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# Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984

Jack Snyder

**M**military technology should have made the European strategic balance in July 1914 a model of stability, but offensive military strategies defied those technological realities, trapping European statesmen in a war-causing spiral of insecurity and instability. As the Boer and Russo-Japanese Wars had foreshadowed and the Great War itself confirmed, prevailing weaponry and means of transport strongly favored the defender. Tactically, withering firepower gave a huge advantage to entrenched defenders; strategically, defenders operating on their own territory could use railroads to outmaneuver marching invaders. Despite these inexorable constraints, each of the major continental powers began the war with an offensive campaign. These war plans and the offensive doctrines behind them were in themselves an important and perhaps decisive cause of the war. Security, not conquest, was the principal criterion used by the designers of the plans, but their net effect was to reduce everyone's security and to convince at least some states that only preventive aggression could ensure their survival.

Even if the outbreak of war is taken as a given, the offensive plans must still be judged disasters. Each offensive failed to achieve its ambitious goals and, in doing so, created major disadvantages for the state that launched it. Germany's invasion of Belgium and France ensured that Britain would join the opposing coalition and implement a blockade. The miscarriage of France's ill-conceived frontal attack almost provided the margin of help that the Schlieffen Plan needed. Though the worst was averted by a last-minute railway maneuver, the Germans nonetheless occupied a key portion of France's industrial northeast, making a settlement based on the status quo ante impossible to negotiate. Meanwhile, in East Prussia the annihilation of an over-extended Russian invasion force squandered troops that might have

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Robert Jervis, William McNeill, Cynthia Roberts, and Stephen Van Evera provided helpful comments on this paper, which draws heavily on the author's forthcoming book, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

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been decisive if used to reinforce the undermanned advance into Austria. In each case, a defensive or more limited offensive strategy would have left the state in a more favorable strategic position.

None of these disasters was unpredictable or unpredicted. It was not only seers like Ivan Bloch who anticipated the stalemated positional warfare. General Staff strategists themselves, in their more lucid moments, foresaw these outcomes with astonishing accuracy. Schlieffen directed a war game in which he defeated his own plan with precisely the railway maneuver that Joffre employed to prevail on the Marne. In another German war game, which actually fell into Russian hands, Schlieffen used the advantage of railway mobility to defeat piecemeal the two prongs of a Russian advance around the Masurian Lakes—precisely the maneuver that led to the encirclement of Sazonov's Second Army at Tannenberg in August 1914. This is not to say that European war planners fully appreciated the overwhelming advantages of the defender; partly they underrated those advantages, partly they defied them. The point is that our own 20/20 hindsight is not qualitatively different from the understanding that was achievable by the historical protagonists.<sup>1</sup>

Why then were these self-defeating, war-causing strategies adopted? Although the particulars varied from country to country, in each case strategic policymaking was skewed by a pathological pattern of civil-military relations that allowed or encouraged the military to use wartime operational strategy to solve its institutional problems. When strategy went awry, it was because a penchant for offense helped the military organization to preserve its autonomy, prestige, and traditions, to simplify its institutional routines, or to resolve a dispute within the organization. As further discussion will show, it was not just a quirk of fate that offensive strategies served these functions. On balance, offense tends to suit the needs of military organizations better than defense does, and militaries normally exhibit at least a moderate preference for offensive strategies and doctrines for that reason. What was special about the period before World War I was that the state of civil-military relations in each of the major powers tended to exacerbate that normal offensive bias, either because the lack of civilian control allowed it to grow

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1. Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan* (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 60, note 34; A.A. Polivanov, *Voennoe delo*, No. 14 (1920), p. 421, quoted in Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), chapter 7.

unchecked or because an abnormal degree of civil-military conflict heightened the need for a self-protective ideology.

In part, then, the “cult of the offensive” of 1914 reflected the endemic preference of military organizations for offensive strategies, but it also reflected particular circumstances that liberated or intensified that preference. The nature and timing of these catalytic circumstances, though all rooted in problems of civil-military relations, were different in each country. Indeed, if war had broken out as late as 1910, the Russian and French armies would both have fought quite defensively.<sup>2</sup>

Germany was the first European power to commit itself to a wildly over-ambitious offensive strategy, moving steadily in this direction from 1891 when Schlieffen became the Chief of the General Staff. The root of this pathology was the complete absence of civilian control over plans and doctrine, which provided no check on the natural tendency of mature military organizations to institutionalize and dogmatize doctrines that support the organizational goals of prestige, autonomy, and the elimination of novelty and uncertainty. Often, as in this case, it is offense that serves these interests best.<sup>3</sup>

France moved in 1911 from a cautious counteroffensive strategy towards the reckless frontal assault prescribed by the *offensive à outrance*. The roots of this doctrine can also be traced to a problem in civil-military relations. The French officer corps had always been wary of the Third Republic’s inclination towards shorter and shorter terms of military service, which threatened the professional character and traditions of their organization. Touting the offense was a way to contain this threat, since everyone agreed that an army based on reservists and short-service conscripts would be good only for defense. The Dreyfus Affair and the radical military reforms that followed it heightened the officer corps’ need for a self-protective ideology that would justify the essence and defend the autonomy of their organization. The extreme doctrine of the *offensive à outrance* served precisely this function, helping to discredit the defensive, reservist-based plans of the politicized

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2. One reason that the war did not happen until 1914 was that Russian offensive power did not seriously threaten Germany until about that year. In this sense, the fact that all the powers had offensive strategies in the year the war broke out is to be explained more by their strategies’ interactive consequences than by their common origins.

3. Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapters 1, 4, and 5. I have profited greatly from the works of Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), and Stephen Van Evera, “Causes of War” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1984), who advance similar arguments.

“republican” officers who ran the French military under civilian tutelage until the Agadir crisis of 1911. Given a freer rein in the harsher international climate, General Joffre and the Young Turks around him used the offensive doctrine to help justify a lengthening of the term of service and to reemphasize the value of a more highly professionalized army.<sup>4</sup>

Russia’s drift towards increasingly overcommitted offensive plans between 1912 and 1914 was also abetted by the condition of civil-military relations. The problem in this case was the existence of two powerful veto groups within the military, one in the General Staff that favored an offensive against Germany and another centered on the Kiev military district that wanted to attack Austria. Forces were insufficient to carry out both missions, but there was no strong, centralized civilian authority who could or would enforce a rational priority commensurate with Russian means. Lacking firm civilian direction, the two military factions log-rolled the issue, each getting to implement its preferred offensive but with insufficient troops.<sup>5</sup>

It might be argued that these pathologies of civil-military relations are unique to the historical setting of this period. Civilians may have been ignorant of military affairs in a way that has been unequalled before or since. The transition in this period of the officer corps from an aristocratic caste to a specialized profession may have produced a uniquely unfavorable combination of the ill effects of both. Finally, social changes associated with rapid industrialization and urbanization may have provided a uniquely explosive setting for civil-military relations, as class conflicts reinforced civil-military conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Even if this is true, however, the same general patterns may persist but with lesser intensity, and understanding the circumstances that provoke more intense manifestations may help to forestall their recurrence.

Such a recurrence, whether intense or mild, is not a farfetched scenario. As in 1914, today’s military technologies favor the defender of the status quo, but the superpowers are adopting offensive counterforce strategies in defiance of these technological constraints. Like machine guns and railroads, survivable nuclear weapons render trivial the marginal advantages to be gained by striking first. In the view of some, this stabilizing effect even neutralizes whatever first-strike advantages may exist at the conventional level, since the fear of uncontrollable escalation will restrain even the first

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4. Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapters 2 and 3. See also Samuel Williamson, *The Politics of Grand Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

5. Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapters 6 and 7. See also A.M. Zaiionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k imperialisticheskoi voine* (Moscow: Gosvoenizdat, 1926).

6. Van Evera, “Causes of War,” chapter 7, explores these questions briefly.

steps in that direction. Since the would-be aggressor has the “last clear chance” to avoid disaster and normally cares less about the outcome than the defender does, mutual assured destruction works strongly for stability and the defense of the status quo. In this way, the absolute power to inflict punishment eases the security dilemma. All states possessing survivable second-strike forces can be simultaneously secure.<sup>7</sup>

Even those who are not entirely satisfied by the foregoing line of argument—and I include myself among them—must nevertheless admit the restraining effect that the irrevocable power to punish has had on international politics. Caveats aside, the prevailing military technology tends to work for stability, yet the strategic plans and doctrines of both superpowers have in important ways defied and undermined that basic reality. As in 1914, the danger today is that war will occur because of an erroneous belief that a disarming, offensive blow is feasible and necessary to ensure the attacker’s security.

In order to understand the forces that are eroding the stability of the strategic balance in our own era, it may be helpful to reflect on the causes and consequences of the “cult of the offensive” of 1914. In proceeding towards this goal, I will discuss, first, how offensive strategies promoted war in 1914 and, second, why each of the major continental powers developed offensive military strategies. Germany will receive special attention because the Schlieffen Plan was the mainspring tightening the European security dilemma in 1914, because the lessons of the German experience can be more broadly generalized than those of the other cases, and because of the need to correct the widespread view that Germany’s military strategy was determined by its revisionist diplomatic aims. After examining the domestic sources of military strategy in Germany, France, and Russia, I will discuss the effect of each state’s policies on the civil-military relations and strategies of its neighbors. A concluding section will venture some possible applications of these findings to the study of contemporary Soviet military doctrine.

### *How Offense Promoted War*

Conventional wisdom holds that World War I was caused in part by runaway offensive war plans, but historians and political scientists have been remark-

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7. The best and most recent expression of this view is Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

ably imprecise in reconstructing the logic of this process. Their vagueness has allowed critics of arms controllers' obsession with strategic instability to deny that the war resulted from "the reciprocal fear of surprise attack" or from any other by-product of offensive strategy.<sup>8</sup> Stephen Van Evera's contribution to this issue takes a major step towards identifying the manifold ways in which offensive strategies and doctrines promoted war in 1914. I would add only two points to his compelling argument. The first identifies some remaining puzzles about the perception of first-strike advantage in 1914; the second elaborates on Germany's incentive for preventive attack as the decisive way in which offensive military strategy led Europe towards war.

Van Evera cites statements and behavior indicating that European military and political decision-makers believed that the first army to mobilize and strike would gain a significant advantage. Fearing that their own preparations were lagging (or hoping to get a jump on the opponent), authorities in all of the countries felt pressed to take military measures that cut short the process of diplomacy, which might have converged on the solution of a "halt in Belgrade" if given more time. What is lacking in this story is a clear explanation of how the maximum gain or loss of two days could decisively affect the outcome of the campaign.

Planning documents suggest that no one believed that a two-day edge would allow a disarming surprise attack. Planners in all countries guarded against preemptive attacks on troops disembarking at railheads by concentrating their forces out of reach of such a blow. The only initial operation that depended on this kind of preemptive strike against unprepared forces was the German *coup de main* against the Belgian transport bottleneck of Liège. As the July crisis developed, the German General Staff was caused some anxiety by the progress of Belgian preparations to defend Liège, which jeopardized the smooth implementation of the Schlieffen Plan, but Moltke's attitude was not decisively influenced by this incentive to preempt.<sup>9</sup> In any event, it was Russia that mobilized first, and there is little to suggest that preemption was decisive in this case either. Prewar planning documents and

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8. Even the usually crystal-clear Thomas Schelling is a bit murky on this point. See his *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 221–225. For a critic, see Stephen Peter Rosen, "Nuclear Arms and Strategic Defense," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 1981), pp. 83–84.

9. Ulrich Trampener, "War Premeditated? German Intelligence Operations in July 1914," *Central European History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 1976), p. 80.

staff exercises show that the Russians worried about being preempted, but took sufficient precautions against it. They also indicate that preemption was not particularly feared if Austria was embroiled in the Balkans—precisely the conditions that obtained in July 1914. On the offensive side, however, the incentive to strike first might have been an important factor. Van Evera points out that the difference between the best case (mobilizing first) and the worst case (mobilizing second) was probably a net gain of four days (two gained plus two not lost). Given the Russians' aim of putting pressure on Germany's rear before the campaign in France was decided, four days was not a negligible consideration. To save just two days, the Russians were willing to begin their advance without waiting for the formation of their supply echelons. Thus, time pressure imposed by military exigencies may explain the haste of the crucial Russian mobilization. It should be stressed, however, that it was neither "the reciprocal fear of surprise attack" nor the chance of preempting the opponent's unalerted forces that produced this pressure. Rather, it was the desire to close Germany's window of opportunity against France that gave Russia an incentive to strike first.<sup>10</sup>

A second elaboration of Van Evera's argument, which will be crucial for understanding the following sections of this paper, is that offensive plans not only reflected the belief that states are vulnerable and conquest is easy; they actually caused the states adopting them to *be* vulnerable and consequently fearful. Even the Fischer school, which emphasizes Germany's "grasping for 'World Power'" as the primary cause of the war, admits that Germany's decision to provoke a conflict in 1914 was also due to the huge Russian army increases then in progress, which would have left Germany at Russia's mercy upon their completion in 1917.<sup>11</sup> This impending vulnerabil-

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10. Russia, 10-i otdel General'nogo shtaba RKKA, *Vostochnoprusskaia operatsiia: sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Gosvoenizdat, 1939), especially p. 62, which reproduces a Russian General Staff intelligence estimate dated March 1, 1914. Van Evera's quotations suggest that decision-makers in all countries exhibited more concern about being preempted than seems warranted by actual circumstances. One explanation may be that the military oversold this danger as a way of guarding against the risk of excessive civilian foot-dragging, which was clearly a concern among the French military, at least. Another possibility is that there was a disconnect between the operational level of analysis, where it was obvious that no one could disrupt his opponent's concentration, and the more abstract level of doctrine, where the intangible benefits of "seizing the initiative" were nonetheless considered important. See Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapters 2 and 3.

11. The Germans saw the planned 40 percent increase in the size of the Russian standing army as a threat to Germany's physical survival, not just a barrier foreclosing opportunities to expand. This is expressed most clearly in the fear that the power shift would allow Russia to force a



ity, though real enough, was largely a function of the Schlieffen Plan, which had to strip the eastern front in order to amass the forces needed to deal with the strategic conundrums and additional opponents created by the march through Belgium. If the Germans had used a positional defense on the short Franco–German border to achieve economies of force, they could have handled even the enlarged Russian contingents planned for 1917.<sup>12</sup>

In these ways, offensive strategies helped to cause the war and ensured that, when war occurred, it would be a world war. Prevailing technologies should have made the world of 1914 an arms controllers' dream; instead, military planners created a nightmare of strategic instability.

*Germany: Uncontrolled Military or Militarized Civilians?*

The offensive character of German war planning in the years before World War I was primarily an expression of the professional interests and outlook of the General Staff. Civilian foreign policy aims and attitudes about international politics were at most a permissive cause of the Schlieffen Plan. On balance, the General Staff's all-or-nothing war plan was more a hindrance than a help in implementing the diplomats' strategy of brinkmanship. The reason that the military was allowed to indulge its strategic preferences was not so much that the civilians agreed with them; rather, it was because war planning was considered to be within the autonomous purview of the General Staff. Military preferences were never decisive on questions of the use of force, however, since this was not considered their legitimate sphere. But indirectly, war plans trapped the diplomats by handing them a blunt instrument suitable for massive preventive war, but ill-designed for controlled coercion. The military's unchecked preference for an unlimited offensive strategy and the mismatch between German military and diplomatic strategy were important causes of strategic instability rooted in the problem of civil-military relations. This section will trace those roots and point out some implications relevant to contemporary questions.

The Schlieffen Plan embodied all of the desiderata commonly found in field manuals and treatises on strategy written by military officers: it was an

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revision of the status quo in the Balkans, leading to Austria's collapse. See especially Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975; German edition 1969), pp. 377–379, 427.

12. This is argued in Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapter 4.

offensive campaign, designed to seize the initiative, to exploit fleeting opportunities, and to achieve a decisive victory by the rapid annihilation of the opponents' military forces. War was to be an "instrument of politics," not in the sense that political ends would restrain and shape military means, but along lines that the General Staff found more congenial: war would solve the tangle of political problems that the diplomats could not solve for themselves. "The complete defeat of the enemy always serves politics," argued General Colmar von der Goltz in his influential book, *The Nation in Arms*. "Observance of this principle not only grants the greatest measure of freedom in the political sphere but also gives widest scope to the proper use of resources in war."<sup>13</sup>

To do this, Schlieffen sought to capitalize on the relatively slow mobilization of the Russian army, which could not bring its full weight to bear until the second month of the campaign. Schlieffen reasoned that he had to use this "window of opportunity" to decisively alter the balance of forces in Germany's favor. Drawing on precedents provided by Moltke's campaigns of 1866 and 1870 as well as his later plans for a two-front war, Schlieffen saw that a rapid decision could be achieved only by deploying the bulk of the German army on one front in order to carry out a grandiose encirclement maneuver. France had to be the first victim, because the Russians might spoil the encirclement by retreating into their vast spaces. With Paris at risk, the French would have to stand and fight. By 1897, Schlieffen had concluded that this scheme could not succeed without traversing Belgium, since the Franco-German frontier in Alsace-Lorraine was too narrow and too easily defended to permit a decisive maneuver. In the mature conception of 1905, most of the German army (including some units that did not yet exist) would march for three or four weeks through Belgium and northern France, encircling and destroying the French army, and then board trains for the eastern front to reinforce the few divisions left to cover East Prussia.

Even Schlieffen was aware that his plan was "an enterprise for which we are too weak."<sup>14</sup> He and his successor, the younger Moltke, understood most of the pitfalls of this maneuver quite well: the gratuitous provocation of new enemies, the logistical nightmares, the possibility of a rapid French rede-

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13. Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1969; German edition 1954), Vol. 1, p. 196, citing *Das Volk in Waffen* (5th ed., 1889), p. 129.

14. Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, p. 66.

ployment to nullify the German flank maneuver, the numerical insufficiency of the Germany army, the tendency of the attacker's strength to wane with every step forward and the defender's to grow, and the lack of time to finish with France before Russia would attack. The General Staff clung to this plan not because they were blind to its faults, but because they thought all the alternatives were worse. To mollify Austria in 1912, they went through the motions of gaming out a mirror-image of the Schlieffen Plan pointed towards the east, concluding that the French would defeat the weak forces left in the Rhineland long before a decision could be reached against Russia.<sup>15</sup> What the General Staff refused to consider seriously after 1890 was the possibility of an equal division of their forces between west and east, allowing a stable defensive against France and a limited offensive with Austria against Russia. (This was the combination that Germany used successfully in 1915 and that the elder Moltke had resigned himself to in the 1890s.)

Around the turn of the century, the General Staff played some war games based on a defensive in the west. These led to the embarrassing conclusion that the French would have great difficulty overwhelming even a modest defensive force. In future years, when games with this premise were played, the German defenders were allotted fewer forces, while Belgians and Dutch were arbitrarily added to the attacking force. Stacking the deck against the defensive appeared not only in war-gaming but also in Schlieffen's abstract expostulations of doctrine. Even some German critics caught him applying a double standard, arbitrarily granting the attacker advantages in mobility, whereas the reality should have been quite the opposite.<sup>16</sup>

In short, German war planning, especially after 1890, showed a strong bias in favor of offensive schemes for decisive victory and against defensive or more limited offensive schemes, even though the latter had a greater prospect of success. This bias cannot be explained away by the argument that Germany would have been at an economic disadvantage in a long war against Russia and hence had to gamble everything on a quick victory. As the actual war showed, this was untrue. More important, Schlieffen hit upon economic rationalizations for his war plan only after it had already been in place for years. Moreover, he actively discouraged serious analysis of wartime economics, deciding *a priori* that the only good war was a short war and that

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15. Louis Garros, "Préludes aux invasions de la Belgique," *Revue historique de l'armée* (March 1949), pp. 37–38; French archival documents cited in Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapter 4.

16. Friedrich von Bernhardi, *On War of Today* (London: Rees, 1912), Vol. 1, p. 44.

the only way to end a war quickly was to disarm the opponent decisively.<sup>17</sup> These conclusions were not in themselves unreasonable, but Schlieffen reached them before he did his analysis and then arranged the evidence in order to justify his preferred strategy.

The explanation for the General Staff's bias in favor of offensive strategy is rooted in the organizational interests and parochial outlook of the professional military. The Germans' pursuit of a strategy for a short, offensive, decisive war despite its operational infeasibility is simply an extreme case of an endemic bias of military organizations. Militaries do not always exhibit a blind preference for the offensive, of course. The lessons of 1914–1918 had a tempering effect on the offensive inclinations of European militaries, for example.<sup>18</sup> Still, exceptions and questionable cases notwithstanding, initial research indicates that militaries habitually prefer offensive strategies, even though everyone from Clausewitz to Trevor Dupuy has proved that the defender enjoys a net operational advantage.<sup>19</sup>

#### EXPLAINING THE OFFENSIVE BIAS

Several explanations for this offensive bias have been advanced. A number of them are consistent with the evidence provided by the German case. A particularly important explanation stems from the division of labor and the narrow focus of attention that necessarily follows from it. The professional training and duties of the soldier force him to focus on threats to his state's security and on the conflictual side of international relations. Necessarily preoccupied with the prospect of armed conflict, he sees war as a pervasive aspect of international life. Focusing on the role of military means in ensuring the security of the state, he forgets that other means can also be used towards that end. For these reasons, the military professional tends to hold a simplified, zero-sum view of international politics and the nature of war, in which wars are seen as difficult to avoid and almost impossible to limit.

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17. Lothar Burchardt, *Friedenswirtschaft und Kriegsvorsorge: Deutschlands wirtschaftliche Rüstungsbestrebungen vor 1914* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1968), pp. 15, 163–164.

18. However, this effect should not be overdrawn. Barry Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, has recently demonstrated that the French collapse in 1940 was due not to a Maginot Line mentality but to the overcommitment of forces to the offensive campaign in Belgium.

19. Possible biases in civilian views on offense and defense have not been studied systematically. For Trevor Dupuy's attempts to analyze quantitatively offensive and defensive operations in World War II, see his *Numbers, Predictions and War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979), chapter 7, and other publications of his "HERO" project.

When the hostility of others is taken for granted, prudential calculations are slanted in favor of preventive wars and preemptive strikes. Indeed, as German military officers were fond of arguing, the proper role of diplomacy in a Hobbesian world is to create favorable conditions for launching preventive war. A preventive grand strategy requires an offensive operational doctrine. Defensive plans and doctrines will be considered only after all conceivable offensive schemes have been decisively discredited. Under uncertainty, such discrediting will be difficult, so offensive plans and doctrines will frequently be adopted even if offense is not easier than defense in the operational sense.

The assumption of extreme hostility also favors the notion that decisive, offensive operations are always needed to end wars. If the conflict of interest between the parties is seen as limited, then a decisive victory may not be needed to end the fighting on mutually acceptable terms. In fact, denying the opponent his objectives by means of a successful defense may suffice. However, when the opponent is believed to be extremely hostile, disarming him completely may seem to be the only way to induce him to break off his attacks. For this reason, offensive doctrines and plans are needed, even if defense is easier operationally.

Kenneth Waltz argues that states are socialized to the implications of international anarchy.<sup>20</sup> Because of their professional preoccupations military professionals become "oversocialized." Seeing war more likely than it really is, they increase its likelihood by adopting offensive plans and buying offensive forces. In this way, the perception that war is inevitable becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A second explanation emphasizes the need of large, complex organizations to operate in a predictable, structured environment. Organizations like to work according to a plan that ties together the standard operating procedures of all the subunits into a prepackaged script. So that they can stick to this script at all costs, organizations try to dominate their environment rather than react to it. Reacting to unpredictable circumstances means throwing out the plan, improvising, and perhaps even deviating from standard operating procedures. As Barry Posen points out, "taking the offensive, exercising the initiative, is a way of structuring the battle."<sup>21</sup> Defense, in contrast, is more reactive, less structured, and harder to plan. Van Evera argues that the

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20. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

21. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, chapter 2.

military will prefer a task that is easier to plan even if it is more difficult to execute successfully.<sup>22</sup> In Russia, for example, regional staffs complained that the General Staff's defensive war plan of 1910 left their own local planning problem too unstructured. They clamored for an offensive plan with specified lines of advance, and in 1912 they got it.<sup>23</sup>

The German military's bias for the offensive may have derived in part from this desire to structure the environment, but evidence on this point is mixed. The elder Moltke developed clockwork mobilization and rail transport plans leading to offensive operations, but he scoffed at the idea that a campaign plan could be mapped out step-by-step from the initial deployment through to the crowning encirclement battle. For him, strategy remained "a system of *ad hoc* expedients . . . , the development of an original idea in accordance with continually changing circumstances."<sup>24</sup> This attitude may help to explain his willingness to entertain defensive alternatives when his preferred offensive schemes began to look too unpromising. The Schlieffen Plan, in contrast, was a caricature of the link between rigid planning and an unvarying commitment to the offensive. Even here, however, there is some evidence that fits poorly with the hypothesis that militaries prefer offense because it allows them to fight according to their plans and standard operating procedures. Wilhelm Groener, the General Staff officer in charge of working out the logistical preparations for the Schlieffen Plan, recognized full well that the taut, ambitious nature of the plan would make it impossible to adhere to normal, methodical supply procedures. Among officers responsible for logistics, "the feeling of responsibility must be so great that in difficult circumstances people free themselves from procedural hindrances and take the responsibility for acting in accordance with common sense."<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, it is difficult to ignore the argument ubiquitously advanced by European military writers that defense leads to uncertainty, confusion, passivity, and incoherent action, whereas offense focuses the efforts of the army and the mind of the commander on a single, unwavering goal. Even when they understood the uncertainties and improvisations required by offensive operations, as Groener did, they may still have feared the uncertainties of the defensive more. An offensive plan at least gives the illusion of certainty.

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22. Van Evera, "Causes of War," chapter 7.

23. Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k imperialisticheskoi voine*, pp. 244, 277.

24. Quoted by Hajo Holborn, "Moltke and Schlieffen," in Edward M. Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 180.

25. Papers of Wilhelm Groener, U.S. National Archives, roll 18, piece 168, p. 5.

Another possibility, however, is that this argument for the offensive was used to justify a doctrine that was preferred primarily on other grounds. French military publicists invoked such reasoning more frequently, for example, during periods of greater threat to traditional military institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Other explanations for the offensive bias are rooted even more directly in the parochial interests of the military, including the autonomy, prestige, size, and wealth of the organization.<sup>27</sup> The German case shows the function of the offensive strategy as a means towards the goal of operational autonomy. The elder Moltke succinctly stated the universal wish of military commanders: "The politician should fall silent the moment that mobilization begins."<sup>28</sup> This is least likely to happen in the case of limited or defensive wars, where the whole point of fighting is to negotiate a diplomatic solution. Political considerations—and hence politicians—have to figure in operational decisions. The operational autonomy of the military is most likely to be allowed when the operational goal is to disarm the adversary quickly and decisively by offensive means. For this reason, the military will seek to force doctrine and planning into this mold.

The prestige, self-image, and material health of military institutions will prosper if the military can convince civilians and themselves that wars can be short, decisive, and socially beneficial. One of the attractions of decisive, offensive strategies is that they hold out the promise of a demonstrable return on the nation's investment in military capability. Von der Goltz, for example, pushed the view that "modern wars have become the nation's way of doing business"—a perspective that made sense only if wars were short, cheap, and hence offensive.<sup>29</sup> The German people were relatively easy to convince of this, because of the powerful example provided by the short, offensive, nation-building wars of 1866 and 1870, which cut through political fetters and turned the officer corps into demigods. This historical backdrop gave the General Staff a mantle of unquestioned authority and legitimacy in operational questions; it also gave them a reputation to live up to. Later, when technological and strategic circumstances challenged the viability of their

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26. See the argument in Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapter 3, citing especially Georges Gilbert, *Essais de critique militaire* (Paris: Librairie de la Nouvelle Revue, 1890), pp. 43, 47–48.

27. Posen and Van Evera, in analyzing organizational interests in this way, have drawn on the categories laid out by Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings, 1974), chapter 3.

28. Quoted by Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 11.

29. Quoted by Van Evera from Ferdinand Foch, *The Principles of War* (New York: Fly, 1918), p. 37.

formula for a short, victorious war, General Staff officers like Schlieffen found it difficult to part with the offensive strategic formulae that had served their state and organization so effectively. As Posen puts it, offense makes soldiers “specialists in victory,” defense makes them “specialists in attrition,” and in our own era mutual assured destruction makes them “specialists in slaughter.”<sup>30</sup>

#### THE EVOLUTION OF GERMAN WAR PLANNING

The foregoing arguments could, for the most part, explain the offensive bias of the military in many countries and in many eras. What remains to be explained is why this offensive bias became so dogmatic and extreme in Germany before 1914. The evolution of the General Staff’s strategic thinking from 1870 to 1914 suggests that a tendency towards doctrinal dogmatism and extremism may be inherent in mature military organizations that develop under conditions of near-absolute autonomy in doctrinal questions. This evolution, which occurred in three stages, may be typical of the maturation of uncontrolled, self-evaluating organizations and consequently may highlight the conditions in which doctrinal extremism might recur in our own era.<sup>31</sup>

The first stage was dominated by the elder Moltke, who established the basis tenets of the organizational ideology of the German General Staff. These were the inevitability and productive nature of war, the indispensability of preventive war, and the need for an operational strategy that could provide rapid, decisive victories. Moltke was the creator, not a captive of his doctrines and did not implement them in the manner of a narrow technician. He was willing to think in political terms and to make his opinion heard in political matters. This practice had its good and bad sides. On one hand, it allowed him to consider war plans that gave diplomacy some role in ending the war; on the other, it spurred him to lobby for preventive war against France in 1868 and against Russia in 1887. Moltke thought he understood what international politics was all about, but he understood it in a military way. In judging the opportune moment for war, Moltke looked exclusively at military factors, whereas Bismarck focused primarily on preparing domestic and foreign opinion for the conflict.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*.

31. Van Evera uses the concept of the self-evaluating organization, drawing on the work of James Q. Wilson.

32. Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, Vol. 1, pp. 217–218, 245.



Schlieffen, the key figure in the second stage of the General Staff's development, was much more of a technocrat than Moltke. Not a founder, he was a systematizer and routinizer. Schlieffen dogmatized Moltke's strategic precepts in a way that served the mature institution's need for a simple, standardized doctrine to facilitate the training of young officers and the operational planning of the General Staff. In implementing this more dogmatic doctrine, Schlieffen and his colleagues lacked Moltke's ability to criticize fundamental assumptions and tailor doctrine to variations in circumstances. Thus, Moltke observed the defender's increasing advantages and decided reluctantly that the day of the rapid, decisive victory was probably gone, anticipating that "two armies prepared for battle will stand opposite each other, neither wishing to begin battle."<sup>33</sup> Schlieffen witnessed even further developments in this direction in the Russo-Japanese War, but concluded only that the attacker had to redouble his efforts. "The armament of the army has changed," he recognized, "but the fundamental laws of combat remain the same, and one of these laws is that one cannot defeat the enemy without attacking."<sup>34</sup>

Seeing himself as primarily a technician, Schlieffen gave political considerations a lesser place in his work than had Moltke. Again, this had both good and bad consequences. On one hand, Schlieffen never lobbied for preventive war in the way Moltke and Waldersee had, thinking such decisions were not his to make. When asked, of course, he was not reluctant to tell the political authorities that the time was propitious, as he did in 1905. On the other hand, Schlieffen had a more zero-sum, apolitical view of the conduct of warfare than did the elder Moltke. Consequently, his war plans excluded any notion of political limitations on the conduct of war or diplomatic means to end it.<sup>35</sup>

Contrasting the problems of civilian control of the military in stages one and two, we see that the founders' generation, being more "political," chal-

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33. Helmuth von Moltke, *Die Deutschen Aufmarschpläne, 1871–1890*, Ferdinand von Schmerfeld, ed. (Berlin: Mittler, 1929), p. 122ff.

34. The quotation is from an 1893 comment on an operational exercise, quoted by O. von Zoellner, "Schlieffens Vermächtnis," *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau* (Sonderheft, 1938), p. 18, but identical sentiments are expressed in Schlieffen's "Krieg in der Gegenwart," *Deutsche Revue* (1909).

35. Brodie, *War and Politics*, p. 58, reports a perhaps apocryphal statement by Schlieffen that if his plan failed to achieve decisive results, then Germany should negotiate an end to the war. Even if he did say this, the possibility of negotiations had no effect on his war planning, in contrast to that of the elder Moltke.

lenges the political elite on questions of the use of force, but as if in compensation, is more capable of self-evaluation and self-control in its war planning. The technocratic generation, however, is less assertive politically but also less capable of exercising political judgment in its own work. The founders' assertiveness is the more dramatic challenge to political control, but as the German case shows, Bismarck was able to turn back the military's direct lobbying for preventive war, which was outside of the military's legitimate purview even by the Second Reich's skewed standards of civil-military relations. Much more damaging in the long run was Schlieffen's unobtrusive militarism, which created the conditions for a preventive war much more surely than Moltke's overt efforts did.

A third stage, which was just developing on the eve of World War I, combined the worst features of the two previous periods. Exemplary figures in this final stage were Erich Ludendorff and Wilhelm Groener, products of a thoroughgoing socialization to the organizational ideology of the German General Staff. Groener, describing his own war college training, makes it clear that not only operational principles but also a militaristic philosophy of life were standard fare in the school's curriculum. These future functionaries and leaders of the General Staff were getting an intensive course in the same kind of propaganda that the Army and Navy Leagues were providing the general public. They came out of this training believing in the philosophy of total war, demanding army increases that their elders were reluctant to pursue and fearing that "weaklings" like Bethmann Hollweg would throw away the army's glorious victories.<sup>36</sup>

An organizational explanation for this third stage would point to the self-amplifying effects of the organizational ideology in a mature, self-evaluating unit. An alternative explanation also seems plausible, however. Geoff Eley, in his study of right-wing radical nationalism in Wilhelmine Germany, argues that emerging counterelites used national populist causes and institutions like the Navy and Army Leagues as weapons aimed at the political monopoly retained by the more cautious traditional elite, who were vulnerable to criticism on jingoistic issues.<sup>37</sup> This pattern fits the cases of Groener and Ludendorff, who were middle-class officers seeking the final transformation of the

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36. Helmut Haeussler, *General William Groener and the Imperial German Army* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1962), p. 72.

37. Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

old Prussian army into a mass organ of total war, which would provide upward mobility for their own kind. German War Ministers, speaking for conservative elements in the army and the state, had traditionally resisted large increases in the size of the army, which would bring more bourgeois officers into the mess and working-class soldiers into the ranks; it would also cost so much that the Junkers' privileged tax status would be brought into question. This alternative explanation makes it difficult to know whether organizational ideologies really tend toward self-amplification or whether extremist variants only occur from some particular motivation, as the French case suggests.

#### THE MISMATCH BETWEEN MILITARY STRATEGY AND DIPLOMACY

It is sometimes thought that Germany required an unlimited, offensive military strategy because German civilian elites were hell-bent on overturning the continental balance of power as a first step in their drive for "World Power." In this view, the Schlieffen Plan was simply the tool needed to achieve this high-risk, high-payoff goal, around which a national consensus of both military and civilian elites had formed.<sup>38</sup> There are several problems with this view. The first is that the civilians made virtually no input into the strategic planning process. Contrary to the unsupported assertions of some historians, the shift from Moltke's plan for a limited offensive against Russia to Schlieffen's plan for a more decisive blow aimed at France had nothing to do with the fall of Bismarck or the "New Course" in foreign policy. Rather, Schlieffen saw it as a technical change, stemming from an improved Russian ability to defend their forward theater in Poland. Nor was Schlieffen chosen to head the General Staff because of the strategy he preferred. Schlieffen had simply been the next in line as deputy chief under Waldersee, who was fired primarily because he dared to criticize the Kaiser's tactical decisions in a mock battle.<sup>39</sup> Later, when Reich Chancellor von Bülow learned of Schlieffen's intention to violate Belgian neutrality, his reaction was: "if the Chief of Staff, especially a strategic authority such as Schlieffen, believes such a measure to be necessary, then it is the obligation of diplomacy to adjust to it and prepare for it in every possible way."<sup>40</sup> In 1912 Foreign Secretary von

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38. See, for example, L.L. Farrar, Jr., *Arrogance and Anxiety* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1981), pp. 23–24.

39. Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 17–37; Norman Rich and M.H. Fisher, eds., *The Holstein Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), Vol. 3, pp. 347, note 1, and 352–353.

40. Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 91–92.

Jagow urged a reevaluation of the need to cross Belgian territory, but a memo from the younger Moltke ended the matter.<sup>41</sup> In short, the civilians knew what Schlieffen was planning to do, but they were relatively passive bystanders in part because military strategy was not in their sphere of competence and legitimate authority, and perhaps also because they were quite happy with the notion that the war could be won quickly and decisively. This optimism alleviated their fear that a long war would mean the destruction of existing social and economic institutions, no matter who won it. The decisive victory promised by the Schlieffen Plan may have also appealed to civilian elites concerned about the need for spectacular successes as a payoff for the masses' enthusiastic participation in the war. Trying to justify the initial war plan from the retrospective vantage point of 1919, Bethmann Hollweg argued that "offense in the East and defense in the West would have implied that we expected at best a draw. With such a slogan no army and no nation could be led into a struggle for their existence."<sup>42</sup> Still, this is a long way from the totally unfounded notion that Holstein and Schlieffen cooked up the Schlieffen Plan expressly for the purpose of bullying France over the Morocco issue and preparing the way for "Welt Politik."<sup>43</sup> The Schlieffen Plan had some appeal for German civilian elites, but the diplomats may have had serious reservations about it, as the Jagow episode suggests. Mostly, the civilians passively accepted whatever operational plan the military deemed necessary.

If German diplomats had devised a military strategy on their own, it is by no means certain that they would have come up with anything like the Schlieffen Plan. This all-or-nothing operational scheme fit poorly with the diplomatic strategy of expansion by means of brinkmanship and controlled, coercive pressure, which they pursued until 1914. In 1905, for example, it is clear that Bülow, Holstein, and Wilhelm II had no inclination to risk a world war over the question of Morocco.

"The originators of *Weltpolitik* looked forward to a series of small-scale, marginal foreign policy successes," says historian David Kaiser, "not to a major war."<sup>44</sup> Self-deterred by the unlimited character of the Schlieffen Plan,

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41. Fischer, *War of Illusions*, p. 390.

42. Konrad Jarausch, *The Enigmatic Chancellor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 195.

43. This is implied by Martin Kitchen, *The German Officer Corps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 104, and Imanuel Geiss, *German Foreign Policy, 1871–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 101–103.

44. David E. Kaiser, "Germany and the Origins of the First World War," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September 1983), p. 448.

they had few military tools that they could use to demonstrate resolve in a competition in risk-taking. The navy offered a means for the limited, demonstrative use of force, namely the dispatch of the gunboat *Panther* to the Moroccan port of Agadir, but the army was an inflexible tool. At one point in the crisis, Schlieffen told Bülow that the French were calling up reservists on the frontier. If this continued, Germany would have to respond, setting off a process that the Germans feared would be uncontrollable.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the German military posture and war plan served mainly to deter the German diplomats, who did not want a major war even though Schlieffen told them the time was favorable. They needed limited options, suitable for coercive diplomacy, not unlimited options, suitable for preventive war. With the Schlieffen Plan, they could not even respond to the opponent's precautionary moves without setting off a landslide toward total war.

This mismatch between military and diplomatic strategy dogged German policy down through 1914. Bethmann Hollweg described his strategy in 1912 as one of controlled coercion, sometimes asserting German demands, sometimes lulling and mollifying opponents to control the risk of war. "On all fronts we must drive forward quietly and patiently," he explained, "without having to risk our existence."<sup>46</sup> Bethmann's personal secretary, Kurt Riezler, explained this strategy of calculated risk in a 1914 volume, *Grundzüge der Weltpolitik*. A kind of cross between Thomas Schelling and Norman Angell, Riezler explained that wars were too costly to actually fight in the modern, interdependent, capitalist world. Nonetheless, states can still use the threat of war to gain unilateral advantages, forcing the opponent to calculate whether costs, benefits, and the probability of success warrant resorting to force. His calculations can be affected in several ways. Arms-racing can be used, *à la* Samuel Huntington, as a substitute for war—that is, a bloodless way to show the opponent that he would surely lose if it came to a fight. Brinkmanship and bluffing can be used to demonstrate resolve; *faits accomplis* and salami tactics can be used to shift the onus for starting the undesired war onto the opponent. But, Riezler warns, this strategy will not work if one is greedy and impatient to overturn the balance of power. Opponents will fight if they sense that their vital interests are at stake. Consequently, "victory

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45. Holstein to Radolin, June 28, 1905, in *Holstein Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 347.

46. Jaraus, *Enigmatic Chancellor*, pp. 110–111.

belongs to the steady, tenacious, and gradual achievement of small successes . . . without provocation."<sup>47</sup>

Although this may have been a fair approximation of Bethmann's thinking in 1912, the theory of the calculated risk had undergone a major transformation by July 1914. By that time, Bethmann wanted a major diplomatic or military victory and was willing to risk a continental war—perhaps even a world war—to achieve it. *Fait accompli* and onus-shifting were still part of the strategy, but with a goal of keeping Britain out of the war and gaining the support of German socialists, not with a goal of avoiding war altogether.

The Schlieffen Plan played an important role in the transformation of Bethmann's strategy and in its failure to keep Britain neutral in the July crisis. Riezler's diary shows Bethmann's obsession in July 1914 with Germany's need for a dramatic victory to forestall the impending period of vulnerability that the Russian army increases and the possible collapse of Austria–Hungary would bring on.<sup>48</sup> As I argued earlier, the Schlieffen Plan only increased Germany's vulnerability to the Russian buildup, stripping the eastern front and squandering forces in the vain attempt to knock France out of the war. In this sense, it was the Schlieffen Plan that led Bethmann to transform the calculated-risk theory from a cautious tool of coercive diplomacy into a blind hope of gaining a major victory without incurring an unwanted world war.

Just as the Schlieffen Plan made trouble for Bethmann's diplomacy, so too German brinkmanship made trouble for the Schlieffen Plan. The Russian army increases, provoked by German belligerence in the 1909 Bosnian crisis and Austrian coercion of the Serbs in 1912, made the German war plan untenable.<sup>49</sup> The arms-racing produced by this aggressive diplomacy was not a "substitute for war"; rather, it created a window of vulnerability that helped to cause the war. Thus, Riezler (and Bethmann) failed to consider how easily a diplomatic strategy of calculated brinkmanship could set off a chain of uncontrollable consequences in a world of military instability.

47. Andreas Hillgruber, *Germany and the Two World Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 22–24; J.J. Ruedorffer (pseud. for Kurt Riezler), *Grundzüge der Weltpolitik in der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1914), especially pp. 214–232; quotation from Jarasch, *Enigmatic Chancellor*, pp. 143–144.

48. Jarasch, *Enigmatic Chancellor*, p. 157.

49. P.A. Zhilin, "Bol'shaia programma po usileniu russkoi armii," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, No. 7 (July 1974), pp. 90–97, shows the connection between the 1913 increases and the Balkan crisis of 1912. He also shows that this project, with its emphasis on increasing the standing army and providing rail lines to speed its concentration, was directly connected to the offensive character of Russia's increasingly overcommitted, standing-start, short-war campaign plan.

Even the transformed version of the calculated-risk theory, implemented in July 1914, was ill-served by the Schlieffen Plan. If Bethmann had had eastern-oriented or otherwise limited military options, all sorts of possibilities would have been available for defending Austria, bloodying the Russians, driving a wedge between Paris and St. Petersburg, and keeping Britain neutral. In contrast, the Schlieffen Plan cut short any chance for coercive diplomacy and ensured that Britain would fight. In short, under Bethmann as well as Bülow, the Schlieffen Plan was hardly an appropriate tool underwriting the brinkmanship and expansionist aims of the civilian elite. Rather, the plan was the product of military organizational interests and misconceptions that reduced international politics to a series of preventive wars. The consequences of the all-or-nothing war plan were, first, to reduce the coercive bargaining leverage available to German diplomats, and second, to ensnare German diplomacy in a security dilemma that forced the abandonment of the strategy of controlled risks. Devised by military officers who wanted a tool appropriate for preventive war, the Schlieffen Plan trapped Germany in a situation where preventive war seemed like the only safe option.

In summary, three generalizations emerge from the German case. First, military organizations tend to exhibit a bias in favor of offensive strategies, which promote organizational prestige and autonomy, facilitate planning and adherence to standard operating procedures, and follow logically from the officer corps' zero-sum view of international politics. Second, this bias will be particularly extreme in mature organizations which have developed institutional ideologies and operational doctrines with little civilian oversight. Finally, the destabilizing consequences of an inflexible, offensive military strategy are compounded when it is mismatched with a diplomatic strategy based on the assumption that risks can be calculated and controlled through the skillful fine-tuning of threats.

*France: Civil-Military Truce and Conflict*

France before the Dreyfus Affair exemplifies the healthiest pattern of civil-military relations among the European states, but after Dreyfus, the most destructive. In the former period civilian defense experts who understood and respected the military contained the latent conflict between the professional army and republican politicians by striking a bargain that satisfied the main concerns of both sides. In this setting, the use of operational doctrine as a weapon of institutional defense was minimal, so plans and doctrine

were a moderate combination of offense and defense. After the Dreyfus watershed, the truce broke. Politicians set out to “republicanize” the army, and the officer corps responded by developing the doctrine of *offensive à outrance*, which helped to reverse the slide towards a military system based overwhelmingly on reservists and capable only of defensive operations.<sup>50</sup>

The French army had always coexisted uneasily with the Third Republic. Especially in the early years, most officers were Bonapartist or monarchist in their political sentiments, and Radical politicians somewhat unjustifiably feared a military coup against Parliament in support of President MacMahon, a former Marshal. The military had its own fears, which were considerably more justified. Responding to constituent demands, republican politicians gradually worked to reduce the length of military service from seven to three years and to break down the quasi-monastic barriers insulating the regiment from secular, democratic trends in French society at large. Military professionals, while not averse to all reform, rightly feared a slippery slope towards a virtual militia system, in which the professional standing army would degenerate into a school for the superficial, short-term training of France’s decidedly unmilitary youth. War college professors and military publicists like Georges Gilbert, responding to this danger, began by the 1880s to promote an offensive operational doctrine, which they claimed could only be implemented by well-trained, active-duty troops.<sup>51</sup>

This explosive situation was well managed by nationalist republican leaders like Léon Gambetta, leader of the French national resistance in the second phase of the Franco–Prussian War, and especially Charles de Freycinet, organizer of Gambetta’s improvised popular armies. As War Minister in the 1880s and 1890s, Freycinet defused military fears and won their acceptance of the three-year service. He backed the military on questions of matériel, autonomy in matters of military justice, and selection of commanders on the basis of professional competence rather than political acceptability. At the same time, he pressed for more extensive use of the large pool of reservist manpower that was being created by the three-year conscription system, and the military was reasonably accommodating. In this context of moderate civil-military relations, war plans and doctrine were also moderate. Henri Bonnal’s

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50. Presenting somewhat contrasting views of French civil-military relations during this period are Douglas Porch, *March to the Marne: The French Army, 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and David B. Ralston, *The Army of the Republic: The Place of the Military in the Political Evolution of France, 1871–1914* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967).

51. See, for example, Gilbert, *Essais*, p. 271.



“defensive-offensive” school was the Establishment doctrine, reflected in the cautious, counteroffensive war plans of that era.<sup>52</sup>

Freycinet and other republican statesmen of the militant neo-Jacobin variety cherished the army as the instrument of *revanche* and as a truly popular institution, with roots in the *levée en masse* of the Wars of the Revolution. Though he wanted to democratize the army, Freycinet also cared about its fighting strength and morale, unlike many later politicians who were concerned only to ease their constituents’ civic obligations. His own moderate policies, respectful of military sensitivities but insistent on key questions of civilian control, elicited a moderate response from military elites, whose propensity to develop a self-protective organizational ideology was thus held in check.

The deepening of the Dreyfus crisis in 1898 rekindled old fears on both sides and destroyed the system of mutual respect and reassurance constructed by Freycinet. The military’s persistence in a blatant miscarriage of justice against a Jewish General Staff officer accused of espionage confirmed the republicans’ view of the army as a state within the state, subject to no law but the reactionary principles of unthinking obedience and blind loyalty. When conservatives and monarchists rallied to the military’s side, it made the officer corps appear (undeservedly) to be the spearhead of a movement to overthrow the Republic. Likewise, attacks by the Dreyfusards confirmed the worst fears of the military. Irresponsible Radicals were demanding to meddle in the army’s internal affairs, impeaching the integrity of future wartime commanders, and undermining morale. Regardless of Dreyfus’s guilt or innocence, the honor of the military had to be defended for the sake of national security.

The upshot of the affair was a leftward realignment of French politics. The new Radical government appointed as War Minister a young reformist general, Louis André, with instructions to “republicanize” the army. André, aided by an intelligence network of Masonic Lodges, politicized promotions and war college admissions, curtailed officers’ perquisites and disciplinary powers, and forced Catholic officers to participate in inventorying church property. In 1905, the term of conscription was reduced to two years, with reservists intended to play a more prominent role in war plans, field exercises, and the daily life of the regiment.

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52. Charles de Freycinet, *Souvenirs, 1878–1893* (New York: Da Capo, 1973).

In this hostile environment, a number of officers—especially the group of “Young Turks” around Colonel Loyzeaux de Grandmaison—began to reemphasize in extreme form the organizational ideology propounded earlier by Gilbert. Its elements read like a list of the errors of Plan 17: *offensive à outrance*, mystical belief in group *élan* achieved by long service together, denigration of reservists, and disdain for reactive war plans driven by intelligence estimates. Aided by the Agadir Crisis of 1911, General Joffre and other senior figures seeking a reassertion of professional military values used the Young Turks’ doctrine to scuttle the reformist plans of the “republican” commander in chief, Victor Michel, and to hound him from office. Michel, correctly anticipating the Germans’ use of reserve corps in the opening battles and the consequent extension of their right wing across northern Belgium, had sought to meet this threat by a cordon defense, making intensive use of French reservists. Even middle-of-the-road officers considered ruinous the organizational changes needed to implement this scheme. It was no coincidence that Grandmaison’s operational doctrine provided a tool for attacking Michel’s ideas point-by-point, without having to admit too blatantly that it was the institutional implications of Michel’s reservist-based plan that were its most objectionable aspect.<sup>53</sup> Having served to oust Michel in 1911, the Grandmaison doctrine also played a role (along with the trumped-up scenario of a German standing-start attack) in justifying a return to the three-year term of service in 1913. The problem was that this ideology, so useful as a tool for institutional defense, became internalized by the French General Staff, who based Plan 17 on its profoundly erroneous tenets.

Obviously, there is much that is idiosyncratic in the story of the *offensive à outrance*. The overlapping of social and civil-military cleavages, which produced an unusually intense threat to the “organizational essence” and autonomy of the French army, may have no close analog in the contemporary era. At a higher level of abstraction, however, a broadly applicable hypothesis may nonetheless be gleaned from the French experience. That is, doctrinal bias is likely to become more extreme whenever strategic doctrine can be used as an ideological weapon to protect the military organization from threats to its institutional interests. Under such circumstances, doctrine be-

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53. An internal General Staff document that was highly critical of Michel’s scheme stated: “It is necessary only to remark that this mixed force would require very profound changes in our regulations, our habits, our tactical rules, and the organization of our staffs.” Cited in Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapter 3.

comes unhinged from strategic reality and responds primarily to the more pressing requirements of domestic and intragovernmental politics.

*Russia: Institutional Pluralism and Strategic Overcommitment*

Between 1910 and 1912, Russia changed from an extremely cautious defensive war plan to an overcommitted double offensive against both Germany and Austria. The general direction of this change can be easily explained in terms of rational strategic calculations. Russia's military power had increased relative to Germany's, making an offensive more feasible, and the tightening of alliances made it more obvious that Germany would deploy the bulk of its army against France in the first phase of the fighting, regardless of the political circumstances giving rise to the conflict. Russian war planners consequently had a strong incentive to invade Germany or Austria during the "window of opportunity" provided by the Schlieffen Plan. Attacking East Prussia would put pressure on Germany's rear, thus helping France to survive the onslaught; attacking the Austrian army in Galicia might decisively shift the balance of power by knocking Germany's ally out of the war, while eliminating opposition to Russian imperial aims in Turkey and the Balkans.<sup>54</sup>

What is harder to explain is the decision to invade both Germany and Austria, which ensured that neither effort would have sufficient forces to achieve its objectives. At a superficial level the explanation for this failure to set priorities is simple enough: General Yuri Danilov and the General Staff in St. Petersburg wanted to use the bulk of Russia's forces to attack Germany, while defending against Austria; General Mikhail Alekseev and other regional commanders wanted to attack Austria, leaving a weak defensive screen facing East Prussia. Each faction had powerful political connections and good arguments. No higher arbiter could or would choose between the contradictory schemes, so a *de facto* compromise allowed each to pursue its preferred offensive with insufficient forces. At this level, we have a familiar tale of bureaucratic politics producing an overcommitted, Christmas-tree "resultant."<sup>55</sup>

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54. Apart from Zaionchkovskii, the most interesting work on Russian strategy is V.A. Emets, *Ocherki vneshnei politiki Rossii v period pervoi mirovoi voiny: vzaimootnosheniia Rossii s soizuznikami po voprosam vedeniia voiny* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

55. On the characteristics of compromised policy, see Warner Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950," in Schilling et al., *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 217–218.

At a deeper level, however, several puzzles remain. One is that “where you sat” bureaucratically was only superficially related to “where you stood” on the question of strategy. Alekseev was the Chief-of-Staff-designate of the Austrian front, so had an interest in making his turf the scene of the main action. But Alekseev had always preferred an Austria-first strategy, even when he had been posted to the General Staff in St. Petersburg. Similarly, Danilov served under General Zhilinskii, the Chief of Staff who negotiated a tightening of military cooperation with France after 1911, so his bureaucratic perspective might explain his adoption of the Germany-first strategy that France preferred. But Danilov’s plans had always given priority to the German front, even in 1908–1910 when he doubted the reliability and value of France as an ally.<sup>56</sup> Thus, this link between bureaucratic position and preferred strategy was mostly spurious.

Bureaucratic position does explain why Alekseev’s plan attracted wide support among military district chiefs of staff, however. These regional planners viewed the coming war as a problem of battlefield operations, not grand strategy. Alekseev’s scheme was popular with them, because it proposed clear lines of advance across open terrain. Danilov’s plans, in contrast, were a source of frustration for the commanders who would have to implement them. His defensive 1910 plan perplexed them, because it offered no clear objectives.<sup>57</sup> His 1913 plan for an invasion of East Prussia entailed all sorts of operational difficulties that local commanders would have to overcome: inordinate time pressure, the division of the attacking force by the Masurian Lakes, and the defenders’ one-sided advantages in rail lines, roads, fortifications, and river barriers.

Nonetheless, the main differences between Danilov and Alekseev were intellectual, not bureaucratic.<sup>58</sup> Danilov was fundamentally pessimistic about Russia’s ability to compete with modern, efficient Germany. He considered Russia too weak to indulge in imperial dreams, whether against Austria or Turkey, arguing that national survival required an absolute priority be given to containing the German danger. In 1910, this pessimism was expressed in his ultra-defensive plan, based on the fear that Russia would have to face Germany virtually alone. By 1913–1914, Danilov’s pessimism took a different form. The improved military balance, the tighter alliance with France after

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56. Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k imperialisticheskoi voine*, pp. 184–190.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–207.

58. See Schilling, “Politics of National Defense,” for this distinction.

Agadir, and telling criticism from Alekseev convinced Danilov that a porcupine strategy was infeasible politically and undesirable strategically. Now his nightmare was that France would succumb in a few weeks, once again leaving backward Russia to face Germany virtually alone. To prevent this, he planned a hasty attack into East Prussia, designed to draw German forces away from the decisive battle in France.

Alekseev was more optimistic about Russian prospects, supporting imperial adventures in Asia and anticipating that a “sharp rap” would cause Austria to collapse. Opponents of Danilov’s Germany-first strategy also tended to argue that a German victory against France would be Pyrrhic. Germany would emerge from the contest bloodied and lacking the strength or inclination for a second round against Russia. A Russo–German condominium would ensue, paving the way for Russian hegemony over the Turkish Straits and in the Balkans.<sup>59</sup>

Available evidence is insufficient to explain satisfactorily the sources of these differing views. Personality differences may explain Danilov’s extreme pessimism and Alekseev’s relative optimism, but this begs the question of why each man was able to gain support for his view. What evidence exists points to idiosyncratic explanations: Danilov’s plan got support from Zhilinskii (it fit the agreements he made with Joffre), the commander-designate of the East Prussian front (it gave him more troops), and the General Staff apparatus (a military elite disdainful of and pessimistic about the rabble who would implement their plans). Alekseev won support from operational commanders and probably from Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevitch, the future commander-in-chief and a quintessential optimist about Russian capabilities and ambitions. The War Minister, the Czar, and the political parties seem to have played little role in strategic planning, leaving the intramilitary factions to logroll their own disputes.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps the most important question is why the outcome of the logrolling was not to scale down the aims of both offensives to fit the diminished forces available to each. In particular, why did Danilov insist on an early-start, two-pincer advance into East Prussia, when the weakness of each pincer made them both vulnerable to piecemeal destruction? Why not wait a few days

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59. *Documents diplomatiques français (1871–1914)*, Series 2, Vol. XII, p. 695, and other sources cited in Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapter 7.

60. Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914–1917* (New York: Scribner’s, 1975), chapter 1, presents some speculations about factional alignments, but evidence is inconclusive in this area.

until each pincer could be reinforced by late-arriving units, or why not advance only on one side of the lakes? The answer seems to lie in Danilov's extreme fears about the viability of the French and his consequent conviction that Russian survival depended on early and substantial pressure on the German rear. This task was a necessity, given his outlook, something that had to be attempted whether available forces were adequate or not. Trapped by his pessimism about Russia's prospects in the long run, Danilov's only way out was through unwarranted optimism about operational prospects in the short run. Like most cornered decision-makers, Danilov saw the "necessary" as possible.

This is an important theme in the German case as well. Schlieffen and the younger Moltke demonstrated an ability to be ruthlessly realistic about the shortcomings of their operational plans, but realism was suppressed when it would call into question their fundamental beliefs and values. Schlieffen's qualms about his war plan's feasibility pervade early drafts, but disappear later on, without analytical justification. He entertained doubts as long as he thought they would lead to improvements, but once he saw that no further tinkering would resolve the plan's remaining contradictions, he swept them under the rug. The younger Moltke did the same thing, resorting to blithe optimism only on make-or-break issues, like the seizure of Liège, where a realistic assessment of the risks would have spotlighted the dubiousness of *any* strategy for rapid, decisive victory. Rather than totally rethink their strategic assumptions, which were all bound up with fundamental interests and even personal characteristics, all of these strategists chose to see the "necessary" as possible.<sup>61</sup>

Two hypotheses emerge from the Russian case. The first points to bureaucratic logrolling as a factor that is likely to exacerbate the normal offensive bias of military organizations. In the absence of a powerful central authority, two factions or suborganizations will each pursue its own preferred offensive despite a dramatic deficit of available forces. Thus, offensives that are moderately ambitious when considered separately become extremely overcommitted under the pressure of scarce resources and the need to logroll with

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61. Groener, writing in the journal *Wissen und Wehr* in 1927, p. 532, admitted that it had been mere "luck" that an "extremely important" tunnel east of Liège was captured intact by the Germans in August 1914. Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, p. 166, documents Moltke's uncharacteristic optimism about quickly seizing Liège and avoiding the development of a monumental logistical bottleneck there. In the event, the Belgians actually ordered the destruction of their bridges and rail net, but the orders were not implemented systematically.

other factions competing for their allocation. The German case showed how the lack of civilian control can produce doctrinal extremism when the military is united; the Russian case shows how lack of civilian control can also lead to extreme offensives when the military is divided.

The second hypothesis, which is supported by the findings of cognitive theory, is that military decision-makers will tend to overestimate the feasibility of an operational plan if a realistic assessment would require forsaking fundamental beliefs or values.<sup>62</sup> Whenever offensive doctrines are inextricably tied to the autonomy, "essence," or basic worldview of the military, the cognitive need to see the offensive as possible will be strong.

#### *External Influences on Strategy and Civil-Military Relations*

The offensive strategies of 1914 were largely domestic in origin, rooted in bureaucratic, sociopolitical, and psychological causes. To some extent, however, external influences exacerbated—and occasionally diminished—these offensive biases. Although these external factors were usually secondary, they are particularly interesting for their lessons about sources of leverage over the destabilizing policies of one's opponents. The most important of these lessons—and the one stressed by Van Evera elsewhere in this issue—is that offense tends to promote offense and defense tends to promote defense in the international system.

One way that offense was exported from one state to another was by means of military writings. The French discovered Clausewitz in the 1880s, reading misinterpretations of him by contemporary German militarists who focused narrowly on his concept of the "decisive battle." At the same time, reading the retrograde Russian tactician Dragomirov reinforced their home-grown overemphasis on the connection between the offensive and morale. Russian writings later reimported these ideas under the label of *offensive à outrance*, while borrowing from Germany the short-war doctrine. Each of Europe's militaries cited the others in parroting the standard lessons drawn from the Russo-Japanese War: offense was becoming tactically more difficult but was still advantageous strategically. None of this shuffling and sharing of rationales for offense was the initial cause of anyone's offensive bias. Everyone was exporting offense to everyone else; no one was just receiving.

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62. Irving Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision Making* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

Its main effect was mutual reinforcement. The military could believe (and argue to others) that offense must be advantageous, since everyone else said so, and that the prevalence of offensive doctrines was somebody else's fault.<sup>63</sup>

The main vehicle for exporting offensive strategies was through aggressive policies, not offensive ideas. The aggressive diplomacy and offensive war plans of one state frequently encouraged offensive strategies in neighboring states both directly, by changing their strategic situation, and indirectly, by changing their pattern of civil-military relations. German belligerence in the Agadir crisis of 1911 led French civilians to conclude that war was likely and that they had better start appeasing their own military by giving them leaders in which they would have confidence. This led directly to Michel's fall and the rise of Joffre, Castelnau, and the proponents of the *offensive à outrance*. German belligerence in the Bosnian crisis of 1908–1909 had a similar, if less direct effect on Russia. It convinced Alekseev that a limited war against Austria alone would be impossible, and it put everyone in a receptive mood when the French urged the tightening of the alliance in 1911.<sup>64</sup> Before Bosnia, people sometimes thought in terms of a strategic *modus vivendi* with Germany; afterwards, they thought in terms of a breathing spell while gaining strength for the final confrontation. Combined with the Russians' growing realization of the probable character of the German war plan, this led inexorably to the conclusions that war was coming, that it could not be limited, and that an unbridled offensive was required to exploit the window of opportunity provided by the Schlieffen Plan's westward orientation. Caught in this logic, Russian civilians who sought limited options in July 1914 were easily refuted by Danilov and the military. Completing the spiral, the huge Russian arms increases provoked by German belligerence allowed the younger Moltke to argue persuasively that Germany should seek a pretext for preventive war before those increases reached fruition in 1917. This recommendation was persuasive only in the context of the Schlieffen Plan, which made Germany look weaker than it really was by creating needless enemies and wasting troops on an impossible task. Without the Schlieffen Plan, Germany would not have been vulnerable in 1917.

In short, the European militaries cannot be blamed for the belligerent diplomacy that set the ball rolling towards World War I. Once the process began, however, their penchant for offense and their quickness to view war

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63. Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, chapters 2 and 3.

64. *Ibid.*, chapter 7, citing Zaionchovskii, pp. 103, 350, and other sources.



as inevitable created a slide towards war that the diplomats did not foresee.<sup>65</sup> The best place to intervene to stop the destabilizing spiral of exported offense was, of course, at the beginning. If German statesmen had had a theory of civil-military relations and of the security dilemma to help them calculate risks more accurately, their choice of a diplomatic strategy might have been different.

If offense gets exported when states adopt aggressive policies, it also gets exported when states try to defend themselves in ways that are indistinguishable from preparations for aggression.<sup>66</sup> In the 1880s, the Russians improved their railroads in Poland and increased the number of troops there in peacetime, primarily in order to decrease their vulnerability to German attack in the early weeks of a war. The German General Staff saw these measures as a sign that a Russian attack was imminent, so counseled launching a preventive strike before Russian preparations proceeded further. Bismarck thought otherwise, so the incident did not end in the same way as the superficially similar 1914 case. Several factors may account for the difference: Bismarck's greater power over the military, his lack of interest in expansion for its own sake, and the absence of political conditions that would make war seem inevitable to anyone but a General Staff officer. Perhaps the most important difference, however, was that in 1914 the younger Moltke was anticipating a future of extreme vulnerability, whereas in 1887 the elder Moltke was anticipating a future of strategic stalemate. Moltke, planning for a defense in the west in any event, believed that the Germans could in the worst case hold out for 30 years if France and Russia forced war upon them.<sup>67</sup>

Although states can provoke offensive responses by seeming too aggressive, they can also invite offensive predation by seeming too weak. German hopes for a rapid victory, whether expressed in the eastward plan of the 1880s or the westward Schlieffen Plan, always rested on the slowness of Russia's mobilization. Likewise, Germany's weakness on the eastern front, artificially created by the Schlieffen Plan, promoted the development of offensive plans in Russia. Finally, Belgian weakness allowed the Germans to

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65. Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), discusses the effect on the Kaiser of his military aides' incessant warnings that war was inevitable.

66. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 199–210.

67. Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (1962; rpt., New York: Dell, 1971), p. 38; see also *Aufmarschpläne*, pp. 150–156, for Moltke's last war plan of February 1888.

retain their illusions about decisive victory by providing an apparent point of entry into the French keep.

States who want to export defense, then, should try to appear neither weak nor aggressive. The French achieved this in the early 1880s, when a force posture heavy on fortifications made them an unpromising target and an ineffective aggressor. In the short run, this only redirected Moltke's offensive toward a more vulnerable target, Russia. But by 1888–1890, when Russia too had strengthened its fortifications and its defensive posture in Poland generally, Moltke was stymied and became very pessimistic about offensive operations. Schlieffen, however, was harder to discourage. When attacking Russia became unpromising, he simply redirected his attention towards France, pursuing the least unpromising offensive option. For hard core cases like Schlieffen, one wonders whether any strategy of non-provocative defense, no matter how effective and non-threatening, could induce abandoning the offensive.

#### *Soviet Strategy and Civil-Military Relations*

In 1914, flawed civil-military relations exacerbated and liberated the military's endemic bias for offensive strategies, creating strategic instability despite military technologies that aided the defender of the status quo. Some of the factors that produced this outcome may have been peculiar to that historical epoch. The full professionalization of military staffs had been a relatively recent development, for example, and both civilians and military were still groping for a satisfactory *modus vivendi*. After the First World War, military purveyors of the "cult of the offensive" were fairly well chastened except in Japan, where the phenomenon was recapitulated. Our own era has seen nothing this extreme, but more moderate versions of the military's offensive bias are arguably still with us. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to reiterate the kinds of conditions that have intensified this bias in the past in order to assess the likelihood of their recurrence.

First, offensive bias is exacerbated when civilian control is weak. In Germany before 1914, a long period of military autonomy in strategic planning allowed the dogmatization of an offensive doctrine, rooted in the parochial interests and outlook of the General Staff. In Russia, the absence of firm, unified civilian control fostered logrolling between two military factions, compounding the offensive preferences exhibited by each. Second, offensive bias grows more extreme when operational doctrine is used as a weapon in

civil-military disputes about domestic politics, institutional arrangements, or other nonstrategic issues. The French *offensive à outrance*, often dismissed as some mystical aberration, is best explained in these terms.

Once it appears, an acute offensive bias tends to be self-replicating and resistant to disconfirming evidence. Offensive doctrinal writings are readily transmitted across international boundaries. More important, offensive strategies tend to spread in a chain reaction, since one state's offensive tends to create impending dangers or fleeting opportunities for other states, who must adopt their own offensives to forestall or exploit them. Finally, hard operational evidence of the infeasibility of an offensive strategy will be rationalized away when the offensive is closely linked to the organization's "essence," autonomy, or fundamental ideology.

I believe that these findings, derived from the World War I cases, resonate strongly with the development of Soviet nuclear strategy and with certain patterns in the U.S.–Soviet strategic relationship. At a time when current events are stimulating considerable interest in the state of civil-military relations in the Soviet Union, the following thoughts are offered not as answers but as questions that researchers may find worth considering.

Soviet military doctrine, as depicted by conventional wisdom, embodies all of the desiderata typically expressed in professional military writings throughout the developed world since Napoleon. Like Schlieffen's doctrine, it stresses offense, the initiative, and decisive results through the annihilation of the opponent's ability to resist. It is suspicious of political limitations on violence based on mutual restraint, especially in nuclear matters. Both in style and substance, Sidorenko reads like a throwback to the military writers of the Second Reich, warning that "a forest which has not been completely cut down grows up again."<sup>68</sup> The similarity is not accidental. Not only does offense serve some of the same institutional functions for the Soviet military as it did for the German General Staff, but Soviet doctrine is to some degree their lineal descendant. "In our military schools," a 1937 Pravda editorial averred, "we study Clausewitz, Moltke, Schlieffen, and Ludendorff."<sup>69</sup> Soviet nuclear doctrine also parallels pre-1914 German strategy in that both cut against the grain of the prevailing technology. The Soviets have never been

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68. Quoted by Benjamin Lambeth, "Selective Nuclear Options and Soviet Strategy," in Johan Holst and Uwe Nerlich, *Beyond Nuclear Deterrence* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1977), p. 92.

69. Raymond Garthoff, *Soviet Military Doctrine* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953), p. 56.

in a position to achieve anything but disaster by seizing the initiative and striving for decisive results; neither was Schlieffen.

There are also parallels in the political and historical circumstances that permitted the development of these doctrines. The Soviet victories in World War II, like the German victories in 1866 and 1870, were nation-building and regime-legitimizing enterprises that lent prestige and authority to the military profession, notwithstanding Stalin's attempt to check it. This did not produce a man on horseback in either country, nor did it allow the military to usurp authority on questions of the use of force. But in both cases the military retained a monopoly of military operational expertise and was either never challenged or eventually prevailed in practical doctrinal disputes. In the German case, at least, it was military autonomy on questions of operational plans and doctrine that made war more likely; direct lobbying for preventive strikes caused less trouble because it was clearly illegitimate.

While many accounts of the origins of Soviet nuclear strategy acknowledge the effect of the professional military perspective, they often lay more stress on civilian sources of offensive, warfighting doctrines: for example, Marxism–Leninism, expansionist foreign policy goals, and historical experiences making Russia a “militarized society.” Political leaders, in this view, promote or at least accept the military's warfighting doctrine because it serves their foreign policy goals and/or reflects a shared view of international politics as a zero-sum struggle. Thus, Lenin is quoted as favoring a preemptive first strike, Frunze as linking offense to the proletarian spirit. The military principle of annihilation of the opposing armed force is equated with the Leninist credo of *kto kogo*.<sup>70</sup>

Although this view may capture part of the truth, it fails to account for recurrent statements by Soviet political leaders implying that nuclear war is unwinnable, that meaningful damage limitation cannot be achieved through superior warfighting capabilities, and that open-ended expenditures on strategic programs are wasteful and perhaps pointless. These themes have been voiced in the context of budgetary disputes (not just for public relations purposes) by Malenkov, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Ustinov. To varying degrees, all of these civilian leaders have chafed at the cost of open-ended warfighting programs and against the redundant offensive capabilities de-

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70. Herbert Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1962), pp. 210–211; Garthoff, *Soviet Military Doctrine*, pp. 65, 149.

manded by each of several military suborganizations. McNamara discovered in the United States that the doctrine of mutual assured destruction, with its emphasis on the irrelevance of marginal advantages and the infeasibility of counterforce damage-limitation strategies, had great utility in budgetary debates. Likewise, recent discussions in the Soviet Union on the feasibility of victory seem to be connected with the question of how much is enough. Setting aside certain problems of nuance and interpretation, a case can be made that the civilian leadership, speaking through Defense Minister Ustinov, has been using strategic doctrine to justify slowing down the growth of military spending. In the context of arguments about whether the Reagan strategic buildup will really make the Soviet Union more vulnerable, Ustinov has quite clearly laid out the argument that neither superpower can expect to gain anything by striking first, since both have survivable retaliatory forces and launch-on-warning capabilities. Thus, Ustinov has been stressing that the importance of surprise is diminishing and that "preemptive nuclear strikes are alien to Soviet military doctrine." Ogarkov, the Chief of the General Staff, has been arguing the opposite on all counts: the U.S. buildup is truly threatening, the international scene is akin to the 1930s, the surprise factor is growing in importance, damage limitation is possible (though "victory" is problematic), and consequently the Soviet Union must spare no expense in preparing to defend itself.<sup>71</sup>

This is somewhat reminiscent of the French case in World War I, in which civilians and the military were using doctrinal arguments as weapons in disputes on other issues. Two related dangers arise in such situations. The first is that doctrinal argumentation and belief, responding to political and organizational necessity, lose their anchoring in strategic realities and become dogmatic and extremist. The second is that a spiral dynamic in the political dispute may carry doctrine along with it. That is, the harder each side fights to prevail on budgetary or organizational questions, the more absolute and unyielding their doctrinal justifications will become. In this regard, it would be interesting to see whether the periods in which Soviet military spokesmen

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71. Citations to the main statements by Ogarkov and Ustinov can be found in Dan L. Strode and Rebecca V. Strode, "Diplomacy and Defense in Soviet National Security Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 1983), pp. 91–116. Quotation from William Garner, *Soviet Threat Perceptions of NATO's Eurostrategic Missiles* (Paris: Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, 1983), p. 69, citing *Pravda*, July 25, 1981. I have benefitted from discussions of the Ogarkov and Ustinov statements with Lawrence Caldwell, Stephen Coffey, Clifford Kupchan, and Cynthia Roberts, who advanced a variety of interpretations not necessarily similar to my own.

were arguing hardest that "victory is possible" coincided with periods of sharp budgetary disputes.

Even if some of the above is true, the pattern may be a weak one in comparison with the French case. Ustinov is more like Freycinet than André, and marginal budgetary issues do not carry the same emotional freight as the threats to organizational "essence" mounted in the Dreyfus aftermath. Still, if we consider that the Soviet case couples some of the autonomy problems of the German case with some of the motivational problems of the French case, a volatile mixture may be developing.

Another civil-military question is whether Soviet military doctrine is mismatched with Soviet diplomacy. On the surface, it may seem that the awe-inspiring Soviet military machine and its intimidating offensive doctrine are apt instruments for supporting a policy of diplomatic extortion. It may, however, pose the same problem for Soviet statesmen that the Schlieffen Plan did for Bülow and Bethmann. Soviet leaders may be self-deterred by the all-or-nothing character of their military options.<sup>72</sup> Alternatively, if the Soviets try to press ahead with a diplomacy based on the "Bolshevik operational code" principles of controlled pressure, limited probes, and controlled, calculated risks, they may find themselves trapped by military options that create risks which cannot be controlled.

These problems may not arise, however, since the Soviets seem to have turned away from Khrushchev's brinkmanship diplomacy. In the Brezhnev era, Soviet doctrine on the political utility of nuclear forces stressed its role as an umbrella deterring intervention against "progressive" political change.<sup>73</sup> Insofar as limited options and "salami tactics" are more clearly indispensable for compellent than for deterrent strategies, this would help to solve the Soviet diplomats' mismatch problem. The "last clear chance" to avoid disaster would be shifted onto the United States. This solution to the diplomats'

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72. Increased Soviet attention to the "conventional option" since the late 1960s would seem to have mitigated this problem, but in fact it may have compounded it. Military interest in preparing for a conventional phase and acquiring capabilities for escalation dominance in the theater may derive more from obvious organizational motives than from a fundamental change in the military's mind-set of "inflexible over-response." In Soviet thinking, limitations seem to be based less on mutual restraint than on NATO's willingness to see its theater nuclear forces destroyed during the conventional phase. This raises the nightmarish possibility that the Soviet leadership could embark on war thinking that it had a conventional option, whereas in fact unrestrained conventional operations and preemptive incentives at the theater nuclear level would lead to rapid escalation.

73. Coit Blacker, "The Kremlin and Detente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes, and Expectations," in Alexander George, ed., *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry* (Boulder: Westview, 1983), pp. 122-123.

problem might cause problems for the military's budget rationale, however, since strategic parity should be sufficient to carry out a strictly deterrent function.

The German case suggests that extremism in strategic thinking may depend a great deal on institutionalization and dogmatization of doctrine in the mature military organization. If Roman Kolkowicz's "traditionalists" are equated with the Moltke generation and his "modernist" technocrats with the Schlieffen generation, do we find a parallel in the dogmatization of doctrine? Benjamin Lambeth argues that Soviet doctrine is quite flexible and creative, but so was Schlieffen on questions of how to implement his strategic tenets under changing conditions.<sup>74</sup> Creativity within the paradigm of decisive, offensive operations may coexist with utter rigidity towards options that would require a change in the basic paradigm. For example, the Soviet ground forces adapted creatively to improvements in precision-guided munitions (PGMs) that seemed to threaten the viability of their offensive doctrine; they did not consider, however, that PGMs might offer an opportunity to give up their fundamentally offensive orientation. As for the third phase of organizational evolution, are there any parallels to Ludendorff or Groener among younger Soviet officers? Are they forging links to Russian nationalists, whose social base Alexander Yanov describes in ways that are strongly reminiscent of Eley's account of the ultranationalist German right?<sup>75</sup>

Any discussion of the extremist potential of Soviet strategy must consider the strong reality constraint imposed by the mutual-assured-destruction relationship. Despite the reckless rhetoric of some junior officers, it seems clear that when the head of the Strategic Rocket Forces said in 1967 that "a sudden preemptive strike cannot give [the aggressor] a decisive advantage," he knew that launch-on-warning and the hardening of silos made this true for both sides.<sup>76</sup> And today Ogarkov does not deny that a scot-free victory is impossible. But despite this, the theme of damage limitation remains strong in Soviet military thinking, and we should remember those World War I strategists who saw the "necessary" as possible, no matter how realistically they did their operational calculations.

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74. Lambeth, "Selective Nuclear Options"; Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

75. Alexander Yanov, *Detente after Brezhnev* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1977).

76. Garner, *Soviet Threat Perceptions*, p. 69.

Finally, how have the policies of the United States affected the development of civil-military relations and strategic doctrine in the U.S.S.R.? Some analysts argue that the Ogarkov–Ustinov debates ended in May 1983 with Ustinov’s capitulation, at least on the level of rhetoric. Although leadership politics may have been a factor, a more important reason may have been the Reagan “Star Wars” speech and the Reagan defense program generally.<sup>77</sup> Echoing the developments in France in 1911, rising levels of external threat may have helped the military to win the doctrinal argument and achieve its institutional aims in the underlying issues tied to the doctrinal dispute. This episode may also be seen as the latest round of a process of exporting and re-importing warfighting strategies. The impact of Soviet counterforce doctrines on the American strategic debate in the 1970s is obvious; now the fruits of our conversion are perhaps being harvested by Ogarkov in Soviet debates on military budgets and operational policies.

Whatever the precise reality of current civil-military relations in the Soviet Union, patterns revealed by the World War I cases suggest that the Soviet Union manifests several “risk factors” that could produce an extreme variant of the military’s endemic offensive bias. The historical parallel further suggests that the actions of rival states can play an important role in determining how these latent risks unfold. Aggressive policies were liable to touch off these latent dangers, but vulnerability also tended to encourage the opponent to adopt an offensive strategy. Postures that were both invulnerable and non-provocative got the best results, but even these did not always dissuade dogmatic adherents to the “cult of the offensive.” Although Soviet persistence in working the problems of conventional and nuclear offensives does recall the dogged single-mindedness of a Schlieffen, nuclear weapons pose a powerful reality constraint for which no true counterpart existed in 1914. Consequently, if the twin dangers of provocation and vulnerability are avoided, there should be every hope of keeping Soviet “risk factors” under control. The current drift of the strategic competition, however, makes that not a small “if.”

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77. Setting these debates into the context of U.S.–Soviet relations are Lawrence T. Caldwell and Robert Legvold, “Reagan Through Soviet Eyes,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 52 (Fall 1983), pp. 3–21.