War? Use the sources to explain your answer.