**The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War.**

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# Book Reviews

**The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War.** By *David G. Herrmann.*
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996. Pp. xiii+307.

David Herrmann's *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War* is a fascinating study of military affairs in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. Herrmann is concerned with a whole range of fundamental issues—the impact of changing military technology, perceptions of power, the development of strategy and the dynamics of military competition—and he is interested above all in the effect all this had on international political life on the eve of World War I. The book is not long, and detail is never presented for its own sake. Instead, this is an impressive synthesis of a vast amount of archival research. Herrmann has worked in at least fourteen archives in five European countries, and he has pulled his findings together quite effectively. A single footnote might contain archival references in four different languages. This is historical scholarship at its best, full of fresh information and new insight.

The reality that Herrmann reveals is more complex, and a good deal more interesting, than the picture that comes across in traditional accounts. Military leaders were not all mindlessly committed to offensive action. Many of them were considerably more realistic than we have been led to believe. The French general staff, for example, understood at the time of the First Moroccan Crisis in 1905 that France could scarcely fight even a defensive battle against Germany, and that a strategic withdrawal was the only viable option. The chief of the general staff was disturbed by indications that the Germans would attack through Belgium and that France in such a case would be "immediately overwhelmed." A higher-ranking general dismissed these warnings with the argument that the Germans would not violate Belgian neutrality so blatantly—a political and not a military argument. The simple clichés about a cult of the offensive do not adequately capture what was going on. Top military and civilian officials on the entente side, including the tsar himself at one point, had no trouble understanding what the real military situation was. When the entente was weak, their view was that it had to adopt a defensive strategy and take a prudent line in political conflicts with Germany. It was only when the balance shifted that a different sort of strategy became possible.

And it really is striking how sensitive political leaders on both sides were to the military balance. One of the great clichés about the period is that there was an almost hermetic separation between military strategy and foreign policy, but this book brings out in quite remarkable ways how intimately the two were linked. At the time of the 1905 Moroccan Crisis, for example, the Germans were in a very strong military position. The German chancellor had kept track of the military situation and, in fact, before provoking the crisis had "checked with the military authorities" to make sure he understood the military balance correctly (p. 52).

This was not at all unusual, and indeed European leaders were concerned not just with what the balance currently was, but also with how it was changing over time. When the balance was about to turn against a particular power, some military officers

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began to think seriously about preventive war, and Herrmann presents a good deal of important new material on this subject. But one of his key arguments here is that an increase in military spending can be seen as a kind of rival conception—that is, as an alternative to preventive war, a more acceptable way of holding off the shift in the military balance. Another side of this coin is that anything that prevents the military budget from expanding might increase the pressure for preventive military action.

The big competitive increases in military spending on the eve of the war—that is, the coming of a major land arms race in 1912 and 1913—is thus a major focus of Herrmann's analysis. Here again he has many important things to say. One key point is the seriousness with which the German leadership took the military problem, to the point where it felt it had to put its conservative principles aside and do what was necessary from a strategic point of view. The expansion actually decided on was more limited than some officers had called for, but Herrmann shows that, contrary to one common view, this was not to be interpreted primarily in sociopolitical terms—that is, to avoid bringing in too many bourgeois officers and too many urban workers as enlisted men and thus weaken Junker control of the army. Instead, for technical military reasons—essentially, to maintain existing standards of training—the War Ministry felt it had to move more cautiously than some advocates of a big buildup would have liked.

Was the land arms race that got underway just before 1914 a major cause of the war? Herrmann thinks it was, but he presents the evidence fairly. One key argument supporting that kind of interpretation is that a buildup adopted for defensive purposes is misperceived as reflecting aggressive intent, and each side reacts with greater hostility to what it views its adversary as doing than it would in the absence of an arms race. So one is struck by the fact that key officials in both France and Russia viewed the German army law of 1912, the move that began the land armaments race, as essentially defensive in nature. "The French," he writes, "recognized that the German move had been prompted by fear as a result of the second Moroccan crisis and the alignment of Entente power it had revealed" (p. 174). The Russian war minister told the French military attaché in 1913: "Germany is in a very critical position. It is encircled by enemy forces: to the west France, to the east Russia—and it fears them"—a view that, as Herrmann notes, "scarcely differed from that of the German high command." The minister could see why Germany felt it had to make an increased effort: "I can understand its worry, and as a result the measures it is taking seem natural to me" (pp. 191–92).

This book is full of interesting material of this sort. It is a striking example of the difference serious archival research can make. A story is so much richer, so much closer to the truth, when it is based on a massive research effort of the sort Herrmann was able to undertake. He has produced a truly remarkable piece of work.

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**Memoiren der Neuzeit: Betrachtungen zur erinnerten Geschichte.** By *Peter Stadler.*
Zurich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1995. Pp. 347.

This book by Peter Stadler, a professor at the Federal Swiss University of Zurich, clearly shows that he is an avid, careful, and thoughtful reader of memoirs. He must love such historical documents. He recognizes that this very rich form of historical information only very occasionally receives anything like a more systematic theoretical