

THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

I. WORLD WAR I IN PERSPECTIVE

- A. In 1890 Europe was a *nice, quiet place. Things were cool. Germany was sated.* Question: *How could such a great war emerge from such an untroubled world?*
- B. World War I started on August 1, 1914, ended November 11, 1918. At the start of the war the Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia, plus Serbia and Belgium) faced the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). Italy, Rumania, the United States and others later joined the Entente, Turkey and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers. Ultimately the Entente defeated the Central Powers.
- C. World War I was the bloodiest war in history to that point. Some 25,955,000 people died (12,981,000 military, 12,974,000 civilian).<sup>1</sup>
- D. WWI unleashed an avalanche of violence that pervaded the 20th century. It caused the 1917 Russian revolution, which caused Stalinism and its vast murders (perhaps 30 million or more killed), and led eventually to the 1947-1989 Cold War, which caused the Korean and Vietnam and Afghan wars, killing millions more. The Vietnam war caused further trouble, including Pol Pot's rise in 1975 and the subsequent Khmer Rouge Cambodian genocide of 2 million Cambodians. The Afghan war of the 1980s caused the 1996 rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, who sheltered Al Qaeda, leading to 9/11/01 and the current terror war. Many argue that World War I also caused the rise of the Nazis and thus both World War II and the Holocaust. World War II in turn caused the rise to power of communist governments in China, North Korea, Yugoslavia and elsewhere. These governments in turn perpetrated mass murders on an enormous scale and started a number of wars. We narrowly avoided war with North Korea in 1994 and now face another crisis. You get the idea. World War I is a big story--a dark scar across human history.

II. FIVE COMMON EXPLANATIONS FOR WWI

- A. **"Germany caused the war."** Three main variants are offered. The first two paint the war as inadvertent, the last paints it as deliberate.
    - 1. The minimalist Germany-blaming view: Germany consciously risked a general continental war in July 1914 in order to make gains for the German/Austrian alliance. Germany preferred the prewar status quo to a continental war but did knowingly risk such a war.
    - 2. Intermediate Germany-blaming views:
      - a. Germany preferred a continental war (that is, a war against France and Russia) to the prewar status quo, but preferred the prewar status quo to a world war (that is, a war against Britain, France, and Russia). This is the view of "Fischer School" moderates, exemplified by Imanuel Geiss. And a more extreme variant:
      - b. Germany preferred a continental war to a crisis victory or the prewar status quo, and plotted to cause it.
    - 3. The maximalist Germany-blaming view: Germany preferred even a world war to the prewar status quo and plotted to cause the war that occurred. This is argued by some Fischerites and by Dale Copeland.
- The three Germany-blaming views can be distinguished by framing the rank-ordering of desired outcomes that the view attributes to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Leger Sivard, World Social and Military Expenditures 1996 (Washington DC: World Priorities, 1996). I added Sivard's raw data.

German state. Four goals must be ranked:

Status Quo Ante Bellum (SQAB): things remain as they were in June 1914. Serbia is wholly independent and feisty toward Austria-Hungary.

Crisis Victory for the Central Powers (i.e., Germany and Austria) (CV): Austria crushes and vassalizes Serbia; Russia and France stand inert.

Continental War (CW): war erupts between the Central Powers and the Dual Alliance (i.e., France and Russia); Britain remains neutral.

World War (WW): Britain joins France and Russia in a war against the Central Powers.

- B. **"Russia, or Serbia, or Britain, or France, or Austria caused the war."**
1. During 1919-1945 many Germans alleged that Britain organized the encirclement of Germany and conspired to cause the war. Germany, they said, was wholly innocent.
  2. Sidney Fay and other scholars put prime responsibility on Austria and Russia. Some others heavily blame Serbia. Some blame France and Britain for not restraining Russia more firmly. Some suspect that France egged Russia on.
- C. **"Crisis bungling caused the war."** In this view no European power willfully risked war. European leaders simply mismanaged the July crisis.
1. "Russia began pre-mobilization without realizing that mobilization meant war or that partial mobilization against Austria was impossible."
  2. "Austria failed to give Russia its evidence showing that Serbia was responsible for the death of the Austrian Archduke. Had Russia known Serbia's guilt it would have sympathized more with Austria's position."
  3. "British leaders (Grey) did not realize that mobilization meant war; hence they unwisely failed to restrain Russian mobilization."
  4. "German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg also did not fully understand that mobilization meant war until war was inevitable. Specifically, he did not learn of the secret attack on Liège embedded in the German mobilization plan until July 31."<sup>2</sup>
  5. "The French ambassador to Russia, Maurice Paléologue, failed to warn French leaders that Russian leaders were thinking of mobilizing against Austria-Hungary in order to coerce it. Hence French messages urging restraint on Russia arrived too late (July 30) to prevent Russian mobilization."<sup>3</sup>
  6. "German leaders (Jagow) falsely assured Russia that Germany would tolerate Russian partial mobilization against Austria, leading Russia to mobilize."
  7. "German leaders wrongly hoped Britain would stand aside from a continental war. This stemmed partly from Britain's failure to make up its mind to fight, and issue clear warning to Germany, until after the July crisis was out of control. In part this reflected British foreign secretary Grey's failure to foresee the speed of events; in part it reflected the secrecy of German plans to attack Belgium."<sup>4</sup>
- D. **"The explosive military situation caused the war."** Three variants:
1. Inflexible military mobilization plans caused the war by spreading a local Balkan war outward to engulf all Europe.
  2. An imperative to rush to mobilize, stemming from a first-move advantage, caused the war. (Some argue that Russia's slowness

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<sup>2</sup> May and Williamson, "Identity of Opinion": 365.

<sup>3</sup> May and Williamson, "Identity": 376.

<sup>4</sup> May and Williamson, "Identity": 361, 379.

in mobilizing inclined it to mobilize precipitously, but this is false).

3. The widespread belief in the power of the offense and the general embrace of offensive military plans primed the world for war. This explosive military backdrop magnified the dangers posed by a minor crisis and rather normal blunders by leaders. They had no margin for error.
- E. **"Malignant supercharged nationalism and nationalist mythmaking fueled expansionism throughout Europe, causing the war."**

### III. BACKGROUND TO WAR: EUROPE 1890-1914

- A. The Powers' relative strength. They ranked as follows: (1) Germany; (2) Britain; (3) Russia; (4) France; (5) Austria-Hungary; (6) Serbia. (See Paul Kennedy tables, attached to these notes, especially Tables 7 and 9.)
- B. Social structure and domestic politics in Europe, 1890-1914.
  1. Oligarchy and fears of upheaval in Europe, e.g., in Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia.
  2. Militarism (see assigned Martin Kitchen readings).
    - a. The military's influence was large, especially in Germany.
    - b. The military's ideas were dangerous. These included:
      - i. Offense is easy // windows are common and large // surprise is essential.
      - ii. Waving big sticks makes others nice.
      - iii. Others are hostile.
      - iv. Empires are valuable.
      - v. War is short, glorious, even fun.
  3. Self-glorifying nationalist myths in the schools--history as chauvinist fiction (see assigned Langsam reading).
  4. Lack of independent scholarship. Professors were propagandists for the state who repeated fatuous ideas instead of evaluating them, especially in Germany (see L.L. Snyder, German Nationalism, in "further readings," chapter on scholars).
- C. The changing nature of war
  1. The rise of mass armies and the mobilization system:
    - a. Preliminary mobilization vs. full mobilization.
    - b. Why did mobilization mean war? Because Germany's Schlieffen plan mandated a surprise attack on Belgium as soon as mobilization began; and because Germany would have a fleeting military advantage after it mobilized and it felt it had to exploit this advantage by attacking.
    - c. Was secret mobilization possible? No, but some Russians thought so.
  2. The rise of the power of the defensive on the battlefield: machine guns, barbed wire, railroads, and mass armies.
  3. The growth of the "cult of the offensive" and offensive war plans: Germany's Schlieffen Plan, France's Plan XVII, Russia's Plan 20, Austria's offensive war plans. Even Belgium had an offensive war plan! And France's General Joffre pushed for a French offensive into Belgium as well as Germany!<sup>5</sup> German, French and Austrian officers paid little heed to evidence against their plans.<sup>6</sup> And there was a cult of the offensive at sea.

Question: What war plans would have made the most sense for each power? Once at war, what was the best way for each side to fight?
- D. Perceptions in Europe (see assigned Geiss reading).
  1. The rise of international Social Darwinism and the cult of the offensive.

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<sup>5</sup> May and Williamson: 375.

<sup>6</sup> May and Williamson: 347.

2. Big stick ideas in Germany: Admiral Tirpitz's Risk Theory and Kurt Riezler's theory of "bluff diplomacy." (Riezler was Bethmann's top aide.)
  3. The self-encirclement of Germany, and the German myth that others had conspired to bring it about.
  4. "We need an empire!" Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism; expansionism in Germany, Russia, Serbia (!), and France.
  5. "War is good for you"--a remarkable idea found everywhere. 40,000-50,000 assembled outside the Kaiser's Berlin palace in a carnival atmosphere on August 1, as war erupted.<sup>7</sup>
- E. German expansion and the Fischer Controversy (see Geiss reading).
1. How expansionist was Germany? The "War Council" of December 8, 1912: how to interpret it? What should we see in the historical record if Germany plotted World War I at this meeting? What should we see in the record if this meeting meant little?
  2. How expansionist was Austria-Hungary? Answer: quite expansionist. Austrian leaders were determined to smash Serbia.
  3. How expansionist were the other European powers?
- F. The decline of British power and the Anglo-German Detente of 1912-1914.
- G. The appearance of a tight (offensive) network of alliances in Europe (the transformation of alliances from "epimachies" to "symmachies.")
- H. The crises of 1905, 1908, 1911. Were these causes of trouble or mere symptoms of other causes?
- I. The naval and land arms races. Were these causes of trouble or mere symptoms of other causes?
- J. The rise of economic interdependence (it was high in 1914!) and international cooperation (e.g., international agencies regulated railways, postal service and telegraph).
- K. The alleged appearance of dumb national leaders in Russia, Germany, Britain, and Austria-Hungary.
- L. The rise of (incompetent?) peace movements: "Let's arbitrate disputes!"; "Let's have arms control!"

#### IV. THE JULY CRISIS: JUNE 28-AUGUST 4, 1914

Ask three questions of these events: (1) **What** caused the war? i.e. what conditions, events, or actions made the war inevitable? (2) **Who** caused the war? What states, or political groups or persons within states? (3) **Why** did these actors cause the war? What expectations and intentions animated their actions? Were they trying to cause war? Expecting to cause war?

- A. The Sarajevo Assassination of Austria's Archduke Ferdinand, June 28. Was the Serbian government responsible? Unknown at the time, the Serbian military intelligence chief, Col. Dragutin Dimitrijević (a.k.a. "Apis") trained and armed three of the assassins. The Serb prime minister discovered the plot, tried to prevent it, then later concealed it.<sup>8</sup>
- B. The German "Blank Check" to Austria, July 5-6. Germany approves an Austrian war against Serbia. Perhaps it also pushes Austria toward war.
1. German expectations: what were they?
    - > Did the German government think that such a war would provoke Russia to intervene? Most evidence (see Geiss) suggests that most Germans thought Russia would sit quietly, from monarchic solidarity, and for window reasons: Germany's good window was the Russian-French bad window. However, some straws in the wind suggest that some Germans foresaw where the crisis would lead.

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<sup>7</sup> May and Williamson: 347.

<sup>8</sup> May and Williamson: 351.

> Was British intervention in such a war expected? Again, this is debated, but most evidence suggests that most Germans thought not.

2. German desires: what were they?

> Did Germany want a war? The elite was split. The Army actively wanted a continental war, the Kaiser and Bethmann didn't. In my view the preferred center-of-gravity outcome of the elite was a crisis victory; the next preferred outcome was a continental war; the next was status quo ante; and the least-desired result was world war. Bethmann and the Kaiser preferred the status quo ante to continental war, but the Army didn't, and prevailed--ultimately in an unrecorded confrontation on July 30.

C. The Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia, July 23. This had a 2-day deadline, and was designed to be impossible to accept. Austria's plan was then to smash the Serbian army and vassalize Serbia, but not to annex it, because Austria-Hungary's Hungarian politicians wouldn't accept more Slavs in the empire.

D. Serbian reply, 6:00 p.m., July 25. The Serbs considered accepting all Austria's demands but in the end rejected Austria's demand to allow Austrian officials to participate in the Serbian enquiry into the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. (This would have exposed Serbia's role.)

On receiving this reply the Austrian government promptly ordered mobilization of its army against Serbia. This order reached the army command at 9:23 p.m. July 25; it posited July 27 as "alarm day," and July 28 as the first day of mobilization.

E. Russian Preliminary Mobilization, July 25, with orders issued at 4:00 p.m.--even before the Serbian time limit expired at 6:00. Russian leaders also decide in principle to fully mobilize later against Austria (but not Germany) and issue orders to ready this mobilization late on July 24.<sup>9</sup>

The French also began pre-mobilization on July 25, although this had less effect on the crisis, perhaps because these measures were still substantially undetected by July 28.

Why did the Russians pre-mobilize? With what expectation?

Answer: we don't know. This grave decision, a key to the crisis, has never been fully explained.

These points are pertinent:

1. Evidence suggests that Russian leaders thought Germany meant to push matters to war and felt compelled to move first to prepare for the coming conflict. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, explained on July 24 "*C'est la guerre Européenne!*" when he heard the terms of the Austrian ultimatum. It seems the Russians already expected war at this point: they felt the Austro-German move showed that Austria and Germany planned to smash Serbia, and that Russia would have to allow this or fight; and since Russia wouldn't allow this, it would have to fight. Perhaps they also felt that Germany would merely find another excuse for war if Russia conceded on Serbia, making concessions fruitless.

If so, it seems likely that the Russians pre-mobilized to gain the first strike (really first-mobilization) advantage in the war that Germany and Austria seemed to be forcing upon them. Since war seemed inevitable, and the Russians thought that whoever mobilized first would have the upper hand, quick mobilization made sense.

Note: the July crisis occurred against the backdrop of manifest signs of war fever in Germany (e.g., the Jubilees of 1913) that Russia had detected.

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<sup>9</sup> May and Williamson: 369.

2. Russian civilians (Sazonov and the Czar) were apparently unaware that mobilization meant war until later in the crisis. We can surmise that their soldiers talked them into these preliminary measures before they realized that mobilization meant war.
3. When they authorized preliminary mobilization and partial mobilization against Austria, Russian civilians (Sazonov and the Czar) were apparently unaware that Russia had an "all or nothing" mobilization plan; Russia had to mobilize against Germany if it mobilized against Austria. Moreover, the Russian chief of staff failed to explain this to the civilians at the key meetings on July 24-25. This misconception eased the Russian decision in principle to mobilize against Austria.

This suggests a civil-military split on preempting Germany: the civilians were not yet sold on preemption on July 24-25. It also suggests that the Russian military manipulated unwitting civilian consent to Russian military measures. In fact partial Russian mobilization against Austria-Hungary was impossible-- Russia could choose only full mobilization or none. But Russian officers agreed to partial mobilization in principal on July 24, without telling Russian civilians that this was impossible.<sup>10</sup>

4. Russian leaders did not receive Austria's dossier showing Serb responsibility for the Sarajevo murder of Archduke Ferdinand until after Russia had pre-mobilized on July 25 and mobilized on July 30.

F. Germany hangs tough, July 25-30.

The British proposed mediation of the crisis under British auspices. But the Germans kept pushing Austria forward, seeking to get the fait accompli finished. The German problem: Austria wouldn't be ready to attack Serbia until August 12. Hence, to foreclose diplomacy, the Germans urged Austria to declare war on Serbia, which Austria did on July 28. This in turn helped spur Russia to declare partial mobilization on July 29, and then full mobilization on July 30.

What went on? Some details:

1. Bethmann sabotages the Kaiser's peace effort. The Kaiser wasn't told of the Serbian reply for several days. When he saw it, he wrote (July 28) that "every cause of war falls to the ground." He then asked Bethmann to ask Austria to offer the "Halt in Belgrade" peace plan to Russia.

But Bethmann didn't do it! He waited half a day, and then late on July 28 he told the Austrian's something much milder! He never told them how strongly the Kaiser wanted the crisis ended!

2. Moltke sabotages Bethmann's peace effort. Then late on July 29 Bethmann reversed course and tried to pull the Austrians back from the brink, in messages sent overnight, asking Austria to accept the Halt in Belgrade. These messages were sent at 2:55 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. July 30.

Too much can be made of this change. Even on July 30 Bethmann never made a clear threat to Austria, or clearly stated that the crisis should be called off. Still, it was a change.

- a. What caused it? Some say it was the latest warning from Britain, received at 9:12 p.m. July 29. Some say it was Russian partial mobilization, which convinced him that Russia wouldn't cave. I also wonder if it wasn't Belgian mobilization too; Germany learned of significant Belgian mobilization measures on July 29 at 4:00 p.m.
- b. Moltke sabotaged Bethmann's effort at 2:00 p.m. July 30 with a telegram to Austria urging immediate Austrian mobilization against Russia and promising that Germany

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<sup>10</sup> May and Williamson: 368, 370.

would follow suit.

It's possible that Moltke also made more direct efforts to persuade Bethmann to halt his peace effort. Bethmann was inactive during the morning of July 30. If he really meant to avoid war, he should have been telling Russia that he was now willing to pressure Austria, and asking it not to mobilize in the meantime; and he should have been telling Britain the same thing, and asking it to restrain Russia. He didn't. Could coercion or persuasion by Moltke be the reason?

However, assuming that this happened, we still don't know why. Two very different interpretations are possible.

- i. Moltke had hoped to preserve peace, but was finally persuaded that Germany had to mobilize in order to keep pace with the Russian, French, and Belgian mobilizations. He explained this necessity to Bethmann with sadness in his heart.
- ii. Moltke, having desired an opportunity for preventive war against Russia for months, and seeing in the July crisis a fine opportunity for such a war, was delighted that Russia, France and Belgium gave Germany a pretext to mobilize; was enraged that Bethmann might take this pretext as an opportunity to make peace; and either persuaded or coerced Bethmann to cease his efforts.

Interpretation #i suggests World War I was an accidental war caused by military factors that made the July crisis exceptionally dangerous. Interpretation #ii suggests that World War I was a deliberate war of aggression by Germany, which plotted to provoke, and then exploited, the excuse that Russian mobilization presented in order to wage a war of continental conquest.

Note: the Germans learned of the Russian pre-mobilization measures on July 26 or 27, one or two days after they began.<sup>11</sup> If Germany really sought to prevent a continental war, shouldn't this news have shocked Germany into backtracking--i.e. forcing the "Halt in Belgrade" compromise on Austria? But Bethmann kept going until late on July 29. This supports the inference that the Germans viewed a continental war with equanimity, and feared only a world war.

- G. British dithering. The British never warned Germany in a crystal-clear manner that they would intervene if Germany launched a continental war, chiefly because the British themselves did not decide what they would do until August 3.
- H. Russian mobilization
  1. Partial mobilization, July 29. Russia did this partly to deter Austria from invading Serbia, partly to offset Austrian mobilization against Serbia, partly to forestall Austrian mobilization in Galicia, and perhaps partly because on July 27 German Secretary of State Jagow lullingly assured the Allies that Germany would accept a partial Russian mobilization that was aimed only at Austria-Hungary.
  2. Full mobilization, 5:00, July 30. Reasons: the conviction that war was inevitable, spurred by:
    - a. Reports that the Germans were upset by Russian preliminary mobilization, and that the Austrians still resisted any compromise; and Russian military warnings that mobilization was an all-or-nothing matter--a partial, South-only mobilization would make more difficult a full mobilization

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<sup>11</sup> Suggesting July 26 are May and Williamson: 349.

later if that became necessary.

- b. False reports that German mobilization had begun.
  - I. German mobilization. Late on July 30 (but before learning of Russian full mobilization) the German government made a commitment to decide at noon July 31 whether to mobilize. This was, in essence, a provisional decision to mobilize the next day unless something favorable (e.g., a Russian/French cave-in) happened in the interim to defuse the crisis. Germany was probably responding to continuing Russian pre-mobilization, to Belgian pre-mobilization, to the Russian partial mobilization of July 29, and/or to the Kaiser's misinterpretation of Czar's remark that Russian mobilization had begun 5 days earlier, which emerged from the Willy-Nicky correspondence. This decision meant that the war would have broken out absent Russian full mobilization, with German mobilization on July 31. (Thus the outbreak of the war was "overdetermined.")
  - J. An interpretation of the crisis to consider. Note that German military leaders rightly knew that Germany could not mobilize in secret for any length of time; but Russian and French military leaders thought Germany could mobilize secretly, with the French believing secret mobilization was possible for a week (See Joffre's memoirs). Why was this? Perhaps German officers, hoping to bait Russia or France into early mobilizations that would then justify German mobilization and the preventive war that many German officers sought, primed French and Russian intelligence with false information that would scare them into a premature mobilization. Joffre does indicate that his 7-days-of-secret mobilization estimate came from secret intelligence on Germany. Had I been a German general, and had I desired a preventive war, this is exactly what I would have wanted the French to believe, and I would have polluted French intelligence with exactly this sort of information. (This is a speculative interpretation, but I know no evidence against it.)
- V. WORLD WAR I AS A CASE STUDY: HOW TO USE CASES TO TEST THEORIES, & HOW TO USE THEORIES TO EXPLAIN CASES
- VI. MILITARY-RELATED CAUSES OF WWI?
- A. Preemption
  - B. 3 Windows
  - C. False Optimism
  - D. Cult of the Offensive
  - E. Cheap War
- (What if all sides had possessed nuclear second-strike capabilities in 1914?)
- VII. MISPERCEPTIONS AS CAUSES OF WORLD WAR I?
- A. Spiral or deterrence failure?
  - B. Non-evaluation
  - C. Nationalist mythmaking
  - D. Non-strategy
  - E. Militarism?
- VIII. AFTERMATH OF WWI
- A. German territorial losses (see map); and reparations. The myth that Versailles's terms were harsh toward Germany.
  - B. The non-occupation of Germany. A mistake?

WHO CAUSED WORLD WAR I?  
THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY (THE FISCHER CONTROVERSY)

BACKGROUND

**Certain** predictions: strongly infirm a theory if they fail.  
**Unique** predictions: strongly confirm a theory if they prove out.

I. THREE FISCHER SCHOOL VIEWS

The Fischer school view in a nutshell: "German belligerence/expansionism caused World War I."

Consider three Fischer school views on WWI origins, distinguishing three broad levels of German belligerence and responsibility:

1. The minimalist Germany-blaming view: Germany consciously risked a general continental war in July 1914 in order to make gains for the German/Austrian alliance. Germany preferred the prewar status quo to a continental war but did knowingly risk such a war.
2. Intermediate Germany-blaming views:
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These three Germany-blaming views can be distinguished by framing the rank-ordering of desired outcomes that the view attributes to the German state. Four goals must be rank-ordered:

Status Quo Ante Bellum (SQAB): things remain as they were in June 1914.

Serbia is wholly independent and feisty toward Austria-Hungary.

Crisis Victory for the Central Powers (i.e., Germany and Austria) (CV):

Austria crushes and vassalizes Serbia; Russia and France stand inert.

Continental War (CW): war erupts between the Central Powers and the Dual

Alliance (i.e., France and Russia); Britain remains neutral.

World War (WW): Britain joins France and Russia in a war against the Central Powers.

Germany-blaming views ascribe the following priorities to Germany:

Minimal German blaming view (1): CV > SQAB > CW > WW  
Intermediate Fischer view (2a): CV > CW > SQAB > WW  
Intermediate Fischer view (2b): CV > CW > WW > SQAB  
Maximal Fischer view (3): CW > CV > SQAB > WW

Other orderings are possible, e.g., even more extreme German-blaming views:

CW > CV > WW > SQAB  
CW > WW > CV > SQAB (D. Copeland)  
WW > CW > CV > SQAB

II. TESTING FISHER SCHOOL ARGUMENTS AND THEIR COMPETITORS

A. One, two, or all three Fischer School views make the following **fulfilled predictions**:

- P1. **Evidence of active German planning to start WWI**, i.e., a written record of meetings, correspondence, agreements among conspirators to start a war.

P1a. **A prime meeting or meetings where war was plotted should be discovered.** Fischerites find what appears to be such a record of a war-plotting meeting in Admiral Müller's minutes of the December 8, 1912 "War Council." Others such as Hew Strachan (The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]: 51-55) say this meeting was hardly a planning session for a war. What do these minutes mean?

If the December 8 meeting was a planning session where German leaders decided to start a war, we should see the following:

P1b. **Signs of follow-up** from the war-plotting December 8 meeting.

> **Efforts to prepare the public.** We do see such efforts: press campaigns in 1913, another press campaign in March 1914, and the Jubilees of 1913. We also see Müller approach Bethmann about launching a press campaign on Dec. 8, 1912. See Fritz Fischer, War of Illusions (NY: Norton, 1975): 163-64, 190-99, 371-79, 383, 388; and Imanuel Geiss, German Foreign Policy, 1871-1914 (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976): 146, 149-50.

Fischer and Geiss recount a clear spike in articles in the German press that make the case for preventive war. These articles warned that Russia has broadly aggressive aims (toward Sweden, Turkey, etc. etc.) and will launch war in 1917 unless Germany goes first. Geiss also describes the ominous Jubilees of October 1913. Geiss and Fischer also report that Mueller asked Bethmann on Dec. 8 1912 (in the afternoon, right after the War Council) to launch a press campaign to "enlighten the people through the press" about the need for war. (Fischer, WOI: 163.) And Fischer's other discussions of war fever in the press (see pages listed above in WOI) convincingly make the case that the war-fever articles were officially inspired. He notes, e.g., that they were not renounced by the Foreign Ministry; and were often said to come from high officials; or they appeared in journals close to the government.

> Strachan, To Arms, claims we do not see such a campaign for war evident in the press (p. 52). But he must have overlook the evidence uncovered by Fischer and Geiss.

> Strachan, To Arms, claims there is no evidence that the Foreign Ministry tried to orchestrate a war-fever campaign in the press (p. 52). Again, he must have overlook Fischer's evidence to the contrary.

> And: would we necessarily have evidence of such an effort? Propaganda campaigns are generally hidden from view.

> Strachan claims that the German government couldn't have manipulated the press (p. 52).

> This claim is refuted by Tirpitz's evident success in press manipulation before 1914, and by successful official press manipulation in many other countries at various times.

> **Germany preparing its army for war.** We do see this, manifest in the large German army buildup of 1913-1914.

> Strachan says planning for this buildup preceded the Dec. 8, 1912 meeting and that the buildup was defensive in motive, provoked by French building and the Serb defeat of Turkey.

> But as Strachan notes, the Germans sped up the timetable for completing their army buildup from a date in 1916 to 1914. Perhaps a buildup was planned, but not the rapid 1913-14 buildup.

- > **Germany preparing its navy for war?** We don't see this. And Strachan takes the absence of a major naval buildup after December 8, 1912 as evidence against Fischer (p. 55).
  - > But the Fischer theory probably doesn't predict such a buildup! Naval building begun in December 1912 probably would not bear fruit by July 1914 because of long lead times for ship-building. And Tirpitz did not ask for more shipbuilding at the December 8 meeting-- only for time to finish the Kiel canal. Moreover, German strategy was to win quickly on the continent and thereby lock the British out of the war. Hence it should have focused on building up the army, not the navy. Finally, Germany wanted to keep Britain out of the war, so it should have pursued a detente with Britain, including a halt to naval building.
- > **Germany preparing by building up its food stocks?** Strachan notes that Germany stocked food for the army but not the public and so dismisses the notion that the December 8, 1912 meeting was a war-decision meeting.
  - > But the German army was imbued with the cult of the offensive. Hence it would prepare to feed itself and assume that the public would not be short of food as the war would quickly be over!<sup>1</sup>
- Plc. **Agreement among "War Council" participants that they had made a national decision for war at the December 8 meeting.** Fischer critics say this prediction is flunked by Müller's postscript on his minutes stating that the meeting "amounted to almost nothing." But I say: Müller was a superhawk who wanted a decision for immediate war. His postscript only shows his frustration that a decision for immediate war was not taken.
- Pld. **Efforts by those who declared for war at the meeting to bring about war later.** Thus the Kaiser should later be seen working for war, as it was he who called the December 8 meeting. Fischer critics note that instead the Kaiser was clearly dovish during the July 1914 crisis, and infer from this that he couldn't have been seriously proposing war in 1912. I say: this does mitigate against the notion that war was decided on Dec. 8, 1912 but it tests an uncertain prediction. Would the Kaiser necessarily hold personally to a decision for war that he triggered in December 1912? He was both mercurial and manipulable. Perhaps others manipulated him into the decision; and then engineered a later outbreak of war despite his waning support for it in July 1914.
- ple. **Inclusion of all central policymakers in the meeting.** Specifically, Bethmann-Hollweg should have been there for the meeting to mean much, say Fischer critics (Strachan, p. 53). Perhaps so but apparently he didn't need to be. Fischer (WOI:164) offers evidence that Bethmann had become pro-war as of Dec. 14, 1912. Perhaps the Kaiser knew he was already on board.

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<sup>1</sup> Strachan makes additional unpersuasive points:

- >> "German advocates of preventive war didn't recommend war for the domestic reasons Fischer posits!" (p. 55). So what? Now Strachan has switched subjects, from the scope of German aggressiveness to the motives for it. Bait and switch.
- >> "German advocates of preventive war had no impact on policy!" (p. 55).
- >> But Strachan declares this without evidence!

- P2. **Large wartime war aims.** Fischerites infer that large aims in wartime signal large aims also existed before the war--and caused it. Is this fair? Some would say "No--wars beget large war aims. So the prediction is unfair." But I find it not wholly unreasonable. Large war aims don't appear overnight--they reflect long gestation.  
>> We see the German "September Program," a large plan of German expansion drafted in September 1914. (Note: Fischer's discovery of these large war aims gave rise to his argument that these aims preexisted the war. So this evidence persuaded at least Fischer.)
- P3. **German encouragement of Austria-Hungary to take a hard line with Serbia.**  
>> Germany encouraged Austria to take a hard line by its July 5-6 Blank Check to Austria. But did Germany authorize (or push) Austria to take a hard line only to create a crisis victory, not a continental or world war? This seems possible. If so, prediction P2 is not unique.
- P4. **During the July crisis Germany should not pull back even after learning that military measures were underway in Russia and France.**  
>> Germany doesn't pull back on learning of Russian mobilization measures. It learns on July 27 but keeps pushing Austria forward until July 30. This seems a strong test, as it tests a unique prediction. What aside from German desire for war could explain such conduct?
- P5. **Advocacy of war by strong German public pressure groups.**  
>> We see such advocacy by pan-Germans and the Army. But this prediction's fulfillment is not impressive until we also show that the German army, and/or the pan-Germans, were politically powerful. Until then it remains possible that hawkish German pressure groups were violent-minded but too weak to steer Germany onto a violent course. If so Prediction P3 is not unique, so the test it creates is weak.
- P6. **Appropriate beliefs among German elites about national goals and diplomatic tactics.**  
>> Evidence of a German elite motive for war is seen in German perceptions of a window of vulnerability against Russia.  
>> A theory among German elites explaining that a war-risking foreign policy was necessary and could bring the expansion of Germany's sphere of influence is seen in Riezler's theory of Bluff Diplomacy.
- P7. **Evidence of German elite pleasure at the outbreak of war.**  
>> We see rumors of pleasure reported at various military units. And Mueller is quoted: "The mood is brilliant. The government has succeeded very well in making us appear as the attacked." This also seems a strong test, at least of German military desire for war, since it is hard to imagine any explanation for such conduct, other than a German military desire for war. But it is not a conclusive positive test, as one must also establish that the military had the strength to cause war and did push for it before the case becomes conclusive.  
>> On the other hand the Kaiser was upset at the outbreak of war ("you will live to regret this!"). But perhaps others, not the Kaiser, greased the skids to war.
- P8. **Postwar mea culpas, other confessions?**  
>> We see Bethmann-Hollweg say in 1918 or so that "yes it was in a

sense a preventive war..." Is this telltale? A strong test? We don't usually expect mea culpas from the innocent!

P9. **Postwar coverup?**

>> We see a coverup (e.g. editing of the various memoirs, the historical mythmaking that Holger Herwig describes in "Clio Deceived.") But perhaps all elites do this, even the innocent.

B. The Fischer school also makes some unfulfilled predictions:

P1. **No dovish expressions** in German elite? We do see the Kaiser on July 28 say "every reason for war has fallen to the ground" with the Serbian reply to Austria. And on signing the German mobilization order he tells others: "You will live to regret this." (Schmitt).

P2. **No German effort to restrain Austria-Hungary** until there is war? In fact we see an untransmitted pullback by the Kaiser on July 28, then a weak pullback by Bethmann on the morning of July 30, although he then abandons the effort.

This flunks only the extreme Fischer view, holding that Germany sought general war under any circumstances. It doesn't infirm the other Fischer views.

P3. **No efforts to avoid war with Britain;** and no expressions of hope to avoid war with Britain? We see these things; and this infirms the extreme Fischer view, but not the others.

P4. **No signs of great tension in the German elite?** Surely they were tense. And if they didn't want peace, why was the crisis so tense?

P5. **No efforts to avoid war with Russia;** and no expressions of hope to avoid war with Russia? We see some of this, but not much. All efforts to avoid war with Russia seem perfunctory. Bethmann's view that "if there is war, so be it" is typical of German officials.

P6. **Presence of a general theory to explain German expansionism.** Is this a hoop test for the theory? Many implicitly assume it is-- they reject a German Expansion theory of WWI in the absence of a theory explaining why Germany would go nuts. But others (SVE) say this is an unfair prediction. There is a lot we don't understand, and German expansion may be one such thing.

>> There is no widely accepted theory that explains why Wilhelmine Germany would be so aggressive. SVE has his theories but few share them.

C. Predictions from "Russian expansionism/belligerence caused the war!"

P1. **Evidence of a Russian plot to start a war?**

>> An unfair prediction: Russian records, unlike German, have been hidden these many years.

P2. **Evidence of large Russian pre-war goals.**

>> Russia did seek control of the Dardanelles, but DCB Lieven did not find a wider imperial program, or a program that the Russians were willing to push to the point of war.

P3. **Russian military preparations for war?**

>> We do see the planned Russian military buildup of 1914-17 (the "Great Program")! But this prediction is not unique. A "German

aggression caused the war" theory also predicts it, because it followed the German buildup.

P4. **Russia should take avoidable steps that demonstrably triggered reactions that trigger war.**

>> Russian mobilization did demonstrably trigger war. But how avoidable was this mobilization, if there was a large first-move advantage? The prediction is not unique. The "Germany provoked war" theory also predicts that Russia might be provoked to take the final step to war.

D. Predictions from "Austria caused the war!"

Predicts:

P1. Evidence of **Austrian belligerence**, motives for it.

>> We see this.

P2. Evidence of **an independent Austrian decision to pursue war with Serbia** during July 1914.

>> We see this.

E. Predictions from "Serbia caused the war!"

Predicts:

P1. Evidence of **Serb acts that triggered the war.**

>> Serb acts at Sarajevo did trigger war. But historians believe that later Serb intransigence emerged in consultation with Russia.

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