H-Diplo/ISSF Forum on “New Light on 1914?”

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A full century has now passed since the First World War broke out in 1914, but the question of what caused it remains unsettled. Historical opinion in this area continues to evolve; in recent years the change has been particularly dramatic. A half-century ago Fritz Fischer published his famous books essentially blaming Germany for the war, and for decades that basic judgment was widely accepted.[[1]](#footnote-1) One of Fischer’s main disciples, Imanuel Geiss, went so far as to say in 1972 that the “predominant part” Germany played in the outbreak of the war was “no longer debated and no longer deniable.”[[2]](#footnote-2) And even in 2007 another Fischerite, John Röhl, could still claim that “in the international historical fraternity,” there was “something close to consensus that the war came about as a result of the policies pursued by Berlin and Vienna.”[[3]](#footnote-3) But just a few years later it was clear that many historians had come to see things in a very different light. As Jonathan Steinberg notes (in commenting on some new work presented at a 2011 conference on the “Fischer Controversy 50 Years On”), “the Germans look less guilty; the others conspicuously more.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Another well-known historian, Richard Evans, was more categorical. “The Fischer thesis,” he points out a review of six new books on the origins of the war published in 2014, “has not worn well,” and, indeed, judging from the books he was reviewing, it was now “almost dead.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

For those scholars who still accept the Fischer thesis (and many still do), that trend is naturally dismaying—in large part because one their most convincing arguments was that they had essentially won the historiographical debate and their views had come to be almost universally accepted. The remarkable success, especially in Germany, of Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers—*a book which, as they saw it, tended to minimize Germany’s responsibility for the war—was a particular source of concern.Röhl, for example, took the view that Fischer’s “discoveries”—the “proof” Fischer had found of “German plans to unleash war in 1914 with the intention of dominating the Continent”—should have settled the issue once and for all.[[6]](#footnote-6) But the great success in Germany of Clark’s bookshowed, in Röhl’s view, that historical truth was in danger of being overwhelmed by nationalist emotion. “In my darker moments,” he wrote, “it feels as if the arcane detective work we few truth-seekers are undertaking in the archives is no match for the overriding (and perfectly understandable) popular longing in Germany for a guilt-free national myth similar to the proud histories the British and French people can construct for themselves.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

But is it really true that these new interpretations are not the product of an honest effort to understand the origins of the war? Historical opinion has certainly changed in some major ways, but how exactly is that shift to be explained? And, at a more basic level, what are we to make of the Fischer thesis, especially in the light of all the new work that has been published in this area?

The Question of Evidence

For years Fischer’s supporters have claimed that the evidence he presented was so massive and so compelling that his basic point about Germany’s responsibility for the war was irrefutable. A 1962 review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of Fischer’s 1961 book *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (“Reaching for World Power”) was typical. “Startling as some of its conclusions must at first appear,” the anonymous reviewer wrote, “it seems unlikely that they can be seriously challenged in view of the weight of the evidence that the author adduces.”[[8]](#footnote-8) And Fischer provided much more evidence in his second major book on the subject, *Krieg der Illusionen*,published in 1969 (and which appeared in English in 1975 under the title *War of Illusions*)—a book which, unlike its predecessor, was devoted mainly to the period before the war. The two books provoked a massive debate, especially among German historians, but after the dust had settled Fischer’s followers had no doubt who had won. “No serious German historian today,” one of them wrote in 1975, “can venture to pit himself against the evidence compiled by the Fischer school.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

But are those claims correct? The question is of considerable importance, since in historical work hard evidence plays a fundamental role: conclusions are only as good as the evidence supporting them. And yet from the start many historians were not convinced that Fischer’s arguments had been adequately supported by the evidence he had provided. Thus Gerald Feldman, who would later become America’s most distinguished student of German history during the period of the First World War, published a review in 1971 of *Krieg der Illusionen*, Fischer’s most important book on the war origins question. Feldman noted Fischer’s “strong tendency to carry interesting points to their extreme conclusions without the benefit of evidence” and suggested that there was something unprofessional about Fischer’s approach. “Fischer’s passionate effort to demonstrate that Germany was guilty of launching an aggressive rather than a defensive preventive war,” Feldman wrote, “might be helpful to an attorney for the prosecution, but it leaves the historian on the sidelines.”[[10]](#footnote-10) And, indeed, when you actually read the documents Fischer cited to support his key claims, the problems Feldman was referring to are hard to miss.

*Checking the Footnotes*

Consider first a claim Fischer made in the context of his argument that a decision to start a war in the next couple of years had been made at the famous “War Council” of December 8, 1912. At that meeting, General Helmuth von Moltke, the Chief of the German Army’s General Staff, argued that war was unavoidable and that the sooner it broke out the better. The Navy, however, was not ready for an immediate war, and because of its opposition the Emperor reluctantly agreed to a postponement. A few days later, the Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, learned that “the Emperor and Moltke had expressed themselves in favour of an early war.” According to Fischer, Bethmann “adapted himself to this situation and now advocated to the Emperor the pursuit of an energetic pro-war policy,” and in particular “pointed out that it was necessary to prepare the nation psychologically for a great war.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

How well did Fischer back up those assertions about Bethmann? He provided no real evidence to support the very important claim that Bethmann now advocated “the pursuit of an energetic pro-war policy.” The only proof provided was a comment the Emperor made to the effect that Bethmann’s views had shifted: a year earlier he had said he would “never advise going to war” but had now accustomed himself to the idea of an armed conflict. Given Russia’s policy in the Balkans and Germany’s ties with Austria, Bethmann had certainly concluded that war could no longer be ruled out, and in that sense had “accustomed himself” to the idea that an armed confrontation was possible.[[12]](#footnote-12) But that is by no means tantamount to saying he now favored an “energetic pro-war policy.”

But what about Fischer’s narrower claim about the Chancellor understanding how important it was to “prepare the nation psychologically for war”? The one piece of evidence he provided to support that claim was a memorandum Bethmann wrote on December 14, 1912, which had appeared in a well-known collection of German diplomatic documents published in the 1920s. But Bethmann had said nothing about the need to prepare the country for a great war. He began simply by referring to the information he had received about the Emperor urging the Army and the Navy to take advantage of the present readiness of the whole population to authorize whatever was necessary for the purposes of defense and prepare proposals to deal with whatever gaps still existed in Germany’s defense posture. The bulk of the memorandum was a record of what the War Minister, General von Heeringen, and the State Secretary in the Navy Office, Admiral von Tirpitz, had to say about how they proposed to deal with the Emperor’s request. Bethmann concluded by recording his response. For the time being he could not take a position on those proposals, but at first glance they seemed “entirely unfeasible” (“gänzlich undurchführbar”). He ended with a remarkable sentence which is worth quoting in full: “But I must insist most emphatically that you not commit yourselves behind my back with His Majesty, that the public should learn nothing about whatever preparations you undertake within your departments, and that press agitation of any sort to promote such projects cannot under any circumstances be tolerated.” And this document was supposed to prove that the Chancellor thought the country needed to be prepared “psychologically for a great war”?[[13]](#footnote-13)

A second example relates to Fischer’s argument that “Russia tried to the end to prevent the war,” and that Russia could not be blamed for ordering a general mobilization on July 30—that Russia’s responsibility cannot “be said to lie in the fact that on 30th July the Russian government decided to transform the partial mobilization [against Austria] into a general one [directed also against Germany].”[[14]](#footnote-14) Many historians, not just in Germany but in other countries as well, have regarded that move as decisive, but Fischer denies that this was the case, and to that end quotes a statement that “Bethmann Hollweg himself” made that very day at the Prussian State Council:

Although Russia [Bethmann said] had proclaimed a mobilisation its mobilisation measures could not be compared with those of the west European [powers]…Russia did not want a war, it had been forced by Austria to take this step.[[15]](#footnote-15)

This comes across as very powerful evidence. The Chancellor seemed to be admitting, first, that Russia’s general mobilization was not nearly as decisive as, say, Germany’s would have been, and, second, that the Russian move was an understandable reaction to what the Austrians had done. And those points played an important role in supporting the claim that Germany was basically responsible for the war. For if, by Bethmann’s own admission, Russia’s mobilization was understandable, then the Russians could hardly be blamed for taking that step. And if the Germans themselves recognized that a Russian general mobilization would not automatically lead to war, then that meant negotiations could, in principle, have continued even after Russia mobilized; so if the Germans instead chose to respond to the Russian move by opting for war themselves, that could only mean that they had freely chosen to start the war and were just using the Russian mobilization as a welcome pretext to begin military operations.

Other scholars tended to accept that interpretation uncritically. Fischer’s argument in that passage was, for example, echoed by Volker Berghahn in a book published in 1973; Berghahn cited that passage from *Krieg der Illusionen* and used the same extract from Bethmann’s remarks on July 30 to support his claim that the Russian decision to order general mobilization was not “the crucial step that unleashed the First World War,” and that the Germans were merely using it as “a pretext for starting” the war.[[16]](#footnote-16) And the British scholar Niall Ferguson, relying on that passage in the Berghahn book, has repeatedly asserted that the once-common view that the Germans had to start military operations as soon as Russia mobilized against Germany was incorrect, that negotiations were still possible after that Russian mobilization order had been issued, and that if the Germans nonetheless began military operations right away, this was because the German generals were so intent on war. “The Russian argument that their mobilization” did not mean war, he says, “was privately accepted by Moltke and Bethmann.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

I will be discussing the whole Russian mobilization question in more detail a bit later, but for now I want to focus on the way Fischer used Bethmann’s comments at the July 30 State Council meeting. It turns out that there are some major problems with his interpretation of those remarks. The most obvious one is that Bethmann was referring there to Russia’s *partial* mobilization against Austria, announced the previous day, and not, as Fischer had led his readers to think, to a far more important move, Russia’s *general* mobilization against Germany as well. Bethmann, in fact, could not possibly have been referring to a general mobilization (as something which had already been “proclaimed”), because the Germans did not even learn of Russia’s general mobilization until the next morning.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The second problem is even more serious. Bethmann, it turns out, was not expressing his own view (as Fischer had claimed), but was instead simply summarizing an explanation others had given, an explanation the Chancellor by no means fully shared. To see that this was the case, all one has to do is read the passage in its entirety (albeit in a different translation):

The Russian mobilization [according to Bethmann] had been explained, it was true, by statements that Russia’s mobilization measures were not to be compared with those of the western European nations; that the Russian troops might stand fast in a state of mobilization for weeks to come; and that Russia did not intend to go to war, but had only been driven to take these measures by Austria. On the other hand, however, emphasis must be laid on the fact that the four Austro-Hungarian corps mobilized in the southern part of the Monarchy were not aimed against Russia, and also on the fact the the corps mobilized in the north, in Bohemia, possessed more of a local value in view of the dubious political attitude of the Czechs.[[19]](#footnote-19)

And whose argument was he presenting here? It is quite clear from another key source—the German Ambassador Count Friedrich von Pourtalès’s report of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov’s remarks the previous day defending Russia’s recently-announced decision to order a partial mobilization against Austria—that Bethmann was summarizing the official *Russian* view. Sazonov, Pourtalès reported, had contended that Russia was responding to military measures Austria had taken. He argued that “in Russia mobilization was far from meaning war, as it did among western European nations” and that “the Russian army would doubtless be able to remain under arms for weeks to come without crossing the frontier.” “Russia,” Sazonov had said, “wanted to avoid war, if it were in any way possible.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Bethmann’s comments on the 30th were thus clearly a paraphrase—at points practically a word-for-word paraphrase—of what Sazonov had said on the 29th, and this is yet further proof that Bethmann was referring to a partial and not to a general mobilization. And the Pourtalès telegram is not an arcane source. It was included in the important collection of German documents Karl Kautsky published in 1919; it is also covered in the major historical accounts; and every serious student of the July Crisis should be familiar with it.[[21]](#footnote-21) So Fischer’s use of Bethmann’s remarks was utterly misleading: Bethmann’s paraphrase of Sazonov’s defense of Russia’s partial mobilization was transformed into an admission on Bethmann’s part that Russia’s general mobilization was understandable and would not in itself trigger a war.

And why is it important to read the documents with particular care in this case? The main reason is that the interpretation Fischer gave of Bethmann’s remarks is simply not plausible. For it is very clear that Bethmann understood that Germany could not simply throw away what the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, called “the advantage of time” by holding off from military operations once Russia began to mobilize against Germany, and thus knew that a Russian general mobilization would lead directly to war.[[22]](#footnote-22) The whole Schlieffen Plan—Germany’s plan for fighting a two-front war—was predicated on the idea that Germany would have to move as soon as Russia ordered general mobilization. For if Germany was to have any hope of success, it would have to achieve important results in the west at the beginning of the war; that meant it would have to concentrate the bulk of her army in the west, thus leaving its eastern border relatively undefended; and it could do that only while Russia’s relatively slow mobilization was still running its course. If it waited until Russia had finished mobilizing, it would have to divide its armies between east and west and it would thus be too late to put that plan into effect with any hope of success; Germany would therefore have to move as soon as Russia’s general mobilization began. All this was common knowledge at the time, and Bethmann in particular understood why Russia’s general mobilization would more or less automatically lead to war. Indeed, Fischer himself quoted Bethmann as saying a week earlier that “should war break out it will result from Russian mobilisation *ab irato*, before possible negotiations. In that case we could hardly sit and talk any longer because we have to strike immediately in order to have any chance of winning at all.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

All this is quite striking, but let me give a third example of what seems to me a clear misuse of evidence. To support his argument about German policy in the July crisis, Fischer cited an important document, a letter that Gottfried von Jagow, the State Secretary in the Foreign Office, wrote to the ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky—a document which Fischer himself says summed up Germany’s attitude “in a nutshell.” According to Fischer, Jagow argued there that the time had come to launch a preventive war against Russia. “The struggle between Teuton and Slav,” he paraphrases Jagow as saying, “was bound to come . . . which being so, the present was the best moment for Germany, for ‘in a few years Russia . . . will be ready.’” But the original text made no reference to a “struggle between Teuton and Slav,” let alone to its inevitability. All Jagow did was to comment that in Russia “the feeling of the Slavic element is becoming more and more hostile to Germany.” To be sure, Jagow stressed that at present Russia was “not ready to strike” and that the Russians were building up their power and would be “prepared to fight in a few years.” But the conclusion he drew was that Russia would therefore want to avoid war now, and that a “localization” of the Austro-Serbian conflict was still possible. Fischer thus turned Jagow’s argument on its head: Jagow’s point that war with Russia could be avoided was transformed through creative paraphrasing into an argument for provoking war with Russia before it was too late.[[24]](#footnote-24)

These are not the only examples one can cite. I in fact gave a couple of other examples, both also related to important claims Fischer had made, in an article I wrote on the July Crisis twenty-five years ago.**[[25]](#footnote-25)** These were not trivial errors. Each of them related to a piece of evidence that provided important support for a key element in the Fischer argument. So these examples are enough in themselves to raise questions about the overall quality of the Fischer argument: if the building blocks are so defective, how strong can the larger structure be?

*The “Cherry-Picking” Problem*

As Feldman suggested, one often gets the sense that Fischer was building a case rather than weighing the evidence in an open-minded way. Fischer, for example, in keeping with his general interpretation, argued that the Germans were delighted when they learned that Russia had ordered general mobilization and that war was about to break out. The picture “of an Emperor in despair because of the war and a German government unhappy over the failure of the peace negotiations,” he wrote, was simply incorrect; the “real state of affairs” was “very different.” To prove the point, he quoted a passage from Admiral Müller’s diary. “The mood is brilliant,” Müller wrote; “the government has managed brilliantly to make us appear the attacked.” Röhl took much the same view. “The military leaders, the Chancellor, the Foreign Office, and any other statesmen and officers who learned of” the Russian mobilization, he wrote, “reacted to the news with relief. They could now make use of the Russian mobilisation, as they had intended from the start, as a pretext for proclaiming a threatening danger of war and launching attacks on France and Russia.” To support that interpretation, he quoted an extract from the diary of General von Wenninger, the Bavarian military attaché in Berlin, about the mood in the War Ministry at the time: “Beaming faces everywhere, handshaking in the corridors; they are congratulating each other on having cleared the ditch.” This comes across as powerful evidence: if the Germans were so pleased when war broke out, doesn’t that suggest that they had wanted it all along? So it is not surprising that the Müller and Wenninger diary entries are featured in many accounts by Fischer and his supporters.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The problem is that other evidence, which cuts in the opposite direction and bears directly on the attitude of the key policy makers, is not taken into account in this context. Bethmann, for example, judging from the tone of his remarks at the July 30 meeting of the Prussian State Council, was anything but delighted about the course of events: he emphasized “the fact that all Governments, including that of Russia, and the great majority of the nations, were peaceable themselves, but control had been lost, and the stone had started rolling.”[[27]](#footnote-27) A European war, he had said earlier in the crisis, would lead to “the overthrow of all that exists.”[[28]](#footnote-28) He had no illusions about what a great war would be like. “No one can have any conception of a world war,” he told the Reichstag in April 1913, “of the misery and destruction that it would bring to the nations. It would probably make all previous wars look like a childish game.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

Nor does the evidence show unambiguously that the Emperor was pleased by what was about to happen. Indeed, a long marginal comment he wrote on a diplomatic dispatch at the climax of the crisis on July 30 points in exactly the opposite direction. “The net has been suddenly thrown over our head,” the Kaiser wrote, “and England sneeringly reaps the most brilliant success of her persistently prosecuted *anti-German world-policy*, against which we have proved ourselves helpless, while she twists the noose of our political and economic destruction out of our fidelity to Austria, as we squirm *isolated* in the net. A great achievement, which arouses the admiration even of him who is to be destroyed as its result!”[[30]](#footnote-30) As for the top military leaders, their feelings were also not quite as Fischer and his supporters have portrayed them. Moltke, although he had pushed for war, was by no means delighted when the conflict actually broke out: he spoke, in a well-known memorandum written for Bethmann on 28July, of a “war which will annihilate for decades the civilisation of almost all Europe.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

Much the same point applies to another key Fischer argument. To make the claim that the German government during the July Crisis was from the start deliberately aiming at a great war—that it had decided “in early July to start the war at this moment in time”—Fischer had to deny that it had ever really thought that a “localized” Austro-Serbian conflict was a serious possibility.[[32]](#footnote-32) “As innumerable documents show,” he wrote, “Germany knew that Russia would never allow Austria-Hungary to act in the Balkans unopposed.”[[33]](#footnote-33) But the evidence he cited in the passage that followed showed only that the German leaders at that point understood that escalation was possible, not that they knew that for all practical purposes “localization” was impossible.[[34]](#footnote-34) And there is a good deal of evidence that points in the opposite direction. Most historians today, in fact, take the view that the Germans, at least during the early part of the crisis, believed that “localization” was a viable strategy. Even Geiss, writing in 1965, noted that the “dominant mood” among German leaders during the early part of the crisis was that Russia would not intervene in an Austro-Serbian war.[[35]](#footnote-35)

*The Adequacy of the Evidence*

In addition to these problems having to do with the misuse and the selective use of evidence, there is a third problem that should be noted: some key claims are not supported by much hard evidence at all. This point, to be sure, is by no means new. Feldman, for example, had noted in his review of *Krieg der Illusionen* that a couple of Fischer’s most important arguments were not satisfactorily supported by the evidence he had presented, and a leading French historian, Jean-Claude Allain, made much the same point in an obituary he wrote on Fischer in 2000.[[36]](#footnote-36) But let me just give a couple of examples here.

The first relates to Fischer’s argument that a plan had been decided on at the beginning of July “to use the favourable opportunity of the murder at Sarajevo for the start of the continental war which Germany viewed as necessary”; “the German government,” he claimed in an earlier passage, “was determined from early July 1914 onwards to use this favourable opportunity for a war against France and Russia.”[[37]](#footnote-37) But when one looks at the part of the book that deals with this phase of the crisis—the section called “The Occasion is Propitious—the First Week in July”—one finds no proof whatsoever that a decision of that sort had actually been made.[[38]](#footnote-38) The evidence certainly showed that the Germans felt that the assassination provided Austria with a favorable opportunity for settling accounts with Serbia, but that is not the same as saying that they had decided this was a good time to provoke a European war.

A second example has to do with the claim that the policy of engineering a great European war was an integral part of Germany’s drive for “world power.” The July Crisis, Fischer wrote, “appears in its true light only when seen as a link between Germany’s ‘world policy,’ as followed since the mid-1890s, and her war aims policy after August, 1914.”[[39]](#footnote-39) But, as Ferguson noted, “it is hard to see what, if any, direct connection there was between Germany’s ‘world policy’ and the decision to support the Austrian strike against Serbia in 1914.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Klaus Epstein in 1962,Fritz Stern in 1967, and Jacques Droz in 1984, made much the same point.[[41]](#footnote-41) The basic problem here is fairly obvious. If you are investigating a death, you might note that the victim was a heavy smoker, never exercised, drank excessively, and had a serious heart condition; but none of that would be relevant if he had died in a plane crash. There has to be some demonstrable link (as Thomas Schelling put it in another context) between the “strategic background” and the “local foreground,” but Fischer provided no direct evidence proving that Germany’s leaders were “reaching for world power” in July 1914.[[42]](#footnote-42) And that evidence would be hard to find: one has the sense that Germany’s earlier goal of displacing Britain as the world’s premier imperial power had declined in importance—that by 1914 Russia had replaced Britain as the main enemy, that the focus had shifted away from creating a powerful navy to simply strengthening the army, and that with the deterioration of Germany’s position in Europe Germany’s basic orientation was more defensive than it had been.

What all this means is that Fischer’s argument is not particularly impressive in traditional craft terms. That, however, is not the end of the problem.

**The Structure of the Argument**

All historical interpretations have a certain structure. A general thesis rests on a number of more specific claims, which in turn rest on the evidence given to support them. In Fischer’s case, the core argument was supported by a number of key claims. But one by one those claims have been discredited, weakened or relativized.

*The Social Imperialism Argument*

One of Fischer’s main claims was that Germany’s international behavior is to be understood in domestic socio-political terms. He made the point quite explicitly at the beginning of *War of Illusions*: the government’s aim, he wrote, “was to consolidate the position of the ruling classes with a successful imperialist foreign policy; indeed it was hoped a war would resolve the growing social tensions.”[[43]](#footnote-43) This linked up with a powerful argument being made at much the same time by Hans-Ulrich Wehler and a number of other German historians. Their argument was that Germany had modernized economically but not politically; real power remained in the hands of the established elites. The resulting tensions, they said, created a major problem for the ruling groups, and one of the ways the government sought to manage them was through an aggressive foreign policy—through “the diversion outwards,” as Wehler put it, “of internal tensions and forces of change in order to preserve the social and political status quo.”[[44]](#footnote-44) A “social imperialist” policy, the argument ran, would enable Germany’s rulers to use popular nationalism as a “long-term integrative factor which helped stabilise an anachronistc political and social structure.”[[45]](#footnote-45) German policy in the whole period down to 1914 was to be understood in those terms. But that theory served not just to explain German history in the imperial period. The claim was even more far-reaching. The basic socio-political problem persisted well beyond the outbreak of the First World War, and “social imperialism” was the key to understanding German history in the whole period down to 1945: the Nazi phenomenon was to be seen in this context; there was a good deal more continuity in modern German history than people had thought; and one could in fact draw a straight line from Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to Nazi leader Adolf Hitler.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The social imperialism argument was enormously influential, and for a while it seemed that the key to understanding German foreign policy, and indeed modern German history as a whole, had been discovered. But before long a reaction set in. As early as 1976, James Sheehan remarked that the mode of analysis championed by scholars like Wehler seemed to be “becoming a new orthodoxy with its own unexamined assumptions and inherent limitations.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Feldman was convinced by his own work on German society and politics in the period of the First World War that the continuity argument had been overdrawn—that the war itself marked an important break in German history.[[48]](#footnote-48) A number of British scholars also found much to criticize in the new approach. Richard Evans objected to the view of the German Empire “as a puppet theatre, with Junkers and industrialists pulling the strings, and middle and lower classes dancing jerkily across the stage of history towards the final curtain of the Third Reich.”[[49]](#footnote-49) Geoff Eley was at first “exhilarated” by the Wehlerite approach, but “developed big reservations quite quickly.”[[50]](#footnote-50) In 1974 he published an important article criticizing a fairly narrow historical claim supporting the theory; the evidence, it seemed to him, just did not support the basic argument in some key areas.[[51]](#footnote-51) A leading French scholar, Raymond Poidevin, in his important book on Franco-German economic relations before the war, also reached some conclusions that related to one important part of the social imperialism theory, the idea that a bellicose imperialism was the glue that held the “alliance of elites” together.[[52]](#footnote-52) The top industrialists were supposed to be a major part of that “alliance,” but Poidevin, in his very extensive work in the German archives, could not find a single document in which business leaders called for war.[[53]](#footnote-53) Other leading scholars, especially Feldman, have reached similar conclusions.[[54]](#footnote-54)

A number of prominent German historians were also critical of the “social imperialism” thesis. Wolfgang Mommsen, by no means an arch-conservative, quoted in this context Bethmann’s remark in June 1914 to the effect that those who thought a war “might lead to a healthier state of affairs in Germany—in the conservative sense” were wrong, and that “on the contrary a world war with all its unpredictable consequences is likely to enhance the power of the Social Democrats—as they are preaching peace—tremendously, and might lead to the destruction of some thrones.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

The criticism was quite effective, and by the early 1990s few historians still thought that German foreign policy before the war was to be explained in essentially “social imperialist” terms. As Niall Ferguson pointed out at the very beginning of an important article published in 1994, the argument “that the German ‘ruling elites’ precipitated war to avert a domestic political crisis – ‘to strengthen the patriarchal order and mentality’ and ‘halt the advance of Social Democracy’ - no longer appears tenable.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

*Some Key Historical Claims*

The Fischer thesis also rested on a number of narrower historical claims. According to Fischer, for example, a “decision in favour of a war” with France and Russia was made at the December 1912 “War Council.” The war would begin at some point in the near future. In the meantime, he said, the German government began to prepare the country psychologically and economically for a great conflict.[[57]](#footnote-57) That aggressive policy was possible, in his view, only because the Germans felt they would have no trouble winning such a war. The German army, he said, viewed its war plan—the famous Schlieffen Plan—as an “infallible recipe for victory.”[[58]](#footnote-58) But it seemed that in the not-too-distant future that would no longer be the case. With the build-up of Russian and French military power, the balance (it was believed) was shifting against Germany, so war could not be put off indefinitely. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand provided the German government with the opportunity to put its general plan into effect: the Austrians would be pushed into taking action which the Germans knew Russia could not accept and the war that followed could be blamed on Russia. The German government’s goal during the July crisis was thus not to prevent war, but simply to stage-manage things so that its own people would feel they were fighting a defensive war—and maybe also to keep the British from intervening, at least right away. Because Russia made the “technical blunder” of mobilizing first (Geiss’s term), the German government was able to achieve that first goal: the war could be sold to the public as essentially defensive in nature.[[59]](#footnote-59) But historians should not be taken in: in reality, Germany’s plan to use the assassinations at Sarajevo to start a continental war, Fischer said, had been “carried out successfully.”[[60]](#footnote-60) And that interpretation is supported by the point that the Germans were delighted when Russia mobilized and the government was able to go to war with the whole country behind it. The fact that German leaders were so pleased seemed to suggest in itself that the Germans had wanted the war and had succeeded in forcing a full-scale military confrontation.

Each of these claims played an important role in supporting Fischer’s basic thesis that Germany was primarily responsible for the war. But a number of them are no longer widely accepted. Even those that are valid are now seen in a somewhat broader context—that is, in the light of new evidence about how other countries were dealing with these issues. That new approach has tended to deflate the significance of some of Fischer’s key points about Germany. Let me deal with them one by one.

What, first of all, are we to make of Fischer’s argument about the December 1912 “War Council”—that is, his claim that a basic decision for war had been made at that meeting, and that the policy Germany pursued over the next year and a half, culminating in the decision to provoke a war in July 1914, was to be understood in that context? That argument struck most scholars from the outset as far too extreme, and, as Mark Hewitson has pointed out, it was eventually “abandoned by virtually all historians.”[[61]](#footnote-61) The basic problem, as most historians saw it, was that Fischer tended to portray German policy as far more systematic, more coherent, and more premeditated, than it in fact was.[[62]](#footnote-62) Even Fischer himself eventually abandoned the argument, going so far as to say in 1988 that he had never claimed that the war had been “planned for a long time … not even by the ‘War Council’ of Wilhelm II on 8 December 1912.”[[63]](#footnote-63) This was quite extraordinary, given that practically every scholar who has written on the subject, Fischer’s supporters as well as his opponents, thought that that was precisely what Fischer *had* been saying.[[64]](#footnote-64) And the text itself shows unambiguously that he in fact did make that argument in *War of Illusions*.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The weakness of Fischer’s argument about the “War Council” was clear from the start, but that was not the case with the second claim I want to consider, the point that the Germans thought they would quickly win a European war. That argument, of course, was by no means new: Bernadotte Schmitt, for example, also thought that the Germans “faced the prospect of a general conflict with complacency and confidence” and believed “they could easily defeat Russia and France”; those points supported his basic conclusion that Germany’s “primary responsibility for the fatal ending of the crisis” was “clear and overwhelming.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

It turns out, however, that at least some key figures in the army were far more pessimistic about how a great war would run its course than we had been led to believe. Fischer had claimed that the Germans felt strong enough in 1914 to provoke a war with France and Russia with the goal of achieving “Germany hegemony over Europe”—indeed, that they believed that the Schlieffen Plan was an “infallible recipe for victory.”[[67]](#footnote-67) But as Stig Förster has pointed out (building on earlier work by Lothar Burchardt) Moltke himself took a very different view. Even in 1905, Germany’s top military officer had predicted that a war with France alone would be a “long and tedious struggle.” France, he thought, would not give up “before the strength of its entire people has been broken,” and “our own people too will be utterly exhausted, even if we should be victorious.”[[68]](#footnote-68) In 1914 Moltke took the line (with a talk with Jagow) that Germany was barely able to face the prospect of war with confidence and that in the future things would be bleaker still.[[69]](#footnote-69) And Moltke was by no means an isolated figure. Some important analyses produced within the General Staff in the years before the war had also reached the conclusion, as Förster put it, that the basic goal of surrounding and annihilating the French army, as called for in the Schlieffen Plan, was “absolutely unachievable.”[[70]](#footnote-70) It seems quite clear, in fact, that the military leadership was by no means certain that a quick victory was within reach: the war, Moltke and at least some of his colleagues believed, might well turn into a long and grueling struggle.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Fischer also claimed that Germany, in late 1912, began to prepare seriously for a major European war. But as Förster has pointed out, the measures taken were fairly modest. “Even in the field of armament policy,” Förster wrote, “Imperial Germany was unable to prepare for total war.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Thanks to “Lothar Burchardt’s excellent investigation,” he noted, “the lack of economic preparations in Imperial Germany is now a well-established fact.”[[73]](#footnote-73) For Förster, the element of irrationality was quite striking. If the Germans had been rational, there were in theory two possible courses of action open to them. They could have energetically prepared for a long war well before 1914, mobilizing all their resources to get whatever advantage they could, or they could have aimed at avoiding war altogether. But neither of those alternative policies was seriously pursued.[[74]](#footnote-74) Instead the Germans accepted war—and indeed people like Moltke were quite bellicose—even though they understood what a war would be like and even though they had not systematically prepared for it. For Förster this situation is very hard to understand, but the least one can say is that the war was not the result of a “goal-oriented decision-making process.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

Niall Ferguson took the argument a step further. Ferguson’s point was that the German Reich was structurally incapable (in peacetime) of making the necessary effort and that the Germans’ inability to prepare seriously for war helps explain why they actually went to war in 1914.[[76]](#footnote-76) For Ferguson, as for many other scholars, the deterioration of Germany’s relative military position was of fundamental importance. The “decisive factor in 1914 which pushed the Germans over the brink into war,” he wrote, “was the conviction of both military and civilian leaders that Germany could not win the arms race against its continental neighbours.” And the reason the Germans were losing —the reason why the balance was turning against Germany—was *not* that the Germans were economically incapable of keeping up. Germany, Ferguson suggested, “could and should have spent more on defense before 1914.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Even on the eve of the war, “at a time of great international tension and domestic-political bellicosity,” Germany was spending a mere 3.5% of her national income for military purposes.[[78]](#footnote-78) And if Germany was incapable of making the necessary effort—even the kind of effort her continental rivals were making at the time—this was for domestic political and institutional reasons.[[79]](#footnote-79) But whatever the cause, the Germans knew in 1914 that the military balance was turning against them; the situation had already deteriorated to point where even now war was a “considerable gamble”; but things would be even worse two or three years down the road, and they took the plunge thinking that at least now they still had a certain chance of winning.[[80]](#footnote-80)

It is very clear, in fact, that this preventive war logic played an important role in shaping German policy in the July crisis. As Bethmann himself later admitted, “in a certain sense it was a preventive war.” German policy, he said, had been strongly influenced by the military’s claim that “today war is still possible without defeat, but not in two years.”[[81]](#footnote-81) But that point would not support the general claim that Germany was *primarily* responsible for the war if it could be shown that Germany’s rivals were also thinking in preventive war terms.

And it turns out, as Stefan Schmidt shows in his important 2009 book on French policy in the July Crisis, that one can also find the same kind of thinking in France. In early 1913, for example, according to a top British general, the French soldiers were “of the opinion that it would be far better for France if a conflict were not too long postponed.”[[82]](#footnote-82) General Edouard de Castelnau, the second highest-ranking French officer in the French army, was “in favour of a war now as being a good opportunity, France [and] Russia being ready, [and] Austria in a state of confusion.” And Castelnau was by no means an isolated figure. According to the British Ambassador in Paris, many Frenchmen at that time believed that “war is inevitable within the next two years and that it might be better for France to have it soon.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

During the July crisis, many French officers were pleased that war was about to break out under such favorable circumstances. “I have made it clear to the highest authorities,” Castelnau wrote on July 30, at the peak of the crisis, “that from a strategic point of view we would never find a better occasion.”[[84]](#footnote-84) The French military attaché in Berlin also thought that more favorable conditions would never be found—a view shared by French diplomats in St. Petersburg. And the Russian military attaché in Paris was struck, on July 30, at the “unconcealed joy” he saw in the French general staff at the prospect of being able to take advantage of what to the French were such “favorable strategic circumstances.”[[85]](#footnote-85) French military leaders, in fact, seemed sure that the Entente had the upper hand in military terms. They thought a war would be short and were confident their side would emerge victorious.[[86]](#footnote-86) The French general staff, for example, had concluded in September 1912 that a war that broke out over the Serbian question would put the Germanic powers “at the mercy of the Entente.”[[87]](#footnote-87) And General Castelnau told the Russian military attaché on two occasions in late 1912 “that he personally is ready for war and even that he would like a war.”[[88]](#footnote-88)

The political leadership was more prudent, but French leaders certainly felt they could take a tough line because the military situation was so favorable.[[89]](#footnote-89) In May 1914, the Belgian Minister in Paris was struck by how chauvinistic and self-confident the French had become. The same men who two years earlier “showed lively fear at the very mention of a Franco-German conflict,” he wrote, had “changed their language. They declare themselves sure to win.”[[90]](#footnote-90) There was, moreover, a major political factor that affected the way the French approached the Austro-Serbian question. In a war that broke out over this issue, they could be sure to have Russia on their side; if war broke out over some other Franco-German dispute, they might not be able to count on Russian support. That calculation had a good deal to do with the fact that in the two years that preceded the outbreak of war the French took a very firm line on the Balkan question. In October 1912, French President Raymond Poincaré—the key French policymaker during this period—told the Russian Ambassador in Paris that he was “‘not afraid’ of the idea that it might prove necessary to ‘initiate a war under certain circumstances’ and that he was certain the states of the Triple Entente would prevail.”[[91]](#footnote-91) At times French leaders took an even harder line than their Russian ally. In late 1912, for example, Alexandre Millerand, the French War Minister, was annoyed that Russia was not tough enough on the Serbian question; France itself was willing to support Russia even if it meant war.[[92]](#footnote-92) This was not the only time French leaders reacted that way. As Albertini notes, on several occasions during the 1912-14 period “the Russian attitude had been thought too submissive by France.”[[93]](#footnote-93) During the July Crisis, Poincaré was upset when he heard that Russia had decided to advise the Serbs not to resist an Austrian invasion, but to trust their fate to the great powers. He considered this an “abdication,” a “black day” for the Franco‐Russian alliance. He was also irritated by all the emphasis the Russians were placing on the importance of making sure that Britain was on their side. He wondered whether this was a “dérobade”: the Russians, it seemed to him, might well be trying to evade their responsibilities.[[94]](#footnote-94)

For me, perhaps the most revealing piece of evidence relating to this issue was buried in one of Schmidt’s footnotes. On August 6, right after the war broke out, Poincaré was so confident of success, and so determined on war, that he thought that “the worst thing that could happen to us” would be for Germany to accept an American offer of mediation. A full-scale war, he felt, would in that case not take place, but “as we would not be the victors, the peace would not be favorable for us, Germany would remain as powerful as ever, and we would be exposed, before long, to new threats.”[[95]](#footnote-95) The idea was that war was better than a status quo peace—that it was better to have a war now than risk being exposed to German threats in the future (when France, presumably because Russian interests might not be as firmly engaged, would be less able to deal with them). Didn’t this reveal that Poincaré, like Bethmann, was thinking at least to a certain degree in preventive war terms?[[96]](#footnote-96)

The Russians, for their part, were by no means making every effort to avoid an armed conflict in the period before the war. Earlier, when Piotr Stolypin was the leading figure in the government, the assumption had been that war absolutely had to be avoided—that Russia was in no position, as Stolypin himself put it, to pursue “an aggressive foreign policy.”[[97]](#footnote-97) After his assassination in 1911, he was succeeded as Prime Minister by Count Vladimir Kokovstov, who saw things much the same way. But Kokovstov did not have the same degree of authority that Stolypin had had, and there were strong forces in the government favoring a much tougher policy. War Minister Sukhomlinov had pressed in November 1912 for military measures which, in Kokovstov’s view, might well have led to war; when Kokovstov objected, Sukhomlinov replied (according to Kokovstov’s later account, published in 1935) that war was unavoidable anyway, that “it would be profitable for us to begin it as soon as possible,” and that he and the Tsar “believe in our army and know that a war would bring us nothing but good.” Kokovstov took the view in a meeting of the Council of Ministers held the next day that since Russia was “unprepared for war,” the government had to pursue a less confrontational policy; Sukhomlinov, on the other hand, “affirmed the splendid condition of our army and the remendous progress made in the matter of its equipment.” And most of the Ministers seemed to side with Sukhomlinov. The hard-liners were clearly in **t he** ascendant. In early 1914 Kokovstov was dismissed as Prime Minister; by July 1914 it was clear that the avoidance of war was no longer the main priority.[[98]](#footnote-98)

This does not quite show, however, that even people like Sukhomlinov really hoped that a war would break out “as soon as possible,” or even that they actually believed that Russia was strong enough to risk an armed conflict. Sukhomlinov’s real views were very different. During the July crisis, for example, he took a hard line in official meetings with other government leaders; but at the same time he tried to make sure through more informal channels that the Foreign Minister, Sazonov, knew how weak Russia in fact was.[[99]](#footnote-99) It was thus probably a mistake for Clark to suggest that Sukhomlinov’s November 1912 remarks should be taken at face value.[[100]](#footnote-100) But the mere fact that Sukhomlinov felt he had to take a hard line, not just at key ministerial meetings but also by sponsoring bellicose articles in the press, is quite revealing.[[101]](#footnote-101) They tell us something about the world in which Russia’s leaders found themselves—about the mood in Russian political circles during this period.

As Dominic Lieven points out in his new book on Russian policy during this period, Slavophile sentiment was strong within the “social and economic elite” at the time—that is, in the segment of society “on which the regime depended.”[[102]](#footnote-102) The press especially “put the government under great pressure to adopt dangerous policies.”[[103]](#footnote-103) Russia’s leaders “could not and did not ignore public opinion.”[[104]](#footnote-104) Indeed, the “*raison d’être* of the new constitutional order [established in 1905] was to rebuild bridges between the regime, the propertied elites, and Russian educated society.”[[105]](#footnote-105) People like Sazonov thus believed in principle “in the need for a foreign policy reflecting national sentiment.”[[106]](#footnote-106) That meant that they were under pressure to pursue a Slavophile policy—a policy which, to one extent or another, they personally felt was the right policy to pursue.[[107]](#footnote-107) And indeed, for Lieven, “aspects of Slavophilism” were “of vital importance to Russian policy before 1914”; Russia in 1912, in his view, was pursuing a “Slavophile foreign policy.”[[108]](#footnote-108) Sazonov, in particular, was not just “committed to sustaining Russia’s traditional role in the Balkans,” but he brought “to this commitment an instinctive Slavophilism rooted in his conception of what it meant to be a Russian.”[[109]](#footnote-109)

By July 1914, most Russian leaders were thinking in those terms. The old imperative to avoid war was not nearly as important as it had been in period through 1911. The sense now was that Russia could not give way on the Serbian question; if this meant that there would be a showdown with the Germanic Powers over this issue, then that was something the Russian leadership was prepared to accept.[[110]](#footnote-110) And that view was not limited to the government. Sazonov himself later recalled the atmosphere in St. Petersburg after the Balkan Wars: in society circles “in close touch with certain Court and military centres, there was a rooted conviction that a favourable moment was approaching” for settling accounts with Austria-Hungary.”[[111]](#footnote-111) In some Russian circles, the prospect of war was even welcomed. Lieven quotes a comment Mikhail Rodzianko, the Duma’s president, made in the spring of 1913 in a meeting with the Tsar: “We must take advantage of the general enthusiasm. The Straits must belong to us. War will be accepted with joy and will serve only to increase the prestige of the imperial power.”[[112]](#footnote-112) And Clark quotes a January 1914 editorial “from the military journal *Razvechik*, widely viewed as an organ of the imperial General Staff”: “Not just the troops, but the entire Russian people must get used to the fact that we are arming ourselves for a war of extermination against the Germans and that the German empires [*sic*] must be destroyed, even if it costs us hundreds of thousands of lives.”[[113]](#footnote-113) But few leaders actually hoped for a war; most, however, were willing to accept a confrontation over Serbia, almost without regard to what the military realities were. The Russians, like the Germans, were now prepared to risk war over that issue.

Why are parallels of this sort worth noting? Fischer’s thesis that Germany was primarily responsible for the First World War was supported by a number of key claims: that German policy in July 1914 was rooted in a sense that the sooner war broke out, the better; that the Germans felt in July 1914 that “the occasion was propitious” for a great war, which they were confident they would win; that their main goal in the July Crisis was thus not to avoid war but to stage-manage things so Germany could appear to her own people as forced into the conflict; and that German leaders were delighted when war broke out—suggesting that the Germans had wanted the war, and perhaps had even planned it. But none of this could support the claim that Germany was *primarily* responsible for the war—that the “overwhelming share” of responsibility for the war rested on Germany’s shoulders—if one saw the same sort of thing on the Entente side.[[114]](#footnote-114)

And the parallels are quite striking: “beaming faces everywhere, handshaking in the corridors” at the War Ministry in Berlin on July 31; “unconcealed joy” at French general staff headquarters in Paris on July 30. Moltke and his colleagues think in 1914 that in strategic terms things would never be better for Germany; but their counterparts in France especially think “that from a strategic point of view we will never find a better occasion.” German strategy places a great premium on rapid, offensive, action. But French strategy was also very offense-oriented from 1912 on; indeed, the French were more tempted to attack Germany by way of Belgium than we had been led to believe.[[115]](#footnote-115) The Germans give Austria a “blank check,” but France gives Russia a “blank check” of her own.[[116]](#footnote-116) The Germans sabotage efforts at mediation, but the French (and even the British) make little effort to hold Russia back, and Poincaré rules out American mediation on August 6—not because he believes it would not work, but rather because he is afraid it would succeed and head off the conflict, which he is sure his side would win. The German government, moreover, might have taken certain steps to prepare the country psychologically for war.[[117]](#footnote-117) But the Russian and French governments were at the same time conducting a campaign (in which bribery played a key role) to get the French press to take a more pro-Russian line and to accustom French opinion “to the idea of a (European) war arising out of the Balkan conflict.”[[118]](#footnote-118)

And while the German leaders certainly wanted to stage-manage things so that their own people would view the war as defensive, one finds the same sort of calculation on the Entente side. The thought that “the opponent must be allowed to appear the aggressor, ” as Clark notes, crops up “in all the key decision-centres on both sides during the last days of the crisis.”[[119]](#footnote-119) Thus the French government was very much concerned with making it seem, again both with an eye to Britain and for domestic political reasons, that their country would be fighting a purely defensive war.[[120]](#footnote-120) People like Poincaré were under no illusion that the French people would happily go to war for the sake of Serbia; the fact that the war began with a German attack on France and that Germany declared war on their country before they had to declare war on Germany, was exactly what they wanted. Poincaré noted the reaction in the French cabinet when on August 3 news of the German declaration of war was received: “never has a declaration of war been greeted with such satisfaction.”[[121]](#footnote-121) The strategy was quite clear. Robert Doughty quotes some notes of the July 30 cabinet meeting—“for the sake of public opinion, let the Germans put themselves in the wrong”—and then goes on to point out how successful that strategy was.[[122]](#footnote-122) As John Keiger notes, Poincaré’s strategy in the crisis “did not waver from ensuring that France should appear the injured party to unite the country in a defensive war and to ensure that she obtained the necessary diplomatic and military support from countries such as Britain and Italy.”[[123]](#footnote-123) But all this is quite normal. Tactical considerations of this sort are bound to loom large on the eve of a war, no matter what the basic policy was, and it is only to be expected that governments in such circumstances would take such political considerations into account. The U.S. government, for example, immediately before Pearl Harbor, was also thinking in those terms.[[124]](#footnote-124)

*The Russian Mobilization*

One of Fischer’s most important claims had to do with Russia’s decision to order general mobilization. The Russians, he argued, could not be blamed for ordering general mobilization on July 30 and thus triggering the catastrophe. Russia’s “responsibility” lay only in the fact that she was not prepared to “stand by while Serbia was destroyed” and she herself was “completely pushed out of the Balkans.” Given that the Central Powers were preparing to crush Serbia, he implied, it was natural that the Russians would prepare for war. In any event, Russia’s decision to order general mobilization was not of fundamental importance, for if Russia had not made that move, Germany, in his view, would have gone to war anyway.[[125]](#footnote-125)

Indeed, according to Fischer, the Germans were actually pleased that Russia had made that decision because it gave them a suitable pretext for starting the war. Germany’s overriding goal during the climactic phase of the July Crisis was to make sure that Russia could be blamed for the conflict, and to that end her political leaders preferred to wait until Russia ordered general mobilization before taking that measure themselves. Germany’s military leaders were chafing at the bit to start the war, but Bethmann and the Foreign Office, although not opposed to that idea in principle, felt that for political reasons it would be much better if Russia mobilized first. They wanted to be able to blame the war on Russia and claim that German policy was essentially defensive in nature. In that way they could get the whole nation to support the war and would increase the odds that the British would stay out of the conflict. And they were willing to pay a certain price in military terms to achieve those goals.[[126]](#footnote-126) The Germans, the argument runs, were at no point really interested in avoiding war; they just wanted to make sure that Russia “played the role of the aggressor.”[[127]](#footnote-127)

The main problem with that argument is that Fischer essentially ignores the role that Russian military measures short of general mobilization played in driving the crisis. The reader thus does not come away with the sense that the German generals, in pressing for military action, were reacting to what the Russians were doing; it seems instead to be a case of aggression pure and simple. Fischer certainly portrays Germany’s military leaders as set on war, determined not to waste valuable time with political maneuvering.[[128]](#footnote-128) Clark, on the other hand—and he was by no means the first scholar to do so—emphasizes the importance of the far-reaching pre-mobilization measures the Russian government decided upon at two key meetings held on July 24 and 25. These measures, he writes, “were highly likely (if not certain) to further escalate the crisis”; they were “fraught with risk”; and in taking these steps the Russian leaders “greatly increased the likelihood of a general European war.”[[129]](#footnote-129)

The Russians certainly knew that those measures, which would allow Russia to mobilize more quickly when the time came, could provoke Germany into taking counter-measures. The mere fact that they hoped to keep them secret shows that they knew they were risky: if they were risk-free, they could have taken these steps openly. And the Russians, like everyone else, understood that if Germany did respond, matters could escalate very quickly. After all, the whole point of the Schlieffen Plan was to capitalize on the fact that Germany could mobilize more quickly than Russia: the Germans could therefore leave their eastern border relatively undefended at the beginning of the war, concentrate the bulk of their army in the west, and have some hope of knocking France out of the war before having to face a fully mobilized Russian army. They could therefore not just sit on their hands as Russia prepared for war; they would in that case have to divide their army between east and west, and decisive military action in the west would be impossible. They were thus under pressure to move before the Russian mobilization process went too far.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Indeed, for the Russians the whole point of proceeding as far as they could with their pre-mobilization measures before provoking a German response—by moving ahead as secretly as possible, and, as one widely-quoted Russian document from November 1912 put it, by engaging in “clever diplomatic negotiations” designed to “lull to sleep as much as possible the enemy’s fears”[[131]](#footnote-131)—was to prevent Germany from being able to implement the Schlieffen Plan successfully. The French for their part, at the peak of the crisis on July 30, urged the Russians to claim that in the interest of peace they were slowing down their military preparations, but at the same time to continue to move ahead in this area.[[132]](#footnote-132) It is obvious the Germans had no monopoly on duplicity. But the risks such tactics entailed were obvious—there is always a risk that the enemy would see through those maneuvers—and this was scarcely a course of action the Russians would have followed if their primary goal was to keep matters from escalating. General Dobrorolsky, head of the Russian army’s mobilization section in 1914, later wrote (in a widely quoted passage) that after the key decisions the government had made on July 24, “the war was already a decided thing, and all the flood of telegrams between the governments of Russia and Germany were nothing but the staging for an historical drama.”[[133]](#footnote-133) That view is perhaps too extreme, but the pre-mobilization decisions made on July 24-25 were, as Clark says, of enormous historical importance.[[134]](#footnote-134) If, to use Thomas Schelling’s phrase, the crisis can be understood as a poker-like “competition in risk taking,” the Russians, in making those decisions, had upped the ante in a very dramatic way.

And as it turned out the Germans did get wind of what the Russians were doing. This point was often noted in the older literature on the war origins question, and in 1976 Ulrich Trumpener provided important new information on the subject.[[135]](#footnote-135) Fischer had interpreted the pressure the German military authorities were putting on the government at the peak of the crisis to move ahead with a mobilization of their own simply in terms of their desire to waste no more time and get the war started; they were thinking “exclusively in terms of keeping strictly to the strategic time-table.”[[136]](#footnote-136) But the impression you get, especially from the Trumpener article, is that the generals were pressing for action mainly because of what they were learning about what the Russians were doing—and how that was undermining Germany’s own strategic position. As Moltke wrote in his famous July 28 memorandum: “The military situation is thus becoming from day to day more unfavorable for us and may, if our prospective opponents go on preparing themselves at their leisure, lead to disastrous consequences for us.”[[137]](#footnote-137) The implication was that the pressure the generals were exerting was more understandable than Fischer had led his readers to think.[[138]](#footnote-138) But strictly speaking there was not much that was new here: many historians in the pre-Fischer period (and not just in Germany) had made precisely that point.[[139]](#footnote-139)

The issue is important because it bears on one major question often discussed in the older literature on the origins of the war. It was sometimes claimed that the political process—which normally should have led to an agreement—was overwhelmed by forces suddenly and unexpectedly welling up from within the military sphere. “Appalled upon the brink,” Barbara Tuchman, for example, wrote, “the chiefs of state who would be ultimately responsible for their country’s fate attempted to back away but the pull of military schedules dragged them forward.”[[140]](#footnote-140) Such claims always had a certain appeal because they tended to let the political leadership, in every country, off the hook. But does the story of the climactic phase of the July Crisis support that line of argument?

This issue is more complex than one might think. On the one hand, Russian policy *seemed* to be changing dramatically. At the key meetings held on July 24 and 25, the Russian government had opted for a very tough line. It was important to show Germany, the most influential member of the government thought, “that we had come to the end of the concessions we were prepared to make”; in any event, Russia should “take all the steps which would enable us to face an attack.” The government as a whole decided that it was Russia’s duty to stand with Serbia, even if it meant war.[[141]](#footnote-141) But on the 27th Sazonov appeared to take a much softer line. The moment had come, he told the German ambassador, for the powers “to build a golden bridge for Austria.” “There must be a way,” he said, “of giving Serbia her deserved lesson while sparing her sovereign rights.”[[142]](#footnote-142) This runs against Clark’s claims that “Sazonov had never acknowledged that Austria-Hungary had a right to counter-measures in the face of Serbian irredentism,” and that “Sazonov had denied from the start Austria’s right to take action *of any kind* against Belgrade after the assassinations.”[[143]](#footnote-143) On the other hand, it doesn’t quite mean, as Fischer suggests, that Sazonov was now “entirely ready to come an astonishingly long way to meet Austria’s standpoint.”[[144]](#footnote-144) The reference to Serbia’s “sovereign rights” suggested that Sazonov might not have been giving anything away at all, and that a superficially conciliatory line was just a tactic that could serve to help steer Russia through the danger zone—that is, it could help reduce the risk that Germany would act while Russia was getting ready for war. And one should note that at about the same time as Sazonov was talking about building a “golden bridge,” he was cabling his ambassador in Paris, with regard to some information he had received that the French government might want to hold Russia back: “if it is a question of any pressure for moderation at St. Petersburg,” he wrote, “we reject this from the outset, as we have from the beginning adopted an attitude which we cannot modify.”[[145]](#footnote-145) For the historian, the problem is that it is still unclear what exactly Sazonov was prepared to offer Austria.[[146]](#footnote-146) Indeed, looking at the July Crisis as a whole, it is astonishing how little attention was given in any capital to that fundamental issue of what the terms of a settlement might be—of how it might be possible to give Austria “full satisfaction” and yet still respect Serbia’s “sovereign rights.” The whole question of the origins of the war turns, to a certain degree, on whether it might have been possible to square that particular circle.

But in principle a negotiation was not out of the question; even if Sazonov was simply trying to buy time, his real intentions could be drawn out in the course of negotiations. And Germany, for her part, also seemed ready, at practically the last moment, to change course. The Germans persisted with their “localization” strategy as long as they did because they thought the Russians were bluffing.[[147]](#footnote-147) It was only when, on 29 July, Bethmann learned that the Russians had ordered a partial mobilization against Austria that he gave up the game, and indeed, in one of the most dramatic episodes of the crisis (strangely ignored by Clark) demanded, at 3 a.m. on the morning of the 30th, that the Austrians accept a negotiated solution: “we must decline to let ourselves be dragged by Vienna, wantonly and without regard to our advice, into a world conflagration.”[[148]](#footnote-148)

And the British, on the 29th, also began to play a more active role. The Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, as is well known, warned the Germans that Britain would probably intervene if a continental war broke out; but at the same time let them know that if mediation were accepted, “he would be able to secure for Austria every possible satisfaction; there was no longer any question of a humiliating retreat for Austria, as the Serbs would in any case be punished and compelled, with the consent of Russia, to subordinate themselves to Austria’s wishes.”[[149]](#footnote-149) Two days later he was prepared to go a bit further and promise the Germans that if they came up with a reasonable proposal, not only would he support it but he would also make it clear to France and Russia that if they did not accept it, Britain would have “nothing more to do with the consequences”—that is, that Britain would not intervene on their side.[[150]](#footnote-150) Britain would thus be giving everyone the strongest possible incentive to reach a compromise; in theory it thus seemed that a negotiated settlement was within reach; but all these efforts came too late. As Luigi Albertini wrote in his great study of the origins of the war, Grey was:

acting in a manner which displayed both political wisdom and diplomatic skill. What is to be regretted is that he took this action only when the conflagration was on the point of breaking out and not six or seven days earlier. His telegram had probably not even been drafted when Berlin learnt the news of Russian general mobilization and the time for negotiations was gone for good. The pity is that his mind moved too slowly. In the days when these words of his would have been decisive he fumbled round, saying and advising everything but what was needed on the one hand to restrain Russia and France and on the other to make Germany and Austria see reason.”[[151]](#footnote-151)

Russia’s general mobilization, it can thus be argued, prevented the political process, which would normally have resulted in an agreement, from running its course. This is a powerful argument, and it is largely correct, but it should not be taken too far because there is a certain problem of endogeneity here. The major powers might have been moving toward a negotiated settlement, but this was only because the risk of war was now very real. It was not as though there was a political process that was running its course on its own, and that process was suddenly cut short by external pressure generated from within the military sphere. The military measures had played a key role in getting the political process started; it was only because the threat of war was real that people, at the last minute, had become so interested in a negotiated settlement in the first place. Military measures of the sort the Russians were taking were obviously very risky. But it was precisely because of the risks they entailed that they were important indicators of resolve—they suggested to one’s adversaries, and even to one’s friends, that one might really be willing to go all the way.

The basic problem is that credibility and risk are two sides to a coin. There is a certain element of tragedy here: the same forces that bring a political process into being can also prevent it from coming to fruition. Military preparations, in other words, are a two-edged sword. On the one hand, they can utterly transform an adversary’s policy, by convincing him that one is not bluffing and that political action is necessary if war is to be avoided. On the other hand, the information they provide about the degree to which one is committed to a hostile policy can tip the balance and trigger a preventive war: “if they’re so hostile to us now, while we’re still more or less able to hold our own in military terms, there’ll be no living with them in the future when our situation will be worse, so maybe it’s better to have it out now than to put off the inevitable confrontation to a later date.” Indeed, the main function of a tough line might well be to elicit information that would allow a decision of this sort to be made. There is no telling *a priori* which of these effects would prove more powerful; in 1914, as his behavior on the night of July 29-30 shows, Bethmann was pulled in both directions.[[152]](#footnote-152) As it turned out, it was that latter effect that prevailed, but it is not hard to imagine a different outcome. Part of the tragedy in 1914 was that the Russians were moving too quickly on the military front, while **the the** British were moving too slowly on the political front—and this was compounded by the fact that the Germans waited until the very end to show any real interest in a political solution. But the story could easily have been different.

**A Broader Perspective**

Fischer was mainly interested in analyzing German policy. But could one really make a judgment about who bore *primary* responsibility for the war by studying just one country’s policy, no matter how important that country was? In reaching a judgment in this area, most scholars take it for granted that the policies of the other main actors—Russia and France, Britain and Austria, and Serbia as well—also need to be studied, and it was natural that historical work on the war origins question during the post-Fischer period would develop in that direction. This, on the whole, was a trend which even most Fischerites welcomed.[[153]](#footnote-153) But that broader focus was bound to lead to a more balanced view. To study countries other than Germany is to become aware of the choices their leaders made in the pre-1914 period; it leads to the view that their policies mattered, and thus that the story was more complex than a simple focus on what the Germans were doing might lead one to think.[[154]](#footnote-154) So a broader approach was bound to lead to a somewhat different way of framing the issue.

It was not, however, just a question of rounding out the picture. The new work that was done on countries other than Germany also yielded major substantive findings. People came to have a better appreciation, for example, for the aggressiveness of Serbian policy. One of the most striking features of Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers—*and this is by far the most important work on the war origins questions to have appeared in recent years—is his emphasis on the importance of Serbian irredentism.[[155]](#footnote-155) This issue had of course been dealt with in the older literature. Jules Isaac, for example, quoted a report the French minister in Belgrade had sent to Paris in November 1912: “What King Peter [of Serbia] told [the French] General Sancy at Uskub [Skopje] represents the thinking of the entire Serbian people: the Balkan War will lead inevitably to an Austrian cataclysm, and the only question is whether it is better to set it off right now or wait a few years.”[[156]](#footnote-156) But evidence that became available after Albertini wrote his monumental work on the origins of the war over seventy years ago shows that Serbian policy in 1914 was even more bellicose than many historians had realized.[[157]](#footnote-157) The French ambassador in Belgrade, for example, reported in 1913 that the Serbian finance minister had told him that a “war against Austria will be a blessed hour for us; we await it with impatience and you know with what joy our people will take part in it.”[[158]](#footnote-158) And on July 26, 1914, after the Russians had begun to prepare seriously for a war, the Serbian ambassador in Russia (and former high Serbian foreign office official) wrote the foreign ministry that his country now had a “splendid opportunity” to “achieve the full unification of the Serbs. It is desirable, therefore, that Austria-Hungary should attack us. In that case, onwards in the name of God!”[[159]](#footnote-159)

All this has had a certain impact on the way the war origins question has been dealt with. It is not just that in **parcelling** out blame for the outbreak of the war of 1914, people now tend to give “little Serbia” (to use Röhl’s term) a greater share.[[160]](#footnote-160) It has also had a major effect on how the policies of the major powers are viewed. Austria’s decision to bring matters to a head with Serbia is viewed more sympathetically. Thus David Stevenson, in a recent work on “the First World War as political tragedy,” writes that “much of the Austrian sense of grievance was justified” and that the “Serbian evidence confirms that Austria-Hungary had good grounds for rigorous demands.”[[161]](#footnote-161) The same point applies to Germany’s decision to back Austria to the hilt. German policy now comes across as more defensive in nature; many historians now think that German preventive war thinking, in particular, is to be interpreted more in the context of what was going on in the Balkans and much less in terms of a general drive for “world power.” It was, after all, the Balkan crisis that gave rise to the view that a major European war might well be inevitable, and preventive war thinking takes hold only when people begin to see things that way.[[162]](#footnote-162)

And scholars are now inclined for the same reason to take a more jaundiced view of Russian and French policy. Russia was in effect underwriting Serbia’s irredentist goals and could pursue that policy only because she had been guaranteed French support.[[163]](#footnote-163) With regard to Russia, those arguments are by no means entirely new. It had been clear since the 1920s that Russian policy in the Balkans was anything but status-quo-oriented: it was widely noted in the earlier historical literature that the Russian government had encouraged the Serbs to feel that their “promised land lies in the territory of the present Austria-Hungary,” and that before long Austria would be “smashed.”[[164]](#footnote-164) Albertini, for example, quotes a document the French foreign ministry prepared in July 1914 dealing with Austro-Russian relations: “In regard to the Southern Slavs, the Russian programme was defined in December last by the Tsar’s minister to Belgrade, M. de Hartwig: --‘After the question of Turkey, it is now the turn of Austria. Serbia will be our best instrument.’”[[165]](#footnote-165) Even the hard-line French statesman, Raymond Poincaré, found Russian aggressiveness in that area impossible to ignore. When shown, during a visit to St. Petersburg in 1912, the text of the main treaty establishing the Russian-sponsored Balkan League, he commented that it contained “the seeds of a war not just against Turkey but against Austria as well”; the document containing Poincaré’s remark was published in 1931 and was by no means ignored in the older historical literature.[[166]](#footnote-166) Jules Isaac, for example, referred to that remark in an extraordinary review article he published in 1935. Isaac insisted on the importance of what Russia was doing in the Balkans: the policy of the Germanic powers had to be seen in this context; to play down the aggressiveness of Russian policy would make Germany and Austria seem more aggressive than they in fact were; an honest analysis should therefore not sweep this part of the story under the rug.[[167]](#footnote-167)

But those old arguments now have a stronger evidentiary base. Clark, for example, cites some notes made at the time by a French diplomat in St. Petersburg, giving his sense for what the Russian government was up to. “The Russians,” that diplomat wrote in 1913, “are prepared to take no account whatsoever of Austria and to proceed toward the liquidation of Turkey without concerning themselves with her [i.e., Austria’s] interests.”[[168]](#footnote-168) Clark also notes that, as the July Crisis was coming to a head, the Tsar was thinking in terms of a “partition of Austria-Hungary.”[[169]](#footnote-169) Another scholar, David Stevenson, was struck by the shift in Russian military policy after 1909: “From a ‘purely defensive weapon’ the army was to be turned into a ‘first-class offensive’ one”; the goal was to allow Russia to pursue a more assertive foreign policy.[[170]](#footnote-170) Sean McMeekin, for his part, emphasizes the aggressive thrust of Russian policy before the war—especially with respect to the Turkish Straits, but also with respect to Austria itself. In April 1914, he points out, St. Petersburg’s most influential newspaper “was openly advocating the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire.” And the following month, the French ambassador asked a leading member of the Russian government what Russia would do if the Austrian Emperor “were ever to step down due to old age.” “First of all,” the Russian replied, “we would be obliged to annex Galicia. Our minister of war, General Sukhomlinov, explained to me just the other day that the possession of Galicia is indispensable to the security of our frontier. And besides, it is basically Russian territory.”[[171]](#footnote-171) And Ronald Bobroff quotes from a document he found in the Russia archives, a letter Sazonov wrote to one of his ambassadors in December 1912. Russia’s goal in dealing with the Balkan crisis, the foreign minister said, was to “provide itself the possibility of preferential or even exclusive influence” in the region; this was “the red thread across all the questions which require resolution.”[[172]](#footnote-172)

With regard to France, the shift in perspective is perhaps even more striking. The tendency in recent years had been to assume that French policy was fairly passive and that France had been more or less dragged into the war by its alliance with Russia—that the main fear was that if France did not stand by Russia her alliance with that power would collapse.[[173]](#footnote-173) In the older literature, however, some major scholars had taken a very different view. French policy, they pointed out, had changed dramatically in 1912: from that point on, it was clear to the Russians that France would go to war on Russia’s side if an armed conflict broke out over the Serbian issue. The support Poincaré gave to Russia’s Balkan policy from 1912 on—a policy he knew might well lead to a war with Austria—was always very revealing in this connection.[[174]](#footnote-174) With regard to the July Crisis itself, France (as Albertini, for example, noted) did little to hold Russia back and seemed more interested in making sure that Russia would attack Germany quickly than in avoiding war.[[175]](#footnote-175) And that older view was revived—but with stronger supporting evidence—by the German historian Stefan Schmidt in a book he published on the subject in 2006. It was clear from his analysis that French policy was not nearly as passive as most historians had come to believe. The French, it turns out, had not only promised full support for Russia in the event of war but were at times upset by what they saw as Russian weakness and actually encouraged the Russians to pursue a tough policy.[[176]](#footnote-176) And Clark, in his book, relied heavily on Schmidt’s analysis. All of this, of course, has a direct bearing on the Fischer thesis. The point is often made by scholars who stress Germany’s responsibility for the war that Austria could never have pursued the policy she did unless she had been assured of German support, and that point is of course quite valid. But for many scholars nowadays it seems reasonable to apply that same standard when we’re looking at French policy.

And all this is linked to certain judgments about what constitutes proper political behavior. Russia was pursuing what Paul Schroeder called a “very bold offensive policy” in the Balkans.[[177]](#footnote-177) Given that Germany was Austria’s ally, the Russians were playing with fire. And they could pursue that policy only because they were sure of French support. And even Britain, in the final analysis, was willing to back her Entente partners on this issue. The basic conviction that lies at the heart of the new perspective on 1914 is that Russia and France, and even Britain, had no business pursuing policies of that sort. Schroeder’s own views on this subject are quite clear. The Entente powers, he feels, should have understood that Austria, as a great power, could not be expected to put up with what Serbia was doing—to do nothing (as he puts it) while she was “slowly but surely” being strangled. The other powers should have understood that, for the sake of the system as a whole, Austria’s most fundamental interests needed to be respected. The traditional system of European great power politics—the “ethos, rules and incentives of the Bismarckian era”—should not have been abandoned. And Schroeder clearly believes that Russia and her supporters in the West were mainly responsible for destroying that system.[[178]](#footnote-178)

That basic philosophy also lies at the heart of Clark’s argument in *The Sleepwalkers*. Clark, like Schroeder, thinks that the erosion of the traditional system—a system based on the assumption that none of the great powers should be pushed too far and that the most basic interests of every power in the system needed to be respected—was of fundamental importance. The Russian foreign minister, he notes, “had never acknowledged that Austria-Hungary had a right to counter-measures in the face of Serbian irredentism. On the contrary, he had endorsed the politics of Balkan irredentism and had explicitly aligned himself with the view that Serbia was the rightful successor to the lands of unredeemed South Slavdom within the dual monarchy, an obsolete multi-ethnic structure whose days, in his view, were in any case numbered.”[[179]](#footnote-179) For Clark, Russia’s claim “to act as protectress of Serbia” had no real justification: the doctrine of pan-Slavism “was no more legitimate as a platform for political action than Hitler’s concept of *Lebensraum.*”[[180]](#footnote-180) But by 1913 Russia’s hostility to the Habsburg Monarchy and “its utter disregard for Vienna’s interests” in the Balkans “could be taken for granted”; the real problem was that the policy was now backed by Russia’s partners, since without their support Russia could never have pursued such a risky strategy. “The reluctance of the international community to see that Austria faced genuine security threats on its southern periphery and had the right to counteract them,” Clark writes, “reflected a broader shift in attitudes.” The western powers no longer saw Austria as an essential part of the European political system—as a “fulcrum of stability in central and eastern Europe.” They had come to think of Europe “in terms of alliance blocs, rather than as a continental geopolitical ecosystem in which every power had a role to play.”[[181]](#footnote-181)

**The War Guilt Question**

The decline of the Fischer thesis is thus not hard to understand. Indeed, Jonathan Steinberg, reflecting on the papers presented at the 2011 “Fischer Controversy Fifty Years On” conference, wondered why Fischer’s view had “remained so unquestioned” for so long.[[182]](#footnote-182) I cannot deal with that very important issue in this paper, which—as I am sure any reader who is still with me would agree—is already too long.[[183]](#footnote-183) Instead I would like to end by considering how everything I have said so far relates to the basic claim that Germany was “primarily responsible” for the war.

Perhaps the key point here is that this question is not, strictly speaking, an historical issue at all. When people talk about who should be held responsible, what they really mean is who was to blame for the war—who the guilty parties were. The term “responsibility,” of course, sounds less judgmental and more professional; by using it one seems to be making a causal and not a moral judgment. Scholars, of course, would want to give that impression: historical analysis is supposed to be a search for understanding; an historical work is not supposed to be a bill of indictment. And yet when people say that a given country was mainly responsible for the war they *are* making a moral judgment. They are saying that its behavior was not justifiable, not excusable, not legitimate. They are saying that it ought to have behaved differently, while its opponent’s behavior is “understandable.” They are not just saying that it played a major role in the story.

People talk as though historical analysis, if it is taken far enough, can tell us who the responsible parties really are. The assumption is that if one looks at enough evidence, one can reach definitive and more or less objective conclusions about who to point the finger at. But two observers might agree on the facts and even on why all the actors behaved the way they did, and yet disagree as to who should be held responsible for the conflict. In the 1914 case, who is to say (as Albertini put it) “whether politically and morally Austria had the better right to defend her existence or Serbia to liberate her brethren”?[[184]](#footnote-184) Since there is no absolute standard for making moral judgments in such cases, historical analysis, no matter how good it is, cannot in itself tell us who is “responsible” for a conflict. Judgments are made by applying a set of moral standards “from the outside”; they do not emerge automatically from within the story; and so simply reconstructing the story can never in itself fully answer the “war guilt question.”

What this means is that when we deal with these issues, we reach a point where what we are really arguing about is how states shouldbehave—that is, about the *standards* that shouldgovern their political behavior. Those arguments can be informed by historical analysis, but that analysis cannot in itself actually resolve these issues. This does not mean, however, that these moral issues are not worth talking about, or that the historian has no role to play in those discussions. Those issues cannot, and should not, be ignored; and we can get a handle on them by thinking about them in particular historical contexts. When we do so, we can, I think, get some insight into these issues of judgment which we cannot get in any other way.

Consider, for example, some of the common arguments that support the claim that Germany was mainly responsible for the conflict. Germany, it is often argued, was willing to run the risk of a great war and was unwilling, during the crisis, to work for a reasonable compromise; it was therefore mainly her fault that the crisis ended the way it did. “As Germany willed and coveted the Austro-Serbian war,” Fischer wrote, “and, in her confidence in her military superiority, deliberately faced the risk of a conflict with Russia and France, her leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of general war in 1914.”[[185]](#footnote-185) In 1944 Bernadotte Schmitt had taken much the same view. “The Austrian demands,” he wrote, “were intended to precipitate war between Austria and Serbia; and Austria refused all mediation, even though Serbia in very large measure accepted the demands. Germany not only approved the Austrian policy but urged immediate action against Serbia.” While both powers “would have liked to restrict the war to Serbia, they faced the prospect of a general conflict with complacency and confidence,” believing they could “easily defeat France and Russia.” The Entente powers, on the other hand, “proposed mediation in various forms and offered several compromises, but in vain.” His conclusion was unambiguous: “Since Austria would not have acted without German approval and support, the primary responsibility of Germany for the fatal ending of the crisis is clear and overwhelming.”[[186]](#footnote-186)

And of course much of this is true. Germany and Austria were intransigent during the crisis and from the start were prepared to risk war over the Serbian issue. Perhaps their opponents were not quite as accommodating as Schmitt and Fischer suggested, and certainly the Germans were not confident that they could “easily defeat” their enemies, but these points are ultimately of secondary importance.[[187]](#footnote-187) What *is* important is that Germany and Austria were clearly willing to run the risk of a great European war. But does that *in itself* mean that their behavior was illegitimate?

The first point to make here is that *all* the major European powers, as events were to show, were ultimately willing to risk war over the issue. Germany and Austria of course “deliberately faced the risk of a conflict with Russia and France” in 1914, but Russia and France and even Britain in the final analysis were also willing to risk war with the Central Powers. But those facts in themselves do not mean that one side or the other (or both) should be held responsible for the conflict. We certainly do not apply that standard in other cases. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, as Richard Neustadt and Graham Allison point out, President Kennedy “chose a path of action that, in his judgment, entailed a one-in-three chance of nuclear war.”[[188]](#footnote-188) Kennedy, of course, is generally viewed as a hero for having pursued the policy he did during that crisis. But suppose the crisis had not been settled peacefully. Would we then have to condemn Kennedy for having run that risk? If so, isn’t it odd that our judgment of Kennedy should turn not on his behavior but on what the adversary did, since whether war broke out depended on whether or not the Russians gave way? Does it make sense to say that the Germans were guilty in 1914 because the Russians would not back down, but Kennedy was a hero in 1962 because they did?

Or to give another example: in March 1939, in giving a guarantee to Poland, British leaders adopted a policy which they knew, if they held to it, would put their country on a collision course with Nazi Germany. “There was probably no way,” the foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, told his Cabinet colleagues at the time, “in which France and ourselves could prevent Poland and Roumania from being overrun. We were faced with the dilemma of doing nothing, or entering into a devastating war. If we did nothing this in itself would mean a great accession to Germany’s strength and a great loss to ourselves of sympathy and support in the United States, in the Balkan countries, and in other parts of the world. In those circumstances if we had to choose between two great evils he [Halifax] favoured our going to war.”[[189]](#footnote-189) That policy, as it turned out, was abandoned and over the summer the British tried hard to reach a settlement with Germany that involved the transfer of Danzig to the Reich. But if the British had dug in their heels—if they had refused to consider a negotiated arrangement that Germany might conceivably have accepted—would we then say that they bore a large share of the responsibility for the war than ensued? And if, as one leading scholar has repeatedly argued, that hard line was rooted in the sense that Britain could not keep pace with Germany in the arms competition and that matters would therefore have to be brought to a head in the near future, would that be further proof that Britain should at least in some measure be held responsible for the war?[[190]](#footnote-190)

If the answer is no—if we do not think Britain should in that case be held responsible for any war that broke out—then we have to ask why the 1914 case is different. The Germanic powers, one could say, had taken the initiative in 1914; British policy in 1939, on the other hand, was essentially reactive in nature. But in 1962, it was the Americans who took the initiative. Just as Germany and Austria seized on the assassination of Franz Ferdinand to bring matters to a head with their enemies, so Kennedy took advantage of the deployment of the Soviet missiles in Cuba to bring matters to a head with the USSR: at the time the missiles were discovered, he believed that a confrontation with the Soviets over Berlin was unavoidable, and he wanted to have it out with the USSR while the Americans still had the upper hand in strategic terms. Many scholars hold it against the Germans in 1914 that their behavior was strongly influenced by preventive- war thinking—by the idea that if war was inevitable, given the way the military balance was shifting, the sooner it broke out the better. But that kind of thinking also played a key role in shaping U.S. policy in 1962. Was Kennedy’s policy illegitimate for that reason alone?[[191]](#footnote-191)

Much the same point could be made about U.S. policy toward Germany in 1941. Hitler at that point wanted to avoid war with America, at least for the time being, but President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to bring America into the war as soon as he could. Given political realities at home, this meant, he told Churchill, that he had to pursue an increasingly aggressive policy in the Atlantic: “The President said that he would wage war, but not declare it, and that he would become more and more provocative. If the Germans did not like it, they could attack American forces.”[[192]](#footnote-192) Again, preventive war thinking played a key role in shaping the policy. The feeling was that the Germans would probably win their war with Russia, but would need two full years before they could bring “order out of chaos in the conquered areas,” and during that period would prefer to avoid an armed conflict with America. If the United States just sat on its hands and allowed Germany to consolidate its position, an eventual war with Germany would be very difficult, and perhaps unwinnable. Time was thus “of the essence”: it was important to go to war before the enemy could “recoup from his struggle with Russia.”[[193]](#footnote-193) Should we condemn Roosevelt for pursuing a policy rooted in this sort of thinking?

These questions have a certain bearing on how we deal with the issue of who should be held responsible for the coming of war in 1914. To be sure, these other cases differ from the 1914 case in all sorts of ways. But that is precisely the point. The simple yardsticks we apply—was a given country willing to risk war? was it prepared to compromise? was it thinking in preventive war terms?—are simply not good enough. We should not look at just one small part of the picture. If a judgment is to be made, we have to look at the whole context, and it is the policy in its entirety that has to be examined.

Or to make the point another way: if the goal is peace, one can easily adopt the view that defensive policies are morally superior to offensive ones, because both sides can more readily accept the status quo than a change which, in all probability, would be disadvantageous for at least one of them. But even that standard would not generate unambiguous moral judgments, for policies can be defensive on one level and offensive on another.[[194]](#footnote-194) In the 1914 case, the Germanic powers were on the defensive at the most basic political level: Austria’s survival as a great power, and thus Germany’s political position in Europe, were being threatened. But during the July crisis, Germany and Austria had gone on the offensive—it was they who insisted on bringing the Serbian problem to a head—and the Germans especially had a military strategy that emphasized rapid offensive action. In making moral judgments, is it clear which level we should focus on, or what weight we should assign to the different levels of policy? A scholar who has absorbed the political sensibility associated with neorealist theory might think that since all states seek above all to survive and all states are bound to be concerned with the balance of power, the fundamental policy of the Central Powers was “understandable”; another scholar, working in a different tradition, might take a very different view. But there is no reason to think that either view is in some absolute sense more compelling than the other.

The one thing that can be said is that in making these judgments we should take care to apply the same standard to all parties in the conflict. One can say, for example, that the Germans should have realized that they were playing with fire in giving a blank check to Austria, and they should never have pursued such a reckless policy. But by the same token the Russians should have realized that they were also playing with fire in backing Serbia to the extent they did. Many scholars, of course, take the opposite view and argue that Austria and Germany should have seen how committed Russia was, and that if they insisted on throwing down the gauntlet, then they, and not Russia, were mainly responsible for what happened. But the basic principle here is rather odd. It amounts to saying that the more committed one is to a particular policy, no matter what that policy is, the less one should be held responsible for the outcome—that the other side should have seen how committed you were and drawn back, and if it failed to do so, then it and not you should be held responsible for the war that resulted. But to take the view that throwing the steering wheel out the window relieves one of responsibility for whatever happens is to encourage people to engage in irresponsible behavior. This, it seems to me, is not a view we should want to adopt if our goal is to construct a stable international system.

What all this means is that the moral issues are harder to get a handle on than one might think. The simple yardsticks people use to make judgments do not in themselves provide us with an adequate basis for judgment. The question then is whether there is any standard we should apply that is not, in the final analysis, more or less arbitrary. Should we just throw up our hands and say that people are free to base their thinking on whatever set of values they happen to hold?

There is only one way, it seems to me, to base these moral judgments are something more solid, and that is to connect them more directly to a body of theory—that is, to base them more directly on our fundamental understanding of what, in general, makes for a stable international system. If one basic moral imperative is to avoid general war, judgments about policy ought to be rooted to a certain extent in a certain theory of what makes for war—that is, in a *political* theory. The standard thus becomes more political and less overtly moral in nature: are the policies adopted the sorts of policies that make for a stable international order? And to my mind the test here is whether the policies adopted make sense in power political terms: if they are attuned to the basic structure of power—to the same basic structure of power—they would be in harmony with each other, and the system would be relatively stable.[[195]](#footnote-195) So the test should have to do with whether a policy made sense in power political terms—with the degree to which a country took fundamental power realities into account when deciding on a course of action.

This, I think, is a standard that many scholars apply, perhaps without quite fully realizing that they are doing so. Britain, for example, was ready to go to war with France in 1898 during the Fashoda Crisis. But even though the issues at stake would be regarded today as relatively trivial, few scholars today would condemn Britain’s willingness to risk war at the time, in large part I think because that country so clearly had the upper hand in power political terms. The same basic point could be made about Bismarck in the period of German unification, or even about Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis. One would not, of course, want to push the point too far: we sometimes admire countries, like Poland and Finland in 1939, or Britain in 1940, who do not give way even when the power balance seems stacked against them. And that kind of feeling still affects the way some people view Austrian policy in 1914. The Austrians themselves at the time seemed to see things in that light. “We have to go for all or nothing,” the Austrian Army Chief of Staff, General Conrad, said after the assassination; “in 1912-13 it would have been a game with some chances of success, now it is a sheer gamble.” Still, he thought, the war had to be fought: “So ancient a monarchy and so glorious an army cannot be allowed to perish ignominiously.” The Emperor, Franz Josef, took much the same view.[[196]](#footnote-196) The sense that it was better to go down with a bang than with a whimper is understandable, and should perhaps be taken into account when making a judgment. But the main criterion we should apply, it seems to me, is whether a given course of action makes sense in political terms—that is, in the light of power realities as they existed at the time.

That ‘political’ approach, moreover, corresponds to a certain view of history—a tendency to see history as an interactive process, a process driven more by fear than by greed, a process in which simple aggressiveness, or lust for territory, or a desire for hegemony, does not necessarily play a major role. That view might, in certain cases, turn out to be incorrect, but it often makes sense to adopt it as a working hypothesis because it directs our attention to a side of the story that a more moralistic approach might blind us to. And the point applies with particular force to the 1914 case. It is the easiest thing in the world to minimize or ignore what Germany was reacting to—both the basic policy Russia, supported by its Entente partners, was pursuing in the Balkans, and the pre-mobilization measures the Russians were taking during the July Crisis—and thus give the impression that this was a case of German aggressiveness pure and simple. But if the goal is to understand why these events took the course they did, then that approach simply will not do, and a more balanced approach is clearly in order.

And this kind of approach is of particular value because it helps bring the historical problems into focus. What kind of policy, you ask yourself, would have made political sense for Germany in 1914? The Germans had a strong interest in preventing Britain, and even France, from intervening actively if the Austro-Serbian problem led to war with Russia, and thus had a strong interest in adopting a purely defensive posture in the west. After all, the new German empire was willing in 1871 to pay the enormous political price that the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine entailed—that is, a permanently hostile France—in order to acquire a more defensible border with that country. And in 1914 Britain would probably have stayed out of the war if neither France nor Belgium had been invaded. The British Prime Minister, in fact, assured the Germans at the last minute that if the Germans stayed on the defensive in the west and fought the war in the east, Britain would stay out.[[197]](#footnote-197) As for France, Poincaré would have found it much harder to bring his country into such a war if it were not attacked at the outset. And yet Germany adopted a military strategy that almost guaranteed that the war would be fought with the three Entente powers. A child could see the problem, and you have to wonder why it was never dealt with adequately. Much the same point could be made about German naval policy: it should have been obvious that Britain would do whatever it had to in order to maintain its naval lead, and that a policy of challenging Britain in this area was bound to turn it against Germany and lead it to mend fences with France and Russia. Why then did Germany pursue the policy it did in this area? Even the way Germany blocked negotiations during the July Crisis makes little sense. By agreeing to talks but then making demands that were unacceptable to Russia but which at least Britain would find reasonable, Germany could have increased the chances of achieving its fundamental goal of keeping Britain out of the war—and of splitting the Entente, if war could be avoided—so why did the German government not adopt those tactics?[[198]](#footnote-198) Indeed, its whole approach made little sense in power political terms: if Bismarck had seen how his successors were conducting Germany policy, he would have turned over in his grave. But Germany was by no means unique in this regard: you can make similar points about the policies of all the other powers.[[199]](#footnote-199)

The danger here is that that sort of approach can lead to the conclusion that understanding what happened is beyond the reach of rational analysis. And it is easy—perhaps a little too easy—to conclude from the new historical literature on the origins of the war that this was in fact the case. Thus Förster points out that Moltke believed a war would destroy European civilization for decades to come, but nevertheless insisted on one: “All this looks crazy,” Förster comments, “and it would be hard to believe if it were not so well documented.”[[200]](#footnote-200) Avner Offer, writing in 1995, also emphasizes the non-rational side of the story.[[201]](#footnote-201) And in Clark’s account, the key decisionmakers were unable to see reality for what it was. Their vision was clouded by one-sided “narratives” that lead them to behave the way they do. His analysis, in fact, has a certain constructivist flavor: he sees policymakers as prisoners of a “virtual reality” of their own making.[[202]](#footnote-202) There is certainly something to arguments of that sort. But I wonder whether these approaches take us where we need to go.

The Förster view, for example, was that the Germans should have understood that war could no longer serve as a viable instrument of policy, and that a strategy of deterrence was the only rational alternative.[[203]](#footnote-203) But if people are certain that military forces will not be used, how can those forces have any deterrent effect? And indeed if you rule out military action, you put yourself at the mercy of your adversary. “If the quest for peace turns into the *sole* objective of policy,” Henry Kissinger pointed out, “the fear of war becomes a weapon in the hands of the most ruthless.”[[204]](#footnote-204) For that reason alone, no great power before 1914 would have pursued such a policy. The problem, then, is not human irrationality; it is the system itself that creates this dilemma.

And what are we to make of Clark’s idea that statesmen were trapped “within narratives of their own making”? It is hard to tell, from the evidence he presents, just how ‘trapped’ they really were. In the Russian narrative, for example, “the entire history of Russia’s sponsorship of Serbian expansionism” was “elided from view.”[[205]](#footnote-205) But that scarcely proves that the Russian leadership did not understand what its own policy had been. My own feeling is that we should not be too quick to embrace explanations of this sort. Whatever people said—and many statements are made for tactical purposes, even in private meetings within governments—the issues involved were so serious that policymakers had a very strong incentive to take hard political realities into account. The issues, one suspects, must have been debated energetically within political circles at the time. Russia and its friends might insist, with varying degrees of intensity, that Serbia’s sovereignty had to be respected. But given how the Entente powers had in recent years treated the Boer republics, Morocco, Turkey, Persia, and China, that stance must have raised eyebrows, and it would be interesting to see how those issues of consistency and basic principle were dealt with at the time.

Over the past century the whole issue of the origins of the First World War has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention, but we have by no means reached the end of the road. Many key questions remain unanswered, and, as some of the new works have shown, historical analysis can still shed new light on important aspects of the problem. But even if ultimate answers are elusive—or perhaps because the core issues are so hard to resolve in any definitive way—scholars will remain fascinated by this problem. It is not at all clear where the road will lead, but the journey itself will be very much worth taking.

1. See especially Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961) [English translation: *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967)]; and Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen: Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1969) [English translation: *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (New York: Norton, 1975)]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted in Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (London: Pearson, 2002), 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Röhl, “The Curious Case of the Kaiser’s Disappearing War Guilt: Wilhelm II in July 1914,” in Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson, eds., *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. #### Jonathan Steinberg, “Old Knowledge and New Research: A Summary of the Conference on the Fischer Controversy 50 Years On,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 2 (April 2013) ([link](http://jch.sagepub.com/content/48/2/241.full.pdf+html)), 245.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. R. J. W. Evans, “‘The Greatest Catastrophe the World Has Seen,’” *New York Review of Books*, February 6, 2014 ([link](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/feb/06/greatest-catastrophe-world-has-seen/)). See also Samuel Williamson, “July 1914 Revisited and Revised: The Erosion of the German Paradigm,” in Jack Levy and John Vasquez, eds., *The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Hew Strachan, “Review Article: The Origins of the First World War,” *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March 2014)([link](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12118/epdf)), esp. 438-39; and James Sheehan, “The Bloody Details: Who Was to Blame for World War I?” *Commonweal*, April 19, 2014 ([link](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.commonwealmagazine.org%2Fbook-reviews%2Fbloody-details&ei=X4FvVZqoAdDHogTmuYDYDw&usg=AFQjCNFbsh8fbPHyEjrHvu9kLN41VfHgJw&bvm=bv.95039771,d.cGU)). For works that view **that** coming of war more as a tragedy than as a crime, see David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), esp. 14, and Thomas Otte, *July Crisis: The World’s Descent into War, Summer 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. front blurb. In France, Fischer’s work never had the kind of impact it had in Germany, or even in Britain and America. See Jean-Claude Allain, “Nekrologe: Fritz Fischer (1908-2000), *Francia* 27, no. 3 (2000), 233-35 ([link](http://francia.digitale-sammlungen.de/Blatt_bsb00016428,00245.html)), and Jean-Jacques Becker, “La Question des responsabilités allemandes au lendemain de la guerre mondiale, l'implication des historiens dans l'expertise et l'émergence d'une école historique,” *Sociétés contemporaines,* no. 39 (2000) ([link](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/socco_1150-1944_2000_num_39_1_1803)), 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. John Röhl, “Goodbye to All That (Again)? The Fischer Thesis, the New Revisionism and the Meaning of the First World War,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2015) ([link](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12191/epdf)), 155. On 154 Röhl refers directly to Clark’s book: Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Röhl, “Goodbye to All That (Again)?, 166. **[close quotes]** [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Quoted in Mombauer, *Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. John Moses, *The Politics of Illusion* (London: Prior, 1975), 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gerald Feldman, review of Fischer’s *Krieg der Illusionen*, *Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 2 (June 1971) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1876568)), 335. That view was widely shared at the time. Jacques Droz, for example, commented in 1973 that the “abrupt character” of some of Fischer’s claims was “incompatible with the prudence that the historian must maintain.” Droz, *Les causes de la première guerre mondiale: Essai d’historiographie* (Paris: Seuil, l973), 163-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 160-204, and Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen*, 231-88; the quotations are on 164 in the English version and on 235-36 of the original German version. Some of those claims have been accepted as fact by other scholars, who then use them to support their own arguments. See, for example, Dale Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 67. Copeland’s general argument here (which, as he acknowledges, is more extreme than Fischer’s) has in turn been accepted by other political scientists. See, for example, Stephen Walt, “Good news: World War I is over and will not happen again,” entry in Walt’s blog in foreignpolicy.com, February 8, 2003 ([link](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAAahUKEwjy7PDOn-3GAhXUWYgKHX5pCws&url=http%3A%2F%2Fforeignpolicy.com%2F2013%2F02%2F08%2Fgood-news-world-war-i-is-over-and-will-not-happen-again%2F&ei=PcSuVbLaAdSzoQT-0q1Y&usg=AFQjCNGv7QteYKA-TJhoZKCdhNaP8T0UPw&bvm=bv.98197061,d.cGU)). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On December 2, 1912 (that is, before the “War Council” took place), Bethmann, as Wolfgang Mommsen writes, “gave an unusually vehement speech in the Reichstag” on December 2, 1912, in which he gave Russia “a scarcely concealed warning against an attack on Austria-Hungary, and made it clear that in such an event Germany would be prepared to go to war.” Mommsen, “The Topos of Inevitable War in Germany in the Decade before 1914,” in Volker Berghahn and Martin Kitchen, eds., *Germany in the Age of Total War* (London: Croon Helm, 1981), 33. That speech led to a sharp British warning, which in turn provoked the Kaiser into convening the “War Council.” See John Röhl, *Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 901-911; Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 159; and Imanuel Geiss, *German Foreign Policy, 1871-1914* (London: Routledge, 1976) ([link](http://web.mit.edu/afarrell/Public/1742papers/GEISS-GERMAN-FOREIGN-POLICY.PDF)), 141. An extract from Bethmann’s speech is available online ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=1PNmAAAAMAAJ&pg=PR23&lpg=PR23&dq=bethmann+reichstag++%22december+2,+1912%22+OR+%222+december+1912%22+OR+%222.+dezember+1912%22&source=bl&ots=DjXd1JrcHD&sig=qMu3V_HQAGn1X4ybNBD9v9MCSGk&hl=en&sa=X&ei=gANmVbPVM8LXoATizYPIBQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=bethmann%20reichstag%20%20%22december%202%2C%201912%22%20OR%20%222%20december%201912%22%20OR%20%222.%20dezember%201912%22&f=false)). Bethmann had made the same point, with even greater clarity, in a November 28 speech to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundesrat: “If Austria has to fight for its position as a Great Power, regardless of the cause, then we must stand at her side so as not to have to fight alone at a later stage with a weakened Austria beside us . . . We cannot permit our ally to suffer any humiliation. We wish to avoid war for as long as that is possible with honour; if that should prove impossible, we shall face it with . . . firm resolve.” Quoted in Röhl, “Goodbye to All That” ([link](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12191/epdf)), 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Bethmann Hollweg memorandum, December 14, 1912, in Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy und Friedrich Thimme, eds. (for the German Foreign Office), *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914: Sammlung der Diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922–27), vol. 39 ([link](https://archive.org/download/grossepolitik39germ/grossepolitik39germ.pdf)), doc. no. 15623, 145-48. Fischer does, however, point out in a footnote that Bethmann insisted here that the two departments not pursue a press campaign to promote their efforts without first getting his approval. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 164 n. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 491. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 491-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Volker Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1973), 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Niall Ferguson “Public Finance and National Security: The Domestic Origins of the First World War Revisited,” *Past & Present*, no. 142 (February 1994) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/651199?origin=JSTOR-pdf)), 145; Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War: New Perspectives,” *Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September 1992) ([link](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199209%2935%3A3%3C725%3AGATOOT%3E2.0.C0%3B2-0)), 732 n. 39; and Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 149-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See, for example, Ulrich Trumpener, “War Premeditated? German Intelligence Operations in July 1914,” *Central European History* 9, no. 1 (March 1976) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545761)), 80-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Protocol of the Session of the Royal Prussian Ministry of State, July 30, 1914, in Karl Kautsky, comp., and Max Montgelas and Walther Schücking, eds., *Outbreak of the World War*: *German Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), 381; available online through subscribing libraries in the Artemis Primary Sources collection *The Making of Modern Law: Foreign, Comparative and International Law, 1600-1926* ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)). For the German original: Karl Kautsky, comp., and Max Montgelas and Walther Schücking, eds., *Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch* (Charlottenburg: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1919), 2:176-77 (doc. no. 456 ) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Pourtalès to Foreign Office, July 29, 1914, in Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 303 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)), reprinted in Imanuel Geiss, ed., *July 1914: The Outbreak of the First World War: Selected Documents* (New York: Scribner’s, 1967), 281. For the original text, see Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 2:60 (doc. no. 343) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See, for example, Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914,* 3 vols. (London, 1952-57), 2:549. The original version of Albertini’s three-volume study, *Le origini della guerra del 1914*,was published inMilan in 1942-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For Grey’s comment, see Albertini, *Origins*, 2:339. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 484. On these matters in general, see Marc Trachtenberg, “The Coming of the First World War: A Reassessment,” in Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/TrachtenbergWWI.pdf)), 72-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 59; Jagow to Lichnowsky, July 18, 1914, in Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 131-32 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)), and also in Geiss, *]uly 1914,* 123. For the original German text, see Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 1:100 ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku01germ/diedeutschendoku01germ.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The first relates to a distorted account of what for Fischer and his followers was a key piece of evidence supporting their view that a decision for war was made during the first week of the crisis, the record of a meeting the German journalist Viktor Naumann had with a high Austrian official on July 1, 1914. The second had to do with Fischer’s misuse of the Kaiser’s comment “now or never”; he made it seem that this referred to a general European war, whereas in reality it referred only to a “reckoning” with Serbia. See Trachtenberg, “The Coming of the First World War” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/TrachtenbergWWI.pdf)), 51-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 504-505; Röhl, *Abyss*, 1086. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Prussian Ministry of State meeting, July 30, 1914, in Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 382 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)) and Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 2:178 (doc. no. 456 ) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). This was not the only piece of evidence suggesting that Bethmann was thinking along these lines. On July 27 Bethmann’s confidant Kurt Riezler wrote in his diary: “A fate stronger than human power, as the chancellor sees it, looms over Europe and our people*.*” Kurt Riezler, *Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente,* ed. by Karl Dietrich Erdmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1972), 192. That comment was originally quoted in Karl Dietrich Erdmann, “Zur Beurteilung Bethmann Hollwegs,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 15 (September 1964), 527. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Riezler diary, entry for July 7, 1914, in Riezler, *Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente*, 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bethmann Hollweg Reichstag speech of April 7, 1913, quoted in Wolfgang Mommsen, “Topos of Inevitable War,” 44-45. Jost Dülffer also quotes that extract from Bethmann’s speech and writes that “this was only one of his frequently cited characterizations of the horrors of war.” Jost Dülffer, “Die zivile Reichsleitung und der Krieg: Erwartungen und Bilder 1890-1914,” in Wolfram Pyta and Ludwig Richter, *Gestaltungskraft des Politischen: Festschrift für Eberhard Kolb* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1998), 26. And indeed, as Dülffer notes in another article, Bethmann was anything but confident about Germany’s chances in a war. See especially the extract from a letter Bethmann wrote in March 1913 quoted in Jost Dülffer, “Préfigurations de la guerre en Allemagne avant 1914,” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 171 (1993) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25730960)), 14. That article was republished in Jean-Jacques Becker et al., eds., *Guerre et cultures 1914-1918* (Paris: Colin, 1994), and, in German, as “Kriegserwartung und Kriegsbild in Deutschland vor 1914,” in Wolfgang Michalka, ed., *Der Erste Weltkrieg: Wirkung, Wahrnehmung, Analyse* (Munich: Piper, 1994), and in Jost Dülffer, *Im Zeichen der Gewalt: Frieden und Krieg im 19.* ***Und*** *20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003). As Dülffer shows, Bethmann was by no means an isolated figure in this regard. Stig Förster also points out that “prominent civilians,” like the military historian and journalist Hans Delbrück, echoed the warnings of military leaders like the elder Moltke, and notes somewhat tentatively that the “myth of the short-war illusion” was probably “just as wrong with regard to the general public as it is to the military leadership.” Stig Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares: German Military Leadership and the Images of Future Warfare, 1871-1914,” in Manfred Boemeke, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 366, esp. n. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The Emperor’s marginal comments on Pourtalès to Foreign Office, July 30, 1914, in Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 349-40 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)), reprinted in Geiss, *July 1914*, 294-95. For the original text, see Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 2:132-33 (doc. no. 401) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). Emphasis in original text. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Moltke to Bethmann Hollweg, July 29, 1914 (written the previous day), in Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 308 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)) and Geiss, *July 1914*, 284. For the original text, see Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 2:67 (doc. no. 349) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). Nor was Moltke particularly optimistic in a conversation he had with his adjutant, Major von Haeften, on the night of July 30-31. “This war,” Haeften reported him as saying, “will develop into a world war in which England also will take a hand. How it will all end, nobody today knows.” See Stig Förster, “Im Reich des Absurden: Die Ursachen des Ersten Weltkrieges,” in Bernd Wegner, ed., *Wie Kriege entstehen. Zum historischen Hintergrund von Staatenkonflikten* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000) ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/BOOKS/pdf_download.pl?id=bsb00045140&nr=00001)), 244. [To download this article: click the link, for first image enter “212,” for last image enter “253,” check “Ja,” enter the four-digit code in the box, click “WEITER,” wait for the download, and then click “PDF-Datei”]. Förster’s source is a document from Haeften’s papers in the German military archives in Freiburg. Haeften had reported Moltke’s comment in an article he had published in 1917. See Albertini, *Origins*, **3:25 .** But the archival source was more revealing. According to the account Haeften gave there, Moltke broke down in tears when he made that prediction. See Stig Förster, “Angst und Panik: ‘Unsachliche’ Einflüsse im politisch-miltärischen Denken des Kaiserreiches und die Ursachen des Ersten Weltkriegs,” in Birgit Aschmann, ed., *Gefühl und Kalkül: Der Einfluss von Emotionen auf die Politik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 85 ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=hDDREnAsyucC&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%22Meine+Erlebnisse+aus+den+Mobilmachungstagen+1914%22&source=bl&ots=_q1V1DJVHp&sig=Jo6sqHVLxUsfANytbWyBdM1f8HU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CC8Q6AEwA2oVChMI4Lu7mKKfyAIVDTCICh2-Yww-#v=onepage&q=%22Meine%20Erlebnisse%20aus%20den%20Mobilmachungstagen%201914%22&f=false)). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 494. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Fritz Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. To be sure, there is other evidence not cited here that points in this general direction. Bethmann, for example, said in February 1913 it would be “almost impossible” for Russia to stand by while Serbia was crushed, and a German foreign office official was still arguing along these lines on July 2. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 206; Geiss, *July 1914*, 67-68. But documents of that sort are not conclusive. Given that Bethmann in 1913 still wanted to hold Austria back, it is not surprising to find him making that kind of argument; thinking that that policy was still intact, a foreign office official might naturally take the same line. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The July 18 Jagow to Lichnowsky letter referred to above is of particular interest in this context: Jagow still hoped and believed “that the conflict can be localized.” Jagow to Lichnowsky, July 18, 1914, in Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 131-32 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)). For additional evidence, see, for example, Konrad Jarausch, “The Illusion of Limited War: Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg’s Calculated Risk, July 1914,” 56 (note also the title); and Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 416. For Geiss’s view, see Geiss, *July 1914*, 71. Even Röhl, who, like Fischer, claims that the German government decided in early July to start a European war, shows that German leaders at that point believed a “localized” Austro-Serbian war was a real possibility. He quotes, for example, from a diary entry recording the discussion at a meeting of the German leadership held on July 5—the general view, according to that source, was that if Austria moved quickly, “the Russians—although friends of Serbia—will not join in”—and then comments that this was the consensus view at that point. “This contemporary source,” he writes, is an unvarnished record of the unanimous stance taken by the Kaiser, the Reich Chancellor and the army leadership. There was no disagreement amongst them.” He then goes on to quote two other sources that point in the same direction. Röhl, *Abyss*, 1025-26. For Röhl’s general claim about Germany deciding on a major war at this point in the crisis, see ibid., 1020, 1026; note also the title of his chapter 38, taking the story through the first week in July: “Summer 1914: The Decision for War.” The clear implication is that the decision for war was made during that period. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Feldman review of *Krieg der Illusionen* ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1876568)), 335; Allain, “Nekrologe: Fritz Fischer” ([link](http://francia.digitale-sammlungen.de/Blatt_bsb00016428,00245.html)), 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 480, 515 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 473-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 92. Note also the title of chapter 10 in *War of Illusions*: “War not for Austria’s Interests in the Balkans but for Germany’s Position as a World Power in Mitteleuropa.” The body of the chapter, incidentally, provides little evidence to substantiate the assertion made in the title, and Fischer’s claim about the importance of the Mitteleuropa idea in German policy before the war has been flatly rejected by serious scholars. See especially Georges-Henri Soutou, *L’Or et le sang: Les buts de guerre économiques de la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War” ([link](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199209%2935%3A3%3C725%3AGATOOT%3E2.0.C0%3B2-0)), 730. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Klaus Epstein, “German War Aims in the First World War,” *World Politics* 15, no. 1 (October 1962) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2009574)), 179; Fritz Stern, “Bethmann Hollweg and the War: The Limits of Responsibility,” in Leonard Krieger and Fritz Stern, eds., *The Responsibility of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 268 ([link](https://www.google.com/search?as_q=&as_epq=no+evidence+that+he+did+so+in+order+to+establish+Germany+hegemony&as_oq=&as_eq=&as_nlo=&as_nhi=&lr=&cr=&as_qdr=all&as_sitesearch=&as_occt=any&safe=images&as_filetype=&as_rights=&gws_rd=ssl)) and Jacques Droz, “Bulletin historique: Histoire de l'Allemagne de 1789 à 1918,” *Revue Historique* 272, no. 2 (October-December 1984) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40954146)), 516. Fischer, according to Epstein, had argued “that at least after 1911 the dominant forces of German society deliberately aimed at war. His argument is, however, essentially an *a priori* construction without conclusive supporting evidence.” “It is incontrovertible,” Stern wrote, “that Bethmann consciously risked a world war, but there is no evidence that he did so in order to establish Germany hegemony.” He had, however, been more supportive of the Fischer thesis in a famous talk he gave at the German Historical Association’s meeting in Berlin in 1964—that is, in a very different political context. Speaking of the whole period from before 1914 through 1945 he asked: “Is the continuity of intentions and hopes, of style and aims, not altogether amazing?” Fritz Stern, “On Continuity in German History,” *Journal of International Affairs* 22, no. 1 (January 1968) ([link](http://search.proquest.com/docview/1290479417/fulltextPDF/D50F27491B25477CPQ/12?accountid=14512)), 133, and republished as “German Historians and the War: Fritz Fischer and his Critics,” in Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=29Y8Kv_Fr08C&printsec=frontcover&dq=intitle:failure+intitle:of+intitle:illiberalism&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAGoVChMI7MKU7K6VxgIVES2ICh11XQOA#v=onepage&q&f=false)), 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Schelling to Bernard Brodie, February 22, 1965, Bernard Brodie Papers, Box 2, file "Schelling," UCLA Library, Los Angeles, CA, quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, viii. See also Fritz Fischer, *Bündnis der Eliten. Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871 – 1945* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1979). For the English translation: *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871-1945* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969), 115, quoted in Geoff Eley, “Germany, the Fischer Controversy, and the Context of War: Rethinking German Imperialism, 1880-1914,” in Alexander Anievas, ed., *Cataclysm: The First World War and the Making of Modern World Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Industrial Growth and Early German Imperialism,” in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 87-89, quoted in Eley, “Germany, the Fischer Controversy, and the Context of War,” 29-30 ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=XlHoBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA14&lpg=PA14&dq=eley+cataclysm&source=bl&ots=no50YJ7uJE&sig=ToH2Bd2SscR-OId4VzQKJO79Noc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=xX9bVf6XMsbToASvvIFA&ved=0CCEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=eley%20cataclysm&f=false)). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See the discussion in Eley, “Germany, the Fischer Controversy, and the Context of War,” 30-31 ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=XlHoBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA14&lpg=PA14&dq=eley+cataclysm&source=bl&ots=no50YJ7uJE&sig=ToH2Bd2SscR-OId4VzQKJO79Noc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=xX9bVf6XMsbToASvvIFA&ved=0CCEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=eley%20cataclysm&f=false)), and in Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 77-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. James J. Sheehan, review of Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung: Zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland* and Michael Stürmer, *Regierung und Reichstag im Bismarckstaat, 1871-1880: Cäsarismus oder Parlamentarismus*, in the *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976), 567 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1878768.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Philipp Stelzel, “Rethinking Modern German History: Critical Social History as a Transatlantic Enterprise, 1945-1989” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), 258 ([link](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&ved=0CDMQFjAF&url=https%3A%2F%2Fcdr.lib.unc.edu%2Findexablecontent%2Fuuid%3Acb5aa26d-1475-4211-9b35-002345466e39&ei=R3NBVcedE8XFogSn2ICgAQ&usg=AFQjCNGyLtG6zG4XEqwPWnCOL37K1GMSPg&bvm=bv.92189499,d.cGU&cad=rja)). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Richard Evans, “Wilhelm’s Germany and the Historians,” in Evans, ed., *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 23. That metaphor, as Evans notes, had been used in **an** 1976 article by the German scholar Hans-Günter Zmarzlik. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Geoff Eley, “Sammlungspolitik, Social Imperialism, and the Navy Law of 1898,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 15, no. 1 (June 1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Raymond Poidevin, *Les relations économiques et financières entre la France et l’Allemagne de 1898 à 1914* (Paris: Colin, 1969). The allusion is to Fischer’s *Bündnis der Eliten* (see n. 43). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The importance of Poidevin’s findings was stressed by other leading French specialists in this area when they dealt with the Fischer thesis. See Pierre Renouvin, “Nationalisme et impérialisme en Allemagne de 1911 à 1914 (d’après un ouvrage récent),” *Revue Historique* 245, no. 1 (January-March 1971), 69-70 (review article on *Krieg der Illusionen*) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40951632)); and Jacques Droz, “Bulletin historique: Histoire d’Allemagne (1789-1918),” *Revue Historique* 253, no. 1 (January-March 1975) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40952293)), 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Gerald Feldman, “Hugo Stinnes and the Prospect of War before 1914,” in Boemeke, Chickering and Förster, *Anticipating Total War*, esp. 79, 84-85, 88, 92. See also Förster, “Im Reich des Absurden” ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/BOOKS/pdf_download.pl?id=bsb00045140&nr=00001)), 214. One can say much the same thing about the attitude of business and especially banking circles on the Entente side. See, for example, René Girault, “Les Balkans dans les relations franco-russes en 1912,” *Revue Historique* 253, no. 1 (January-March 1975) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40952291)), 163: “on aurait même l'impression que le monde des affaires à Paris, spécialement la banque, témoigne d’une grande réserve face à l'action patriotique ou nationaliste du Quai d'Orsay en 1912-1913.” This is by no means a new argument. See, for example, Elie Halévy, “The World Crisis of 1914-1918,” in Halévy, *The Era of Tyrannies* (London: Allen Lane, 1967), 173-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy before 1914,” *Central European History* 6, no. 1 (March 1973), 33 n.53; see also 36 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545653)). Note also David E. Kaiser, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War,” *Journal of Modern History* 55, no. 3 (September 1983), 442-74 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1878597)). The distinguished German historian Thomas Nipperdey was perhaps Wehler’s most prominent critic. See Thomas Nipperdey, “Wehlers ‘Kaiserreich’. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 539-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ferguson, “Public Finance and National Security” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/651199?origin=JSTOR-pdf)), 141. See also interview with David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *German History* 22 (2004), 229–45 ([link](http://gh.oxfordjournals.org/content/22/2/229.full.pdf+html)), and the editors’ introduction to Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp, eds., *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn, 2011) ([link](http://www.berghahnbooks.com/downloads/intros/MuellerImperial_intro.pdf)), esp. 4-5.  One of Torp’s own articles is of particular importance in this context: Cornelius Torp, “The ‘Coalition of “Rye and Iron”’ under the Pressure of Globalization: A Reinterpretation of Germany's Political Economy before 1914,” *Central European History* 43, no. 3 (September 2010), 401-427 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27856214?origin=JSTOR-pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, chap. 9, and esp. 187 (for the quotation). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid., 389. See also Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 88, 92, and Fischer, “Twenty-Five Years Later: Looking Back at the ‘Fischer Controversy’ and its Consequences,” *Central European History* 21, no. 3 (September 1988) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4546121)), 217-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Imanuel Geiss, “The Outbreak of the First World War and German War Aims*,*” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 3 (1966) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/10.2307/259936.pdf)), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 515; see also 470, 480, 494. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See, for example, Mommsen, “Domestic Factors” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4545653.pdf)), 12-14; Mommsen, “Topos of Inevitable War,” 43-44 (notes 26 and 27); and Lothar Burchardt’s review of Fischer’s *Krieg der Illusionen* in *Francia* 3 (1975), 873-75 ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/francia/francia-retro/bsb00016278/francia-00003-1975-00883-00890)). Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This was a view many historians took of Fischer’s work in general. It seemed to Klaus Epstein, for example, “that Fischer perceives in pre-1914 Germany . . . far too much rational design where in fact there was mostly drift and muddle.” Epstein, “German War Aims in the First World War,” *World Politics* 15, no. 1 (October 1962) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2009574)), 179. See also Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Historiography in Germany Today,” in Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age”: Contemporary German Perspectives* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 233. Wehler referred here to the “misleading and indefensible character” of Fischer’s assertion “that in a methodical quest for world power, the German Reich had been preparing for war since 1912 and had merely translated the plans of the prewar period into action.” This article was originally published in German in 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Fischer, “Looking Back at the Fischer Controversy” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4546121)), 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See, for example, Feldman’s review of *Krieg der Illusionen* ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1876568)), 335; Konrad H. Jarausch, “World Power or Tragic Fate? The Kriegsschuldfrage as Historical Neurosis,” *Central European History* 5, no. 1 (March 1972) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545623)), 79; Burchardt’s review of *Krieg der Illusionen*, 873-74 ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/francia/francia-retro/bsb00016278/francia-00003-1975-00883-00890)); Förster, “Reich des Absurden” ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/pdf/1430253275bsb00045140.pdf/)), 239-40; Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War” ([link](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199209%2935%3A3%3C725%3AGATOOT%3E2.0.C0%3B2-0)), 728; and Mombauer, *Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Thus, for example, in the chapter in *War of Illusions* dealing with the “War Council,” Fischer refers in a passage dealing with the spring of 1913 to “the decision in favour of a war [that] had already been made even though the timing of its start had been postponed” (187). The title of that chapter (“Der vertagte Krieg”—literally “The Postponed War”) is also to be noted in this context. See also his later comment (389) about how “the need for a ‘preventive war’ against Russia and France had been agreed on” prior to the spring of 1913. It should also be pointed out that Imanuel Geiss, Fischer’s leading disciple, in a book published in 1976 also says that the German government in December 1912 in effect made a decision to go to war. See Geiss, *German Foreign Policy* ([link](http://web.mit.edu/afarrell/Public/1742papers/GEISS-GERMAN-FOREIGN-POLICY.PDF)), esp. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Bernadotte Schmitt, “July 1914: Thirty Years After,” *Journal of Modern History* 16, no. 3 (September 1944) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1871459)), 203-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 389, 470. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Förster, “Reich des Absurden,” 249 ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/pdf/1430253275bsb00045140.pdf/)); Stig Förster, “Der deutsche Generalstab und die Illusion des kurzen Krieges,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 54, no. 1 (1995), 84; Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares,” 363-64 (for the quotations); and Lothar Burchardt, *Friedenswirtschaft und Kriegsvorsorge: Deutschlands wirtschaftliche Rüstungsbestrebungen vor 1914* (Boppard: Boldt, 1968), 24-26. Note also Moltke’s response to the Austrian General Conrad’s question in May 1914 about what the Germans would do “if you have no luck in the west and the Russians attack you in the east.” Moltke “shrugged his shoulders” and said, “I shall do what I can. We do not have superiority over the French.” Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906-1918,* 5 vols. (Vienna: Rikola, 1921-25), 3:669. Quoted in Holger Herwig, “Asymmetrical Alliance: Austria-Hungary and Germany 18981-1918,” in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, eds., *Entangling Alliances: Coalition Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Canberra: Australian Military History Publications, 2005), 59 ([link](http://www.army.gov.au/~/media/Files/Our%20history/AAHU/Conference%20Papers%20and%20Images/2005/2005-Coalition_Warfare_in_20th_Century.pdf)), and in Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. “Now we are still more or less a match for them,” Moltke said, but in two or three years “our enemies’ military power will be so great that he did not know how he could deal with it.” This was not a tone of supreme confidence. Quoted in Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Förster, “Reich des Absurden,” 249 ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/pdf/1430253275bsb00045140.pdf/)); and Förster, “Der deutsche Generalstab,” 85-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. This is the basic picture that emerges from the three Förster articles cited in n. 68. See also Burchardt, *Friedenswirtschaft*, 14-29. According to Förster, Burchardt in that section “put much effort into demonstrating convincingly that, apart from Schlieffen and his followers, few German generals held a short-war illusion.” Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares,” 364 n. 81 (see also 345); and Förster, “Deutsche Generalstab,” 85 n. 85. But Burchardt did not actually go that far; his basic point was that some important military figures, and especially Moltke, were thinking in terms of a relatively long (perhaps two-year) war. See also Lothar Burchardt, “Operatives Denken und Plänen von Schlieffen bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges,” *Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte* 9 (1988), 45-72, esp. 60-61, 67. For a summary of the most important evidence on this issue, see Holger Herwig, “Germany and the ‘Short-War’ Illusion: Towards a New Interpretation?” *Journal of Military History* 66, no. 3 (July 2002), 681-93 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3093355)). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares,” 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid., 370. Other indicators point in the same general direction. The lack of military coordination with Austria , for example, is astounding. Although some loose agreements covering this matter had been reached in 1909, more precise arrangements were not worked out during the crisis, and it was only at the last minute that Moltke asked Austria “to employ her main strength against Russia and not disperse it by a simultaneous offensive against Serbia.” But this the Austrians refused to do. Albertini, *Origins,* 3:45-46; Norman Stone, “Moltke and Conrad: Relations between the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs, 1909-1914,” in Paul Kennedy, ed., *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979) and Herwig, “Asymmetrical Alliance” ([link](http://www.army.gov.au/~/media/Files/Our%20history/AAHU/Conference%20Papers%20and%20Images/2005/2005-Coalition_Warfare_in_20th_Century.pdf)).This hardly fits in with the picture of a German government carefully and systematically plotting a war of aggression. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares,” 368-73, and Förster, “Reich des Absurden,” 250 ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/pdf/1430253275bsb00045140.pdf/)). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Förster, “Im Reich des Absurden” ([link](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/BOOKS/pdf_download.pl?id=bsb00045140&nr=00001)), 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War” ([link](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199209%2935%3A3%3C725%3AGATOOT%3E2.0.C0%3B2-0)), 742-52, and Ferguson, “Public Finance and National Security” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/651199)). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ferguson, “Public Finance and National Security” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/651199)), 143 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War” ([link](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199209%2935%3A3%3C725%3AGATOOT%3E2.0.C0%3B2-0)), 734, 743 (for the quotation), 751. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ferguson, “Public Finance and National Security” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/651199)), 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War” ([link](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-246X%28199209%2935%3A3%3C725%3AGATOOT%3E2.0.C0%3B2-0)), 733-34, 751. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Note by Conrad Haussmann of a meeting with Bethmann, February 24, 1918, quoted in Jarausch, “Illusion of Limited War” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545516)), 48. In 1919 Bethmann admitted to the historian Friedrich Thimme that in 1914 the military was convinced Germany could still win in a war, but that this would no longer be possible in a few years; “this, of course,” he said, affected “the way the Serbian question was dealt with.” Quoted in Mommsen, “Topos of Inevitable War,” 45 (n. 43). The point that German policy in 1914 was deeply colored by preventive-war thinking seems irrefutable, but some serious scholars still deny that this was the case. According to Hew Strachan, for example, Bethmann was not thinking in preventive war terms, and Moltke’s “own thinking on preventive war . . . played no role in July 1914.” Strachan, “Preemption and Prevention in Historical Perspective,” in Henry Shue and David Rodin, eds., *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) ([link](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199233137.001.0001/acprof-9780199233137-chapter-2)). And according to Thomas Otte “Bethmann had given no thought to a preventive war but had sought to localize the Austro-Serb conflict.” Thomas Otte, *July 1914: The World’s Descent into War, Summer 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 517; see also 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik in der Julikrise 1914: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ausbruchs des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009) ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 210. The point was by no means ignored in the older literature. See especially John Cairns, “International Politics and the Military Mind: The Case of the French Republic, 1911‐1914,” *Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 3 (September 1953) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1874744.pdf)), 274, 276, 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 210-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid., 209. Castelnau, however, was not being totally straight with the government. He told the political leadership that in strategic terms things would never be better, but he actually felt that in technical military terms things would be better if the war could be put off for a year. See the full extract from the Castelnau’s letter to his son of July 28, 1914 (which Schmidt quoted from in part) in General Yves Gras, *Castelnau ou l’art de commander, 1851-1944* (Paris: Denoël, 1990), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 209-210; Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 482, 552. About a day later, the Russian attaché reported that the French War Minister, Messimy, “m’a déclaré sur un ton de sincérité enthousiaste la ferme décision du Gouvernement à la guerre.” See Jules Isaac, *Un Débat historique: Le Problème des origines de la guerre* (Paris: Rieder, 1933), 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 168-71, 207-209. See also Jan Karl Tanenbaum, “French Estimates of Germany’s Operational War Plans,” in Ernest May, *Knowing One’s Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik,* 208 n. 419. See also Christopher Andrew, “France and the German Menace,” in May, *Knowing One’s Enemies*, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 302. On these matters, see also Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame: Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 238-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Quoted in Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Quoted in Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 297. Clark’s source is a book by the Russian historian V.I. Bovykin published in the USSR in 1961, but the document itself—a letter from Izvolski to Sazonov of October 14, 1912—is available in German translation in *Die Internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, series 3, vol. 4, part 1, no. 46 (the quotation is on 49). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 301-302. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Albertini, *Origins of the War of 1914*, 2:188. See also Jules Isaac, “La Crise européenne et la grande guerre: à l’occasion d’un livre récent,” *Revue Historique* 176, no. 3 (1935) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40946665)), 429-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 80-81, 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Poincaré diary notes, quoted in Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 210 n. 428. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. In his book (pp. 369-70) Schmidt denied that the French were thinking along those lines. But according to Jonathan Steinberg’s report of a conference held in London in 2011, “Stefan Schmidt spoke on how the French fought a ‘preventive war’—a point on which, in discussion, Gerd Krumeich [another specialist in this area] agreed with him.” Steinberg, “Old Knowledge and New Research” ([link](http://jch.sagepub.com/content/48/2/241.full.pdf+html)), 247. And Albertini writes that Poincaré’s share of the responsibility for the war “was in availing himself of the mistakes committed by Austria and Germany to carry through the revancheand restore to France Alsace and above all his own Lorraine.” Albertini, *Origins*,2:197. He does not, however, provide much evidence to support this claim, but given Albertini’s deep familiarity with this whole subject his views have to be taken seriously. Jacques Droz, one should note, thought in 1973 that Poincaré’s policy was deeply influenced by this sort of thinking: “Poincaré et ses collaborateurs estimaient, puisque l’entraînement à la guerre était ‘fatal,’ qu’il fallait engager celle-ci dans les conditions les plus favorables.” Droz, *Causes de la Première Guerre mondiale*, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See David McDonald, “A Lever Without a Fulcrum: Domestic Factors and Russian Foreign Policy, 1904-1914,” in Hugh Ragsdale, ed., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 284, 296 ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=bwvllKkPQtYC&pg=PA284&dq=%22internal+situation+does+not+allow+us+to+conduct%22&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCgQ6AEwAmoVChMI4bH29YOxyAIV0TOICh39Ow_5#v=onepage&q=%22internal%20situation%20does%20not%20allow%20us%20to%20conduct%22&f=false)). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. H.H. Fischer, ed., *Out of My Past: The Memoirs of Count Kokovstov* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935), 348-49; and McDonald, “Lever Without a Fulcrum,” 302 ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=bwvllKkPQtYC&pg=PA284&dq=%22internal+situation+does+not+allow+us+to+conduct%22&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCgQ6AEwAmoVChMI4bH29YOxyAIV0TOICh39Ow_5#v=onepage&q=%22internal%20situation%20does%20not%20allow%20us%20to%20conduct%22&f=false)). Those two sources are the basis for Clark’s account in *Sleepwalkers*, 220. For a discussion of this passage from Kokovstov’s memoirs, see Lieven, *Towards the Flame,* 266-68. Although Lieven does not think Kokovstov’s account should be accepted uncritically, he does not say that he misrepresented Sukhomlinov’s position or the views of other members of the government. On the shifts within the Russian leadership during this period, see also ibid., 291-96. For the basic thrust of Russian policy in July 1914 (very different from the old Stolypin-Kokovstov line), see ibid., 320-23. On the hardening of Russian policy in this period, see also Ronald Bobroff, “War Accepted but Unsought: Russia’s Growing Militancy and the July Crisis, 1914,” in Levy and Vasquez, *Outbreak of the First World War*, esp. 233-37  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 323, citing a volume of memoirs published in 1973. See also William Fuller, “The Russian Empire,” in May, *Knowing One’s Enemies*, 111, and William Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Two Sukhomlinov-inspired articles in the *Birshevaia Viedemosti—*the one published on June 13, 1914, was called “Russia is Ready, France Must Be Also”—are of particular interest in this context. Both created quite a stir, especially in Germany. See David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 351, 359, 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid., 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid., 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. For Lieven, it was not a question of the government giving way to “public opinion.” Instead, he sees “a consensus developing on the fundamentals of foreign policy between the dominant element in the Foreign Ministry and mainstream public opinion.” Ibid., 180. See also ibid., 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid., 8, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., 233-34. Lieven also refers in this passage to “Sazonov’s strong Orthodox and Slavophile sympathies.” See also ibid., 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *Memoirs of Count Kokovstov*, 349; Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 322-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Serge Sazonov, *Fateful Years* (New York: Stokes, 1928) ([link](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015012278720;view=1up;seq=1)), 78, quoted in Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) ([link](http://www.degruyter.com/dg/viewbookchapter.fullcontentlink:pdfeventlink/$002fbooks$002fharvard.9780674063204$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4.pdf?t:ac=books$002fharvard.9780674063204$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4.xml)), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Geiss, *July 1914*,367; see also 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Georges-Henri Soutou, *La Grande illusion: Quand la France perdait la paix, 1914-1920* (Paris: Tallandier, 2015), 32-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 43-44. Soutou also uses this term. See Soutou, *Grande illusion*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. See John C.G. Röhl, “An der Schwelle zum Weltkrieg: Eine Dokumentation über den ‘Kriegsrat’ vom 8. Dezember 1912,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, no. 21 (1977), esp. 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Isaac, “Crise européenne” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40946665)), 425. In the early 1920s, the Soviet government had allowed Boris Souvarine, then a prominent member of the French Communist Party, to gather evidence in the Tsarist archives relating to this issue. The key documents were published in the newspaper *L’Humanité* in 1923-24, and in 1931 a full collection appeared: Arthur Raffalovitch, *“L’Abominable vénalité de la presse,” d’après les documents des archives russes (1897-1914)* (Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1931)([link](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k83024b.r=l%27abominable+venalite+de+la+presse.langEN)). The documents in that collection are generally viewed as authentic; decades later, René Girault found the originals in the Russian archives. See Patrick Eveno, *L’Argent de la presse française des années 1820 à nos jours* (Paris: CTHS, 2003), 70. One of the most striking revelations was the involvement of the French government, and indeed of Poincaré personally, in this effort to influence the press. It is also important to note that the goal here was not just to assuage the concerns of the bondholders so as to keep the money flowing; more fundamental foreign policy concerns on the part of both governments also came into play. See especially Kokovtsov to Poincaré, October 30, 1912, 332-33; Isvolsky to Sazonov, October 23, 1912, and February 14, 1913, 325-29, 362-66; Raffalovitch to Davidov, December 11, 1912, 345-47; and Sazonov to Kokovtsov, February 15, 1913, 368-72. See also René Girault, *Emprunts russes et investissements français en Russie, 1887-1914* (Paris: Colin, 1973), 543 n.10, and Girault, “Les Balkans dans les relations franco-russes en 1912” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40952291)), 173-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 484. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 289, 305‐307, 314, 323, 354, 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Ibid., 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 51‐54. See also the extract from Poincaré’s diary quoted in Gerd Krumeich, *Armaments and Politics in France on the Eve of the First World War: The Introduction of Three‐Year Conscription 1913‐1914* (Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers, 1984), 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. John Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 179; see also 182. See also Albertini, *Origins*, 3:85 and Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Thus Secretary of War Henry Stimson, in a widely quoted October 16 diary entry, referred to a meeting Roosevelt had called at the White House that day to consider the Japan problem: “and so we face the delicate question of the diplomatic fencing to be done so as to be sure that Japan was put into the wrong and made the first bad move—overt move.” Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries [microfilm edition] (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1973), entry for October 16, 1941. In another frequently cited diary entry, Stimson quoted Roosevelt as saying on November 25 that “the question was how we should maneuver them [the Japanese] into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves.” Ibid., entry for November 25, 1941. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 491-92, 498. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Ibid., 492-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ibid., 496. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ibid., 492-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 473-76, 478, 480. This is important because Albertini underestimated the importance of German concerns about these Russian pre-mobilization measures and thus tended to portray Germany as less reactive and more aggressive than she in fact was. Note, for example, the discussion of Bethmann’s important warnings to Russia on July 26 and 29 in Albertini, *Origins*,2:428, 553-54 . [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. On these matters, see Trachtenberg, “Coming of the First World War” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/TrachtenbergWWI.pdf)), 76-80. For some new evidence showing that at least some French officials were aware of the problem, see Soutou, *Grande illusion*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Quoted in Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 484, and in many other accounts. See especially Sidney Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1928), 308 ([link](https://archive.org/details/originsofworldwa02sidn)). As Fay notes (2:292n), this and other interesting documents relating to the Russian mobilization, captured by the Germans during the war, were analyzed in two German works published in the immediate post-war period: Robert Hoeniger, *Russlands Vorbereitung zum Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Mittler, 1919) ([link](http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00084569-4)) ([pdf](https://download.digitale-sammlungen.de/BOOKS/pdf_download.pl?id=bsb00084569&nr=00041)), 34-35, and Gunther Frantz, *Russlands Eintritt in den Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1924), 236. One should also note in this context that on July 29 Sazonov “solemnly assured” the German ambassador that “no steps” were being taken against Germany, which was certainly untrue. See Albertini, *Origins*,2:550. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Izvolski to Sazonov, July 30, 1914, quoted in Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 486, quoting Serge Dobrorolsky, “La Mobilisation de l’Armée russe en 1914,” *Revue d’histoire de la guerre mondiale* 1, no. 1 (1923), 68 ([link](https://archive.org/download/revuedhistoirede00sociuoft/revuedhistoirede00sociuoft.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 475. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. See L.C.F Turner, “The Russian Mobilization in 1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 1 (January 1968) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/259967)), 79-80; Trumpener, “War Premeditated?” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545761)). [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 492-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Quoted in Trumpener, “War Premeditated?” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545761)), 74. See also Geiss, *July 1914*, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Trumpener ends his article with the following comment: “Altogether it may be concluded that the army authorities in Berlin had considerably more, and better, information on the scope and tempo of Russia's ‘premobilization’ measures than is reflected in the various collections of diplomatic documents and other civilian government records from that period which were published after the war. At least in terms of their own view of the responsibility they carried, both Falkenhayn's and Moltke's ‘clamor’ for German (and Austrian) ‘countermeasures’ in the last days of July thus becomes perhaps a bit more understandable,” 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Jules Isaac’s analysis of this issue in 1933 is particularly worth noting: Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 214-223, esp. 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Dominic Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1983), 143-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Pourtalès to Foreign Office, July 28, 1914, Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War* ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)), 263. For the original text, see Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 2:4-5 (doc. no. 282) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 480-81. Emphasis his. Note also Williamson’s comment, in summarizing the results of new work on the origins of the war: “Under no circumstances were Paris and St. Petersburg prepared to allow any chastisement of Serbia.” Williamson, “July 1914 Revisited and Revised,” 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Sazonov to Izvolski, July 27, 1914, *Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, series 1, vol. 5, doc. 116, 105 ([link](http://www.ub.uni-koeln.de/cdm/ref/collection/dirksen/id/188427)), and quoted in Albertini, *Origins*,2:401. Note also the discussion in Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. The main works on Russian policy in 1914, like the Lieven and McMeekin studies cited above, do not go into the subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Thus one key Foreign Office official (Zimmermann), according to a Bavarian diplomat in Berlin on July 18, was “counting on the fact that ‘bluffing’ constitutes one of the most favored requisites of Russian policy, and that while the Russian likes to threaten with his sword, he still does not like so very much to draw it on behalf of others at the critical moment.” Quoted in Pierrre Renouvin, *The Immediate Origins of the War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 74. Even as late as July 30, another Bavarian diplomat reported, Bethmann was not sure whether the measures Russia and France had taken were a “simple bluff” or something more serious. Quoted in Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 163n. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. See, for example, Trachtenberg, “Coming of the First World War” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/TrachtenbergWWI.pdf)), 84-92; this episode is discussed at length in many accounts of the crisis. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Lichnowsky to Foreign Office, July 29, 1914, Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War,* 322 ([link](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MMLF?dd=0&locID=uclosangeles&d1=LP3Y0009400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=LP3Y0009400&d2=3&docNum=HT2900142213&h2=1&af=RN&d6=3&ste=10&dc=tiPG&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=HT100142211)). For the German original, see Kautsky, *Deutschen Dokumente*, 2:86-88 (doc. 368) ([link](https://archive.org/download/diedeutschendoku02germ/diedeutschendoku02germ.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Grey to Goschen, July 31, 1914, in G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. 11 (London: HMSO, 1926) ([link](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.49015002016443;view=1up;seq=9)), 215-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Albertini, *Origins*, 2:643. The episode is discussed at length in Albertini, *Origins*,2:642-43 and 3:52-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See Trachtenberg, “Coming of the First World War” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/TrachtenbergWWI.pdf)), 91-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. See, for example, Annika Mombauer, ed., *Origins of the First World War: Diplomatic and Military Documents* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 17. Volker Berghahn is an exception. See Volker Berghahn, “Origins,” in Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) ([link](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHO9780511675669.004)), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. It is in large part for this reason that Dominic Lieven’s new book on Russian policy before the war is of particular interest. His study brings out the fact that key figures in the Russian elite disagreed with Sazonov’s policy, sometimes in very fundamental ways. As Lieven points out (143), this suggests that alternative courses of actions were quite conceivable and that the policy choices that were made were thus of fundamental importance. See especially Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 133-43 (Rosen and Giers), 216 (Kuropotkin), 249 (Trubotskoy, on the Balkan League). Similarly, Dobrorolsky remarked in his important 1923 article on the Russian mobilization that if different individuals had been in charge of the Russian military in 1914—if people like Milyutin and Obruchev had been in charge—war could have been avoided at the time. See Dobrorolsky, “La Mobilisation de l’Armee russe en 1914,” 147 ([link](https://archive.org/download/revuedhistoirede00sociuoft/revuedhistoirede00sociuoft.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Clark, *Sleepwalkers,* esp. 26-27, 34-39, 47, 63-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Descos to Poincaré, November 26, 1912, *Documents diplomatiques français*, 3rd series, vol. 4, 577, quoted in Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 49n. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. For a summary of relatively recent findings, see Samuel Williamson and Ernest May, “An Identity of Opinion: Historians and July 1914,” *Journal of Modern History* 79, no. 2 (June 2007) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/519317)), 350-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. See Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 44-45. As Schmidt points out in that passage, the professional historians who published the main French collection of documents, the *Documents diplomatiques français*, wanted to include this document in that publication, but Foreign Ministry officials objected and were ultimately backed up by the foreign minister, who decided the issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Quoted in Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Röhl, “Goodbye to All That” ([link](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12191/epdf)), 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Note, for example, the role this issue played in the discussion at the December 1912 “War Council” ([link](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=799)). [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 481. See also Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. The main evidence was presented in Miloš Bogićević [Bogichevich (English); Boghitschewitsch (German); Boghitchevitch (French)], *Die auswärtige Politik Serbiens: Geheimakten aus serbischen Archiven,* vol. 1(Berlin: Brückenverlag, 1928) ([link](http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11166270-5)), 280, 299, and vol. 3 (Berlin: Brückenverlag, 1931) ([link](http://www.mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11166272-6)), 167. The key documents Bogićević (and others) had presented were generally cited in the main historical studies. See, for example, Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Coming of the War, 1914*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner’s, 1930), 1:135 ([link](https://archive.org/download/comingofwar191401bern/comingofwar191401bern.pdf)); Albertini, *Origins*, 1: 375, 486; Fay, *Origins of the World War* ([link](https://archive.org/details/originsofworldwa01sidn)), 1:383-85, 399-403, 483-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Albertini, *Origins*,2:190. See also Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 49n. Isaac quotes from two documents from the *Documents diplomatiques français* which support this general point. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Poincaré-Sazonov meeting, August 1912, *Documents diplomatiques français (1871–1914),* 3rd series, vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1931), 34. The remark was quoted, for example, in Pierre Renouvin, *La Crise européenne et la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Alcan, 1934), 131. The reaction of one key Russian Foreign Ministry official is also worth noting. In August 1912, Prince Trubetskoy, “after agreeing to return to the Foreign Ministry to head the Near Eastern Department” was shown the text of the treaty; despite his Slavophile sympathies, “he was so horrified that he almost resigned on the spot.” Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Isaac, “Crise européenne” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40946665)), esp. 425-26, 437-39, 445-46. In this 36-page article, Isaac provided a detailed and very sharp critique of the Renouvin book cited in the previous footnote; the thrust of his criticism was that Renouvin had played down the role of Russia and France in the crisis culminating in the war. Given the sharpness of the analysis, it is a measure of the seriousness of the French historical profession that the two men remained friends after that review. Note especially Renouvin’s letter to Isaac quoted in André Kaspi, *Jules Isaac: Historien, acteur du rapprochement judéo-chrétien* (Paris: Plon, 2002), 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Clark, *Sleepwalkers,* 296-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ibid., 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 157 ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=j3fhF-HHlQEC&pg=PA157&dq=%22purely+defensive+weapon%22+intitle:armaments+inauthor:stevenson&hl=en&sa=X&ei=NkRnVa_8EdbqoATW34Ao&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAA)). [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Paléologue to Doumergue, May 3, 1914, French Foreign Ministry Archives, Political and Commercial Correspondence, 1896-1918, Russie: Politique Etrangère, vol. 46, cited in McMeekin, *Russian Origins*, 22 ([link](http://www.degruyter.com/dg/viewbookchapter.fullcontentlink:pdfeventlink/$002fbooks$002fharvard.9780674063204$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4.pdf?t:ac=books$002fharvard.9780674063204$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4$002fharvard.9780674063204.c4.xml)). See also Soutou, *Grande illusion*, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Bobroff, “War Accepted but Unsought,” 245-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. See Marc Trachtenberg, “French Foreign Policy in the July Crisis, 1914: A Review Article,” H-Diplo/ISSF esssay series, no. 3, published in H-Diplo on December 1, 2010 ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/schmidt.pdf)), 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. See especially Isaac, “Crise européenne” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40946665)), 426-32, 438, 444-45, 446. On the shift in policy in 1912, note also Girault, “Les Balkans dans les relations franco-russes en 1912” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40952291)), 155-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Albertini, *Origins,* 2:598-600. See also Droz, *Causes de la Première Guerre mondiale,* 176-77; and Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 202, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik* ([link](http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/phs/schmidt_aussenpolitik)), 80-81, 92; discussed in Trachtenberg, “French Foreign Policy in the July Crisis” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/schmidt.pdf)), 5. See also Isaac, “Crise européenne” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40946665)), 429-31, 438 (and esp. n. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Paul W. Schroeder, “Embedded Counterfactuals and World War I as an Unavoidable War,” in Paul Schroeder, *Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 186 ([link](http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/archives/texts/t040829a/counter.html)). [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Paul W. Schroeder, “Stealing Horses to Great Applause: Austria-Hungary’s Decision in 1914 in Systemic Perspective,” in Afflerbach and Stevenson, *An Improbable War*, 23-28, 39, and (for the quotations) 37, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 481. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Ibid., 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ibid., 288. See also Georges-Henri Soutou, “La Première guerre mondiale: une rupture dans l’évolution de l’ordre européen,” *Politique étrangère* 65, no. 3-4 (2000), 842-43 ([link](http://www.persee.fr/doc/polit_0032-342x_2000_num_65_3_4988)) ([pdf](http://www.persee.fr/docAsPDF/polit_0032-342x_2000_num_65_3_4988.pdf)); Georges-Henri Soutou, “Le Concert européen, de Vienne à Locarno,” in Jean Bérenger and Georges-Henri Soutou, eds., *L’Ordre européen du XVIe au XXe siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998) ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=6veWKnMMoHwC&printsec=frontcover&dq=intitle:L%E2%80%99ordre+intitle:europ%C3%A9en+intitle:du+intitle:XVIe+intitle:au+intitle:Xxe+intitle:si%C3%A8cle&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAGoVChMInv-Y87aBxwIVjpWICh3bdg-i#v=onepage&q=soutou&f=false)), esp. 129-30; and Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 215, 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Steinberg, “Old Knowledge and New Research” ([link](http://jch.sagepub.com/content/48/2/241.full.pdf+html)), 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. The main point here is that historical analysis in this area was deeply influenced by political considerations—and that applies not just to Fischer’s opponents but to his supporters as well. See Arnold Sywottek, “Die Fischer-Kontroverse: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung des politisch-historischen Bewusstseins in der Bundesrepublik,” in Imanuel Geiss und Jürgen Bernd Wendt, eds., *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik* *des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann 1973); Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland: Die Debatte 1914-1980 über den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1984), esp. chap. 4; Klaus Große Kracht, “Die Fischer-Kontroverse: Von der Fachdebatte zum Publikumsstreit,” in his *Die zankende Zunft: Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); and Stephan Petzold, “Fritz Fischer and the Rise of Critical Historiography in West Germany, 1945–1966: A Study in the Social Production of Historical Knowledge,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberystwyth (2010). Note also Imanuel Geiss, *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1972), esp. 165–6, 195-96; Richard J. Evans, “The New Nationalism and the Old History: Perspectives on the West German Historikerstreit,” *Journal of Modern History* 59, no. 4 (December 1987) ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1879952)), esp. 762 and the sources cited there; Helmut Böhme, “ ‘Primat’ und ‘Paradigmata’: Zur Entwicklung eines Bundesdeutschen Zeitgeschichtsforschung am Beispiel des Ersten Weltkrieges,” in Hartmut Lehmann, ed., *Historikerkontroversen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000); Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad Jarausch, eds., *Versäumte Fragen: Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2000); Philipp Stelzel, “Working toward a Common Goal? American Views on German Historiography and German-American Scholarly Relations during the 1960s,” *Central European History* 41, no. 4 (December 2008), 639-671 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20457399)); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Der grosse Krieg und die Historiker: Neue Wege der Geschichtsschreibung über den Ersten Weltkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2012); and Röhl, “Goodbye to All That (Again)?” ([link](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12191/epdf)), 166. The point applies even to Fischer himself. Fischer had joined the SA in November 1933 and remained committed to the Nazi cause even in the latter part of World War II. Geiss thought Fischer’s historical work (in the words of Stephan Petzold) “represented an effort to come to terms not only with his country’s but also his own Nazi past.” Perhaps “make amends for” might be a better way of putting it. See Stephan Petzold, “The Social Making of a Historian: Fritz Fischer’s Distancing from Bourgeois-Conservative Historiography, 1930–60,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 2 (April 2013) ([link](http://jch.sagepub.com/content/48/2/271.full.pdf+html)), 272, 278, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Albertini, *Origins*,2:372. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Fischer, *Germany’s Aims*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Schmitt, “July 1914: Thirty Years After” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1871459)), 203-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. On the issue of whether the Serbians really did “in very large measure” accept the Austrian demands, see Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 457-69. Clark basically says no. Albertini, *Origins*,2:364-72, and Isaac, *Un Débat historique*, 124n., take much the same view. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Richard Neustadt and Graham Allison, afterword to Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (New York: Norton, 1999) ([link](https://books.google.ca/books?id=mWWAm0h5yP0C&pg=PA102&lpg=PA102&dq=%22thirteen+days%22+%22one+in+three%22&source=bl&ots=dsB4SZyweZ&sig=QzK0QWvzUCOmKcNdYKAHI8HN_jc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ddRsVabSMoW2oQT-nYKoAw&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=%22thirteen%20days%22%20%22one%20in%20three%22&f=false)), 102. The authors point out that according to Theodore Sorensen, it seemed to Kennedy during the Missile Crisis that the odds of the Soviets going “all the way to war” were “somewhere between one out of three and even.” Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 705. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy meeting, March 27, 1939, C.P. 74 (39), 15, Cab 24/284 ([link](http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-284.pdf)), f. 229 (frame 334). [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. See Richard Overy, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 2d ed. (London: Longman, 1999), 62, 69–73; Overy, “Germany, ‘Domestic Crisis’ and War in 1939,” *Past and Present*, no. 116 (August 1987), 167–68 ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.2307/650883.pdf)), reprinted in Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 231–32; and Overy with Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road to War* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 100. I deal with these issues in a related paper, “Some Notes on British Policy in 1939” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/1939.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. See Marc Trachtenberg, "Preventive War and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Security Studies* 16, no. 1 (January-March 2007) ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/pw%28SecStud%29.pdf)), 13-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. W.M. 84 (41), August 19, 1941, CAB 65/19, “Most Secret” typewritten attachment ([link](http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-65-19.pdf)), frames 208-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. See Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton University Press, 2006), chapter 4 ([link](http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/chap4.pdf)), esp. 118-20, and Trachtenberg, “Preventive War” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/pw%28SecStud%29.pdf)), 22-28. The quotations come from Admiral Harold Stark and General George Marshall, “Joint Board Estimate of United States Over-All Production Requirements,” September 11, 1941, and appended “Estimate of Army Ground Forces,” *American War Plans, 1919–1941,* ed. Steven Ross, vol. 5 (New York: Garland, 1992), 160-201, esp. 193–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. I am grateful to the political scientist Stephen Van Evera for sensitizing me to this aspect of the problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. See Marc Trachtenberg, “The Question of Realism: An Historian's View,” *Security Studies*, 13:1 (Fall 2003), 3-43 ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/realism.pdf)), and reprinted with some minor changes in Marc Trachtenberg, *The Cold War and After: History, Theory, and the Logic of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) ([link](http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s9745.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Quoted in Avner Offer, “Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honor?” *Politics and Society* 23, no. 2 (June 1995) ([link](http://pas.sagepub.com/content/23/2/213.citation)), 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. See Otte, *July Crisis*, 486, 492. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. That such tactics might have been effective is suggested by the fact that opinion in the governing Liberal Party was relatively sympathetic to the Austrian point of view. See D. С. Watt, "The British Reactions to the Assassination at Sarajevo," *European Studies Review* 1, no. 3 (July 1971) ([link](http://ehq.sagepub.com/content/1/3/233.full.pdf+html)), esp. 243-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. For an argument along these lines about French policy before the war, see Trachtenberg, “French Foreign Policy in the July Crisis” ([link](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/schmidt.pdf)), 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares,” 373-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Offer, “Going to War in 1914” ([link](http://pas.sagepub.com/content/23/2/213.citation))*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, xxviii, 161 (for the reference to “virtual reality”), 350, 407-411, 558; and Clark interview with Robert Siegel of National Public Radio, April 23, 2013 ([link](http://www.npr.org/2013/04/23/178616215/stumbling-into-world-war-i-like-sleepwalkers)). Again, the theme is not entirely new. Jules Isaac, in his 1935 article on the war origins question, makes a similar point. “Le Passé et le présent nous enseignent, assez clairement, que la férocité humaine existe, avec un certain art de se déguiser et, sous ce déguisement, de se faire illusion à elle-meme.” Isaac, “Crise européenne” ([link](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40946665)), 442. The work of the evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers on self-deception is of particular interest in this context. See especially Robert Trivers, *The Folly of Fools: Deceit and Self-deception in Human Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Förster, “Dreams and Nightmares,” 354, 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 70; emphasis his. See also Henry Kissinger, *For the Record: Selected Statements, 1977-1980* (Boston: Little Brown, 1981), 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)