'Mutual suspicion was an important factor that caused the First World War.' Do you agree? Explain your answer with reference to the period 1900-14.

Before the First World War, mutual suspicion between different countries created a strained international atmosphere. And it was their mutual suspicion that made the world war unavoidable. Therefore, what the question suggests is valid and this essay is going to discuss it in terms of racial, alliance, military and colonial issues.

First of all, mutual suspicion at racial level accounted for the world war. In the early 20th century, two strong nationalist ideologies, namely *Pan-Germanism 泛日耳曼主義* and *Pan-Slavism 泛斯拉夫主義*, had expansion in the *Balkans 巴爾幹*, and mutual suspicion between both sides provoked different conflicts and even the world war. For example, Germany mistrusted Russia that actively supported Serbia in Balkan affairs for the suspected purpose of extending the influence of the Slavic race. It responded aggressively by backing Austria-Hungary with one-third of its population being Germanic as a countermeasure against the Slavic camp. During the *Bosnian Crisis 波斯尼亞危機* of 1908, Germany gave Austria-Hungary strong support for its annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and this almost triggered a world war. As for the *Sarajevo Incident 塞拉耶佛危機* of 1914, Germany offered Austria-Hungary the 'blank cheque' out of suspicion of the Slavic influence, boosting its confidence so much that it issued a harsh *ultimatum 最後通牒* to Serbia which caused the war between them. Meanwhile, Pan-Slavic Russia doubted that Germany supported Austrian expansion in the Balkans in the hope of stemming Slavic influence there. In response, Russia also acted aggressively against Germany as exemplified by its general mobilization in support of Serbia with strong ethnic ties after the *Sarajevo Incident 塞拉耶佛危機* of 1914 against Germany and Austria-Hungary, but this made the situation so bad that the world war was already inevitable. Therefore, suspicion between Germany and Russia of the expansion of each other's race led to the world war.

Secondly, mutual suspicion concerning alliance also led to the world war. The alliance system had a secret nature and signatories were not allowed to disclose details of treaties they signed. This caused mutual distrust among countries, created international tension and led to conflicts as well as their deterioration. After Britain and France signed the *Entente Cordiale 英法協約*(1904), Germany, without knowing the nature of this treaty, started the *First Moroccan Crisis 第一次摩洛哥危機* in 1905 to test how supportive Britain would be of France in a crisis and this clearly caused a conflict. In addition, after the formation of the *Triple Entente 三國協約* in 1907, Germany doubted if Britain, France and Russia did this to make it isolated and thus offered Austria-Hungary more assistance to counterbalance the Entente Powers as demonstrated by its firm support for the annexation of *Bosnia-Herzegovina 波黑* in 1908. This also added tension to conflicts. Worse still, German suspicion of the Allied Powers during the *Sarajevo Incident 塞拉耶佛危機* encouraged the country to start a war easily. Since Britain did not show explicit support for Russia and it did not back Russia in the *Bosnian Crisis 波斯尼亞危機* of 1908, Germany made a wrong predication that Britain would not fight in the war for Russia. It therefore executed the *Schlieffen Plan 施里芬計劃* to attack France by first travelling through Belgium, triggering the First World War. It was clear that mutual suspicion concerning alliance led to miscalculations and subsequently the world war.

Thirdly, mutual military suspicion also led to the world war. In terms of navy, Britain was suspicious of German naval expansion and worried that its naval strength would sooner or later surpass that of Britain. Therefore, Britain put in more effort to build its own navy, especially after the failure of the *Second Hague Conference 第二次海牙裁軍會議* of 1907 on naval disarmament. At that time, Britain became even more suspicious of Germany and thus proposed the *2:1 dreadnought policy 二比一無畏艦政策*, which was that for each dreadnought Germany manufactured Britain would build two more. This led to the fierce naval arms race between the two countries. Out of suspicion about the German naval build-up, Britain even signed the Anglo-French Naval Agreement (1912) with France as a measure to cope with German naval threats in the English Channel and the Mediterranean Sea. In 1914, Germany implemented the Schlieffen Plan to invade Belgium, which fueled fear among the British that Germany intended to establish a naval base against Britain and would pose a threat to the English Channel. Following British declaration of war, Britain and Germany went to war as a result. Also, in terms of war plan, some countries with suspicion against other countries came up with war plans and perceived other countries as imaginary enemies. For example, Germany speculated that it was targeted by the war plans jointly developed by France and Russia (*Plan 17 十七號計劃* and *Plan 19 十九號計劃*). For this reason, it adopted the *Schlieffen Plan 施里芬計劃* immediately after the *Sarajevo Incident 塞拉耶佛危機* of 1914 for fear of a two-front war, hoping to defeat France directly before having a war with Russia. Eventually, the implementation of this plan triggered the world war. Therefore, mutual military suspicion also made the world war inevitable.

Lastly, mutual suspicion concerning colonies also became an important factor that caused the First World War. Colonial expansion was the focus of many countries in the early 20th century but they were all suspicious of their competitors. Among these countries, Germany, as an emerging power, adopted the 'Weltpolitik' policy under the reign of Emperor Wilhelm II from 1890 onwards in a scramble for colonies. This aroused suspicion from old colonial empires, including Britain and France that even put aside their differences and signed the *Entente Cordiale 英法協約* in resistance to the German policy, and gave rise to hostility between Germany and these two countries. In 1905, Germany started the *First Moroccan Crisis 第一次摩洛哥危機* and attempted to tighten its grip on Morocco. This upset France that had strong ties with Morocco and made it more suspicious of Germany. Considering Germany a competitor for colonies, France sought to facilitate the signing of the *Anglo-Russian Entente 英俄協約* in 1907, which led to the formation of the Triple Entente against Germany. In 1911, Germany made another attempt to challenge French control over Morocco and caused the *Second Moroccan Crisis 第二次摩洛哥危機*. This again created suspicion on Germany and France thus supported Russia in the *Sarajevo Incident 塞拉耶佛危機*(1914) in order to destroy Germany and prevent it from harming French colonial interests. This became one of the reasons for the outbreak of the world war. Therefore, mutual suspicion concerning colonies also contributed to the world war.

In conclusion, mutual suspicion between different countries in the above aspects caused international tension and they even went to the world war under miscalculations. Therefore, what the question suggests is valid with no doubt.

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