

# 1.3 The Moroccan crises

When the great powers of Europe divided themselves into two major alliances, each alliance began to build up their armies and navies and make plans for war, just in case they needed to go to the aid of an ally. As tension increased between the alliances, two serious disagreements developed over the north-west African nation of Morocco. Why was Morocco at the centre of European arguments? Which countries were involved? How close did the countries come to all-out war at this time?

## Objectives

- Explore the first and second Moroccan crises of 1905–6 and 1911.
- Assess the impact of these crises on European relations.

### Morocco and the Entente Cordiale

Morocco was one of the few areas of Africa that had not been colonised by a European country. As part of the 1904 deal between France and Britain (the Entente Cordiale), the British agreed to support France's attempts to take over Morocco. Spain and Italy both said they had no objection to France's plans. However, Germany's Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, was determined to prevent this from happening and visited Tangier to pledge his support for Morocco's ruler, the Sultan Abdelaziz.

▼ **SOURCE A** Kaiser Wilhelm II (circled) during his visit to Tangier in April 1905, accompanied by soldiers and a military band; he told the Sultan that he would protect German business interests in Morocco and stop the French takeover



▼ **SOURCE B** Adapted from a report on the Kaiser's visit to Morocco in 1905, written by Councillor von Schoen, a high-ranking German official

His Majesty remarked that he looked upon the Sultan as the ruler of a free and independent empire subject to no foreign control; that he expected Germany to have advantages equal to those of other countries in trade and commerce; and that he himself would always negotiate directly with the Sultan.

### The first crisis in Morocco, 1905–6

The German Emperor's support for Morocco was a direct challenge to France's ambitions. As news spread of the crisis, many wondered whether this would lead to war between Germany and France. It seems that the Kaiser had several aims:

- He wanted to test the French to see how far they could be pushed. Would they really declare war on Germany?
- He wanted to test the Entente Cordiale. Would France's new ally, Britain, come to France's defence?
- He wanted to demonstrate that Germany intended to become fully involved in world affairs and was very interested in the expansion Germany's empire.

### The Algeiras Conference, January 1906

War between Germany and France was looming – but it never happened. An international conference, attended by all the major European nations (and the USA), was held in Algeiras (southern Spain) to settle the conflict.

However, the conference was humiliating for Germany. Only Austria-Hungary supported the Germans and it was decided that France could have special rights in Morocco. Although the French were stopped from colonising Morocco and including it as part of their empire, they gained a foothold in the country by being given joint control of the Moroccan police. More importantly, Britain and Russia had stood firm against Germany in their support for France. The Kaiser could now be in no doubt that the Entente Cordiale was more than just a 'friendly understanding'. Furthermore, in the wake of this crisis, the relationship between Britain and Russia improved and soon Britain, Russia and France formed the Triple Entente (see page 18).



## Another crisis in Morocco, 1911

Five years later there was a second crisis in Morocco. In 1911 a rebellion against the ruling Sultan of Morocco broke out in Fez, the capital city. The Sultan asked the French for help and the French government sent 20,000 soldiers to fight the rebels. Germany's Kaiser accused the French of invading Morocco and sent a warship named *Panther* to the port of Agadir as a show of strength.

The British were worried about the arrival of the warship in Morocco. Britain had a navy base nearby in Gibraltar (see the Map C below) and it looked like Germany might be trying to create a navy base in Agadir. The British prepared for war.

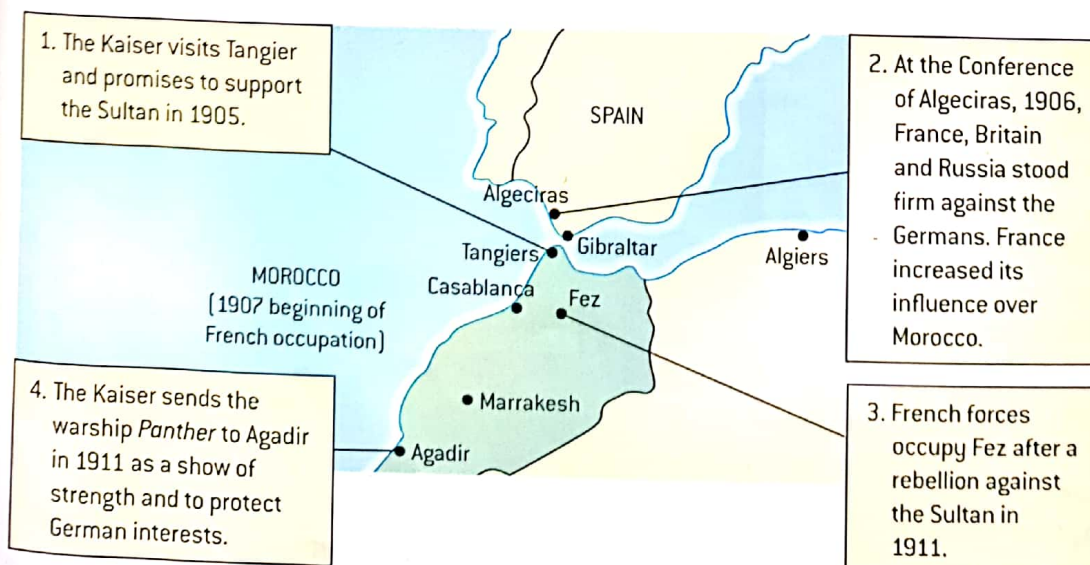
### A solution is found

A series of meetings between German, French and British politicians were held and eventually a peaceful solution was found. Britain and France again stood firm against Germany, and the Kaiser decided to back down and order the warship to leave Agadir. Other countries, such as Italy, also opposed the Germans. After a tense few weeks, the French took control of Morocco, but Germany was given some land in central Africa as compensation.

The results of the second Moroccan crisis were far-reaching:

- Germany was humiliated – and was unlikely to back down again from an international crisis.
- Many German people fully supported the Kaiser and his actions. When he talked of war, they would support him on this matter too.

### Map C The Moroccan Crises of 1905–6 and 1911



- Britain was now convinced that Germany was a threat to European peace. It is no coincidence that Britain began to build more and more battleships after this crisis.
- Britain and France grew closer. They reached a secret agreement that French warships would patrol the Mediterranean Sea whilst British warships would defend the north coast of France.
- Italy had not supported Germany, and this weakened the Triple Alliance. From now on, Germany would look to Austria-Hungary as their main ally in the Triple Alliance.

### Work

- 1 Look at **Source A**. Why do you think the Kaiser wore his finest military uniform, rode a white horse and was accompanied by soldiers and a military band?
- 2 Why was the Algeciras Conference:
  - a a success for France?
  - b a humiliation for Germany?
- 3 How was the Entente Cordiale affected by events in Morocco between 1905 and 1911?

### Practice Question

Write an account of how events in Morocco became an international crisis in 1905 and 1906.

**8 marks**

[AQA 2016 Paper 1 specimen material]

### Study Tip

This question is not simply asking you to write about the Moroccan crisis of 1905 and 1906, it asks you to write about the impact of the crisis. It is as much about the *results* of the crisis as it is about the events of the crisis itself.