In 1914 Franz Ferdinand, heir to Austria-Hungary, was shot in Sarajevo. His assassin was Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian nationalist. His hope was that this act would help reunite Greater Serbia, but lead to so much more. As Austria-Hungary demanded justice from Serbia, tensions erupted and Europe’s system of alliances was drawn into a worldwide war. The Great War wasn’t caused by the assassination as much as it was sparked by it. World War One was actually caused by the underlying causes of militarism, nationalism, and alliances. These ideas that had partially fueled imperialism would explode into a world war following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Without armies to fight it, there is no war. If armies are small, the war will be small. With the heavily militarized armies of 1914 though, the war would be huge. In an excerpt from *The London Times History of the World* it is shown that nations had nearly doubled the size of their armed forces between 1890 and 1914. This reflects the competition for imperial expansion, but also helps explain the scope of the war. As nations grow their armies, they become confident in their ability to win a conflict. With each nation feeling this confidence, the idea of going to war became more appealing. Nations do not typically fight wars that they expect to lose, but if every nation feels that they will win conflict becomes nearly inevitable. This confidence is seen in the work of Emile Zola who declared that “only warlike nations which have prospered; a nation dies as soon as it disarms.” As militaries grow, so does confidence in them. When nations had massive militaries, they leaned towards war.