

World War I

The Causes of World War I

World War I was originally called "*The Great War*" or the "*War to End all Wars*". Over the course of 4 years, 16 million people would lose their lives either fighting in battle or as a result of the war. Like many wars, it did not have one specific cause, but started because of competition and alliances between the major countries in Europe.

The causes of World War I can be summarized into 4 MAIN reasons - **Militarism**, **Alliances**, **Imperialism**, and **Nationalism**.

During the late 1800s, advances in technology had led to an Industrial Revolution. All across Europe, countries developed advanced weapons of war. Many European countries expanded their military in order to both defend themselves and to take over other countries. Countries competed against each other to grow the size of their armed forces. Military life became very important to the culture of these European countries. The ideal of gaining glory through war spread across the European continent. This growth in military and the glorification of the military is called **militarism**.

As European countries competed for the largest military, they also competed for the most land. Countries like Great Britain had created a large empire by conquering areas of Africa and India. Many other European countries wanted the wealth and access to natural resources that would come with a world-wide empire. The competition for land around the world would lead to distrust between European countries. **Imperialism**, or attempting to control foreign land for trade and power, would lead to hostilities between nations.

Also, during this time period, as European countries competed against each other for natural resources and land, they turned to **alliances** to increase their strength. Countries that shared a common culture or history worked together to compete against their mutual enemies. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed an alliance called the *Triple Alliance*. In response, Great Britain, France, and Russia joined together in the *Triple Entente*. The Triple Alliance would later become the *Central Powers* and the Triple Entente would become the *Allied Powers*.



European alliances during World War I.

The growth of militarism and imperialism would lead to **nationalism**. Many European countries did not exist prior to the late 1800s, they were a collection of smaller regions or cities. As countries like Germany and Italy were formed out of these smaller regions, people began to identify themselves with their nation instead of just a region. They took great pride in being a German or Italian. This pride included a willingness to die to defend their country.

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The Spark That Started It All

World War I officially started with one event, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on June 28th, 1914. Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. He and his wife were visiting Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina when they were both killed by a Serbian teenager protesting the invasion of his country.

A grab for power and the complicated system of alliances soon lead Europe into war. A month after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Austria-Hungary, with the backing of Germany, declared war on Serbia. Serbia called on its' allies for help. Russia began to mobilize its troops, Germany warned Russia to keep out of the conflict, then declared war on Russia. France and Belgium began to **mobilize** their troops. Germany declared war on France and invaded Belgium. Belgium called on their allies for help. The empire of Great Britain, including the British colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa, declared war on Germany. Austria-Hungary then declared war on Russia. Great Britain and France declared war on Austria-Hungary. By the end of the summer of 1914, almost all of Europe is at war with each other.



The assassination of Franz Ferdinand started World War I.