To what extent was the First World War caused by imperialism and conflict overseas?

**Thesis**

Imperialism and conflict overseas contributed significantly to World War 1, through giving rise to tensions among the European powers, the dissent of annexed states and the formation of alliances which magnified an incident in a peripheral country to a world-wide war.

**Argument/Analysis**

**POV#1: Conflicts in Africa contributed to the rivalry between Britain/France and Germany which built the foundation for their later major clashes.**

  - in January, 1896, following the Boer war between the Dutch and the British in South Africa, Wilhelm II approved the dispatch of a telegram to the leader of Boer leader, showing his support for the Dutch
  - the telegram had an extremely negative impact on the relations between Britain and Germany
  - the Prince of Whales viewed it “as a most gratuitous act of unfriendliness” on Germany’s part
  - following the Kruger telegram, anti-German sentiments in Britain increased whereas prior to the event, Germany had been considered Britain’s friend (the Kaiser was half English and, according to Britain, ought not to question the British actions)
  - thus, the telegram following the conflict in South Africa served as a major watershed event in the relationship between Britain and Germany
  - there was also new sense of hostility and Britain began to consider Germany as a serious colonial rival

  - two international crises occurred in Morocco, in Tangir and Agadir, which were “centred on France’s attempts to control Morocco and on Germany’s concurrent attempts to stem French power”
  - in a show of imperial power, emperor William II visited Tangier in March, 1905, supporting nationalism which greatly infuriated the French
  - this resulted in international panic (First Moroccan Crisis) and was resolved in January–April 1906 at the Algeciras Conference
  - the Second Moroccan Crisis occurred when Germany sent its gunboat, Panther to Agadir to once again undermine France’s authority there, raising tensions between the two countries
  - this also further raised pre-existing animosity between Britain and Germany since Britain supported France’s claim to Morocco (the Entente Cordiale between the two countries gave France control over Morocco) and Britain even made preparations for eventual war

**POV #2: Imperial Germany built up its naval forces in order to compete with Britain for colonies overseas which prepared both for impending war.**

  - Kaiser Wilhelm believed that naval power was the key to success, power and wealth and that colonies were an index of wealth
  - he regarded Britain as the chief obstacle to Germany’s imperial destiny
  - Kaiser Wilhelm’s naval officer, Tirpitz, began to build Germany’s navy to become the second largest in the world
  - the dominance of its navy was of uttermost importance to Britain (as an island, it felt that a large navy was important for self-defence) which made it all the more sensitive to Germany’s growing navy
  - the British press (more specifically, the *Morning Post*) spoke of Germany’s naval competition as “a menace growing up in the east which cannot be ignored”
  - this shows just how much British valued their navy and how Germany greatly aggravated them
  - furthermore, as Germany built its navy, Britain continued to build as well in order to maintain its dominance
  - this arms race meant that they were ready for a war on the world scale
POV #3: When Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia, this imperialistic move clashed with the nationalist beliefs of many Bosnians and acted as a catalyst for the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo which in turn led to the war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

- Bosnia and Hercegovina were annexed in 1908 by the Austro-Hungarian Empire
- the inhabitants of the provinces were mostly Slavs and were resentful of being under the control of Austria-Hungary rather than being able to join Serbia, their national state
- this shows that relations between Bosnia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had always been tense due to conflict in the ideals of nationalism and imperialism
- rebellion had broken out in 1875, prior to the incident at Sarajevo
- so dissent was steadily growing before the incident
- due to the opposition of Bosnia to Austro-Hungarian rule, when they had their chance, a group of young Bosnians, who were supported by the Black Hand (a Serbian Pan-Slavic terrorist group), carried out the assassination of the heir to the Austria-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand
- Austria-Hungary felt that this event was a challenge to her rule over Bosnia as well as her prestige as a Great Power
- furthermore, the very existence of Serbia as an independent state felt like a crime to Bosnia
- therefore, though the link between the assassination and Serbia was only tenuous at best, Austria-Hungary sent an ultimatum to Serbia and declared war on Serbia when it wasn’t able to meet the demands

POV #4: Conflicts overseas contributed to the formation of the Entente Cordiale and subsequently the Triple Entente, which made the scope of the war possible.

- the Fashoda Crisis overseas between France and England in 1898 highlighted the tensions between the two countries
- it also illuminated the potential dangers of having competing colonial interests
- the Entente Cordiale was created to assuage the fear of France and England of being drawn to opposing sides of war
- this shows that fear of clashes in colonial interests was the tethering force in the creation of the Entente Cordiale
- this later developed into a Triple Entente between France, England and Russia
- contrary to common belief, the Triple Entente wasn’t created out of Britain’s fear of Germany but rather it was the prevention of war (be it as a result of colonialism or other conflicts) between the three countries that joined them together
- although the alliance was formed to keep the fragile peace, it ultimately increased the threat perceived by each nation
- for instance, Germany was inadvertently encircled geographically by the Triple Entente
- paradoxically, the alliance system dragged all the countries involved into war when it’s main purpose had been the prevention of war

- the goal of Tsar Nicholas II was to preserve imperial Russia and the Romanov Dynasty
- in order to do so, preservation of peace was crucial
- this was what motivated Russia to join the Triple Entente
- therefore, it can be seen that Russia didn’t join because of her ideology but rather for the benefit of her imperial reign (realpolitik)
- this offers a more in-depth view of what Russia’s motives were for joining the alliance

Conclusion
Overall, imperialism and conflict overseas were deep underlying causes that contributed significantly to the build-up leading up to Word War I in that they led to rising tensions between the European powers, growing discontent among annexed states of empires and the formation of alliances. Therefore, imperialism and conflict overseas can be seen as the main branches in a network of roots that closely intertwine with tendrils in the form of the alliance system, nationalism and various other contributors to the start of the Great War.