



How did trade blockades in World War One cause starvation in Lebanon?

Narrated by Luis Fajardo

1. Germany's deadly diplomacy

The old saying, 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' had a ring of truth about it for many of the protagonists of the First World War. Persuading others to distract your enemy by attacking them in unexpected places could be an appealing strategy. While Germany was not alone in playing such diplomatic games, this was a strategy its leaders often used.

When war broke out in 1914, the Kaiser quickly attempted to make use of his relationship with Islamic leaders. Wilhelm II hoped to "inflame the whole Mohammedan world" against his British enemies, who he described as 'hateful, mendacious, unprincipled nation of shopkeepers'. There were nearly 100 million Muslims living in British territories around the world. And soon Germany was funding secret missions into the Islamic world, to turn Muslims against their rulers.

Yet the tactic did not have the effect the Kaiser hoped it would. In Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, the Sheik-ul-Islam declared a holy war against the allies, but 400,000 Muslims actually fought for Britain during the war.

But this was not Germany's only attempt to engineer conflict against the British. With most British soldiers fighting abroad, Irish nationalists tried to take advantage by starting a rebellion against British rule in Ireland.

If an uprising was to succeed, it would need weapons, and Germany answered the call. In 1916, a shipment of 25,000 captured Russian rifles was sent to Ireland. But the boat carrying them was intercepted by the Royal Navy. The rebellion went ahead, but it was much less effective than it might have been.

These failures did not discourage German leaders. When it looked as if the USA might enter the war, they saw an opportunity to use one of America's enemies to their advantage.