

ORIGINS OF WORLD WAR I, PART II
WHO CAUSED THE WAR?
THEORIES OF RESPONSIBILITY (THE FISCHER CONTROVERSY)

BACKGROUND

Resolved: "Germany should be assigned prime responsibility for causing World War I." True or false?

Certain predictions: strongly infirm a theory if they fail.

Unique predictions: strongly corroborate a theory if they prove out.

Uncertain or non-unique predictions also infirm or corroborate a theory but less strongly.

I. FIVE FISCHER SCHOOL VIEWS

The Fischer school view in a nutshell: "Germany desired and sought WWI; and/or German actions caused World War I."

The July crisis had five possible outcomes:

Status Quo Ante Bellum (SQAB): Things remain as they were in June 1914. Serbia is wholly independent and feisty toward Austria-Hungary. This SQAB outcome was logically possible but very unlikely, as no state preferred it: the Entente states agreed with Germany and Austria that something had to be done to control Serbian extremism.

Austria and Germany compel Serbia to Destroy Black Hand (SDBH): Austria and Germany coerce the Serbian government to smash the Black Hand and other extremist nationalist Serbian organizations. Serbia survives intact and sovereign.

Austria Destroys Serbia (ADS): Austria conquers Serbia (or compels its surrender) and partitions it, probably between Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. No more Serbia. Russia, France and Britain do not intervene.

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

World War (WW): Britain joins France and Russia in a war against Germany and Austria.

Five Fischer school views on WWI origins can be identified. They distinguish five German preference rankings among these four crisis outcomes, and suggest five broad levels of German belligerence and responsibility.

1. The minimal Germany-blaming view: Germany's first preference was to have Austria destroy Serbia without

sparkling a wider war (ADS). Germany's #2 preference was to compel Serbia to destroy the Black Hand and other radical Serb nationalist groups while letting it survive (SDBH). Germans preferred both of these outcomes to a continental war (that is, a war against France and Russia, CW) or a world war (that is, a war against Britain, France, and Russia, WW). In short, Germany gambled that the other powers would accept an Austrian destruction of Serbia without war, but would have accepted an SDBH outcome had it known that the alternative was Continental War or World War. Germany did not deliberately unleash general war, but it bears responsibility for recklessly risking a general war that even it didn't want.

2. The medium-low Germany-blaming view: Germany's first preference was again to destroy Serbia without sparking a wider war, ADS. Germany's #2 preference, however, was a continental war (CW), which Germany sought in order to cut Russia down to size. Germany's #3 preference was to compel Serbia to destroy the Black Hand while letting Serbia survive (SDBH). Germany's least-preferred result was a world war. In sum: Germany preferred to destroy Serbia without wider war but also preferred continental war to scenarios that allowed Serbia to survive, while preferring these scenarios to world war. In this view Germany did not deliberately unleash a world war; but did prefer a continental war to the only feasible compromise outcome (SDBH). If so, Germany bears responsibility for choosing to unleash a continental war but not a world war.

This is the view of "Fischer School" moderates, exemplified by Imanuel Geiss.

3. The medium Germany-blaming view: Germany's first preference was continental war (CW). It preferred such a war to destroying Serbia without wider war (ADS) and to scenarios that allowed Serbia to survive (SDBH). Hence it plotted to cause such a continental war. But it preferred scenarios that allowed Serbia to survive to a world war. If so, Germany again bears responsibility for choosing to unleash a continental war but not a world war.
4. The medium-high Germany-blaming view: Germany's first preference was a continental war (CW). Germany's #2 preference was to destroy Serbia (ADS). Germany's #3 preference was world war, which it favored over scenarios that allowed Serbia to survive. If so, Germany did not choose world war over continental war, but it did prefer world war to the only feasible compromise outcome (SDBH), and thus bears responsibility for choosing a world war.
5. The maximal Germany-blaming view: Germany's first preference was a continental war. Germany's #2 preference was world war, Germany's #3 preference was to destroy Serbia, which it favored over scenarios that allowed Serbia to survive. If so, we again conclude that Germany did not choose world war over continental war, but it did prefer world war to the only feasible compromise outcome (SDBH), and thus bears responsibility for choosing world war.

This is argued by some Fischerites and by Dale Copeland.

These five Germany-blaming views can be summarized by as follows:

Minimal Germany-blaming view (1): ADS > SDBH > CW > WW
Medium-low Germany-blaming view (2): ADS > CW > SDBH > WW
Medium Germany-blaming view (3): CW > ADS > SDBH > WW
Medium-high Germany-blaming view (4): CW > ADS > WW > SDBH
Maximal Germany-blaming view (5): CW > WW > ADS > SDBH

Another orderings is possible that paints Germany as even more belligerent, but it isn't widely ascribed to Germany:

WW > CW > ADS > SDBH

II. TESTING FISHER SCHOOL ARGUMENTS AND THEIR COMPETITORS

A. All of these Germany-blaming Fischer School views make the following **fulfilled predictions**:

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

Pl1a. **A prime meeting or meetings where war was plotted should be discovered.** Some Fischerites find what appears to be such a record of a war-plotting meeting in Admiral Müller's minutes of the December 8, 1912 "War Council."¹ Others such as Hew Strachan (The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]: 51-55) say this meeting was not a planning session for a war. What do these minutes mean?

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

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

> **Efforts to prepare the public.** Fischer and Geiss report that we see such efforts: press campaigns in 1913, another press campaign in March 1914, and the Jubilees of 1913. We also see Müller approach Bethmann about launching a press campaign on Dec. 8, 1912. See Fritz Fischer, War of Illusions (NY:

¹ More recently John Röhl has argued that Germany decided on war at some point during November 9-22 1912, and the December 8 1912 war council was convened to consider postponing the war decided earlier in light of British threats to intervene in such a war.

Norton, 1975): 163-64, 190-99, 371-79, 383, 388; and Imanuel Geiss, German Foreign Policy, 1871-1914 (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976): 146, 149-50.

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

- > Strachan, To Arms, claims we do not see such a campaign for war evident in the press (p. 52).
 - > Research question: who is right on this point, Fischer/Geiss or Strachan?
- > Strachan, To Arms, claims there is no evidence that the Foreign Ministry tried to orchestrate a war-fever campaign in the press (p. 52).
 - > Research question: who is right on this point, Fischer/Geiss or Strachan?
 - > And: would we necessarily have evidence of such an effort? Propaganda campaigns are generally hidden from view.
- > Strachan claims that the German government couldn't have manipulated the press (p. 52).
 - > This claim is refuted by Tirpitz's evident success in press manipulation before 1914, and by successful official press manipulation in many other countries at various times-- e.g., in Vladimir Putin's Russia.
- > **Germany preparing its army for war.** We do see this, manifest in the large front-loaded German army buildup of 1913-1914.
 - > Strachan says planning for this buildup began before the Dec. 8, 1912 meeting and that the buildup was defensive in motive, provoked by French building and the Serb defeat of Turkey.
 - > But as Strachan notes, the Germans sped up the timetable for completing their army buildup from a date in 1916 to 1914. Perhaps a buildup was planned, but not the rapid

1913-14 buildup.

- > Also, some (John Röhl) argue that Germany decided for war during November 9-22, in response to Serbia's victory in the First Balkan War. If so, the German decision to build up the army fits with Germany's decision for war.

Research question: when did Germany decide for the main parts of the German army buildup? And with what motive?

- > **German diplomatic preparations? There were some, see Geiss. Germany sought to curry favor with Britain by behaving well at the Ambassadors' conference on the Balkans, Dec. 18 1912ff.** And to restrain AH from starting war prematurely, on 3 occasions in 1913 (Feb, May, summer).²
 - > This seems a weak test. Germany might have restrained Austria in order to prevent war altogether.
- > Secondary planning meetings where plotting the outbreak of the war is the agenda. We see this with the Moltke-Conrad meeting of May 1914 at the spa; and the Blank Check meeting of July 5, 1914.
- > **Germany preparing its navy for war?** We don't see this. And Strachan takes the absence of a major naval buildup after December 8, 1912 as evidence against Fischer (p. 55).
 - > But the Fischer theory probably doesn't predict such a buildup! Naval building begun in December 1912 probably would not bear fruit by July 1914 because of long lead times for shipbuilding. And Tirpitz did not ask for more shipbuilding at the December 8 meeting--only for time to finish the Kiel canal. Moreover, German strategy was to win quickly on the continent and thereby lock the British out of the war. Hence it should have focused on building up the army, not the navy. Finally, Germany wanted to keep Britain out of the war, so it should have pursued a detente with Britain, including a halt to naval building.
- > **Germany preparing by building up its food stocks?** Strachan notes that Germany stocked food for the army but not the public and so dismisses the notion that the December 8, 1912 meeting was a war-decision meeting.
 - > But most German policymakers expected that the Schlieffen Plan, which posited a victory over France in 40 days, would succeed. If so, they would prepare the army to feed itself and

² Geiss, GFP, 150-152.

assume that the public would not be short of food as the war would quickly be over!³

plc. **Inclusion of all central policymakers in the meeting.** Specifically, Bethmann-Hollweg should have been there for the meeting to mean much, say Fischer critics (Strachan, p. 53). Perhaps so but apparently he didn't need to be. Fischer (WOI:164) offers evidence that Bethmann had become pro-war as of Dec. 14, 1912. Perhaps the Kaiser knew he was already on board.

P2. **Large wartime war aims.** Fischerites infer that large aims in wartime signal large aims also existed before the war--and caused it. Is this fair? Some would say "No--wars beget large war aims. So the prediction is unfair." But I find it not wholly unreasonable. Large war aims don't appear overnight--they reflect long gestation.

>> We see the German "September Program," a large plan of German expansion drafted in September 1914. (Note: Fischer's discovery of these large war aims gave rise to his argument that these aims preexisted the war. So this evidence persuaded at least Fischer.)

P3. **German encouragement of Austria-Hungary to take a hard line with Serbia.**

>> Germany encouraged Austria to take a hard line by its July 3/4 and 5 blank checks to Austria. But did Germany authorize (or push) Austria to take a hard line only to achieve the destruction of Serbia, not a continental or world war? This seems possible. If so, prediction P2 is not unique.

P4. **During the July crisis Germany should not pull back even after learning that military measures were underway in Russia and France.**

>> Germany doesn't pull back on learning of Russian mobilization measures. Bethmann learns on July 26 but keeps pushing Austria forward until July 30. This seems a strong test, as it tests a unique prediction. What aside from German desire for war, could explain such conduct?

³ Strachan makes additional points:

>> "German advocates of preventive war didn't recommend war for the domestic reasons Fischer posits!" (p. 55). But is this relevant? Strachan has switched topics, from the scope of German aggressiveness to the motives for it. Bait and switch.

>> "German advocates of preventive war had no impact on policy!" (p. 55).

>> But Strachan declares this without evidence.

P5. Advocacy of war by strong German public pressure groups.

>> We see such advocacy by pan-Germans and the Army. E.g., Moltke urged Jagow to pursue war in a May 20 car ride, Falkenhayn pushed for war during the July crisis, etc. But this prediction's fulfillment is not impressive until we also show that the German army, and/or the pan-Germans, were politically powerful. Until then it remains possible that hawkish German pressure groups were violent-minded but too weak to steer Germany onto a violent course. If so Prediction P3 is not unique, so the test it creates is weak.

But overwhelming evidence shows the army was powerful. A measure of Army power: When Moltke changes his view on July 30, and seeks to impose his view on others, their view is changed. Bethmann crumples when Moltke shows up at 1:00. An indicator of power. Also: Moltke imposes his view on foreign policy at 2:00 by his telegram to Austria, and is not later reprimanded. His control is accepted.

P6. Aggressive beliefs among German elites about national goals and diplomatic tactics. A crime needs a motive! Do we see one?

>> Evidence of a German elite motive for war is seen in:

1. German perceptions of a window of opportunity against Russia (opening in 1913/14), to be followed by a window of vulnerability in 1916-17.
2. Fears that Austria's demise would gravely threaten Germany; together with German belief that Austrian security requires Serbia's destruction.

>> A theory among German elites explaining that a war-risking foreign policy was necessary and could bring the expansion of Germany's sphere of influence is seen in Riezler's theory of Bluff Diplomacy.

P7. Evidence of German elite pleasure at the outbreak of war.

>> We see rumors of pleasure reported at various military units. Von Müller declared: "The mood is brilliant. The government has succeeded very well in making us appear as the attacked."⁴ A visitor at the Prussian

⁴ Röhl, "Admiral von Müller," p. 670. A blamecasting strategy requires provoking the other side into significant first moves, and hence requires yielding the military initiative, while perhaps exploiting the jumpiness that a first-move advantage creates on the other side to catalyze their first move. If German leaders did pursue a blamecasting/baiting strategy in the July crisis, they were in essence eschewing the first-move advantage. The July crisis does have this appearance; the major first military moves were taken by Russia and France, while the Germans seem uninterested in seizing the military initiative-- although they did not want others to gain a big jump either. It

War Ministry found a party atmosphere: "Everywhere beaming faces, people shaking hands in the corridors, congratulating one another on having cleared the ditch."⁵ This also seems a strong test, at least of the German military's desire for war, since it is hard to imagine any explanation for such conduct, other than a desire among the German military for war. But it is not a conclusive positive test, as one must also establish that the military had the strength to cause war and did push for it before the case becomes conclusive.

>> On the other hand the Kaiser was upset at the outbreak of war ("you will live to regret this!"). But perhaps others, not the Kaiser, greased the skids to war.

P8. Postwar mea culpas, other confessions?

>> We see Bethmann-Hollweg say in 1918 or so that "yes it was in a sense a preventive war..." Is this telltale? A strong test? We don't usually expect mea culpas from the innocent!

>> Moltke spoke of "the war I caused." (This statement is a recent post-Cold War discovery).

P9. Postwar coverup?

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

B. The Fischer school also makes these unfulfilled predictions:

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

The Kaiser was known for a pattern of bluster-then-retreat. He did this many times. Thus it's plausible

even seems possible that German intelligence purveyed disinformation to lay the basis for such a baiting strategy before the July crisis--spreading false word around Europe that Germany could mobilize in secret. (Could this be the source of Joffre's false intelligence warning that Germany could mobilize in secret? See above, pp. *-*, and Joffre, Personal Memoirs, 1:119-120, 127, 128.)

⁵ Report by Bavarian military attaché General Karl Ritter von Wenninger, quoted in Röhl, "Germany," 39. Stig Förster notes that "after 1911 the General Staff became a hotbed of warmongers." "Dreams and Nightmares," 361.

that he decided for war in late 1912, then got cold feet later.

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

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

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

- P4. **No efforts to avoid war with Russia;** and no expressions of hope to avoid war with Russia? We see some of this, but not much. All efforts to avoid war with Russia seem perfunctory. Bethmann's view that "if there is war, so be it" is typical of German officials.

- P5. **Presence of a general theory to explain German expansionism.** Is this a hoop test for the theory? Many implicitly assume it is--they reject a German Expansion theory of WWI in the absence of a theory explaining why Germany would go nuts. But others (SVE) say this is an unfair prediction. There is a lot we don't understand, and German expansion may be one such thing.

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

- P6. **Agreement among "War Council" participants that they had made a national decision for war at the December 8 meeting.** Fischer critics say this prediction is flunked by Müller's postscript on his minutes stating that the meeting "amounted to almost nothing." But others say: Müller was a superhawk who wanted a decision for immediate war. His postscript only shows his frustration that a decision for immediate war was not taken.

- P7. **Efforts by those who declared for war at the meeting to bring about war later.** Thus the Kaiser should later be seen working for war, as it was he who called the December 8 meeting. Fischer critics note that instead the Kaiser was clearly dovish during the July 1914 crisis, and infer from this that he couldn't have been seriously proposing war in 1912. I say: this does mitigate against the notion that war was decided on Dec. 8, 1912 but it tests an uncertain prediction. Would the Kaiser necessarily hold personally to a decision for war

that he triggered in December 1912? He was both mercurial and manipulable. Perhaps others manipulated him into the decision; and then engineered a later outbreak of war despite his waning support for it in July 1914.

But: the Kaiser was known for a pattern of bluster-then-retreat. He did this many times. Thus it's plausible that he decided for war in late 1912, then got cold feet later.

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

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

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

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

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

>> Did Russia seek Austria's destruction? Marc Trachtenberg says yes. The claim can be tested by looking for Russian speech and action indicating this motive, such as: Russian ambassador to Serbia Hartwig inciting Serb radical nationalists toward subverting Austria (as he did); and Russian support for panslav agitation in Galicia (as Russia did--but the scope of such Russian action is not clear).

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

>> We do see the planned Russian military buildup of 1914-17 (the "Great Program")! But this prediction is not unique. A "German aggression caused the war" theory also predicts it, because it followed the German buildup.

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

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

D. Predictions from "Austria caused the war!"

Predicts:

- P1. Evidence of **Austrian belligerence**, motives for it.
>> We see this.
- P2. Evidence of **an independent Austrian decision to pursue war with Serbia** during July 1914.
>> We see this.
- P3. Evidence that Austria-Hungary could hope for success if it fought alone against Russia and Serbia. We don't see this evidence. Such a war would likely be a death ride for Austria, as Russia and Serbia could bring vastly more resources to the war than Austria.

E. Predictions from "Serbia caused the war!"

Predicts:

- P1. Evidence of **Serb acts that triggered the war**.
>> Serb acts at Sarajevo did trigger war. But historians believe that later Serb intransigence emerged in consultation with Russia.

F. Predictions from "France caused the war!"

P1: Belligerent French acts that helped trigger the war.

>> We do see such French acts. But in response to threats...

France took these war-risking and/or war-causing steps in July 1914:

1. France backed Russia's firm line of resisting Austrian infringement on Serbia's sovereignty. Specifically, France raised no objection to Russia's backing of Serbia's rejection of the AH ultimatum. France could have sacrificed Serbia's dignity/sovereignty by insisting that Serbia accept the entire AH ultimatum, including the AH demand for intrusion into Serb police matters (items 5 and 6 in the ultimatum). But France stood firm with Russia on the issue. (This mattered. Had Serbia caved completely AH and Germany would have lost their pretext for war.)
2. France raised no objection to Russia's decision to mobilize against AH in response to the AH declaration of war on Serbia on July 28. (Even Russia had not planned to do this, and Sazonov apparently did it spontaneously.)

On French backing of Russia on July 24 is Albertini II: 295.

3. France did not try to restrain Russia from its fateful launching of preliminary mobilization (decided on July 24, ordered on July 25) or full mobilization (decided and ordered on July 30). French leaders may not have known of premobilization when it was launched, as that was secret, but French observers, e.g., Paléologue, surely learned of it quickly, and if they didn't report it this was likely pre-planned, as Paléologue was Poincaré's guy.)
4. France joined Russia in launching preliminary mobilization on July 25 and full mobilization on July 30. French preliminary mobilization was used by Moltke and Falkenhayn as excuses to end Bethmann's hopeful diplomacy and launch war. (These actions are often forgotten because they were less noticed by Germany, hence played less role in sparking the war, but they surely would have caused war had it joined Russia in taking these measures on July 25 and July 30.)

How do we explain these acts? How to we judge them?

Explaining: evidence and logic suggest they all stemmed from deep French belief in the cult of the offensive.

These French acts illustrate how the COTO can inspire fierce resistance to expansion, even without inspiring expansion itself.

France was not expansionist. It did not seek to change the European status quo.

But France was ok with hard line measures that could well cause war--a firm Russian line on Serbia, prompt Russian premobilization and general mobilization, and prompt French premobilization and general mobilization--because it believed that its own security required these measures, for these reasons:

1. France viewed Serbian survival as important, perhaps vital, to French security. Serbia was "500,000 bayonets on the Danube"--an important power-asset for the Franco-Russian alliance. Serbia's demise would therefore threaten French security. It's loss would affect the European balance of power, perhaps fatefully for France. "It was a European question." (Who said this? Sazonov I think. Maybe Grey.)
2. France viewed Russian survival as even more vital to French security. French leaders believed France and Russia would survive or die together, as neither could resist German power alone. Hence France had to approve whatever measures were required for Russian security, even if these measures (such as mobilization or sanding firm in defense of Serbia) risked a general war that would engulf France.

These French beliefs on the vital importance of Serbian and Russian survival to France rested implicitly on the belief that the offense is strong and conquest is easy--the cult of the offensive. Had France believed that the defense dominated it could have taken a more relaxed view of possible threats to Serbian and Russian security. Russia and Serbia then could have defended themselves more easily against Austria and Germany; and if they were conquered their demise would be less threatening to France, as France would have had better odds of surviving German attack even without their help.

3. France saw a first-move advantage in warfare. So it believed that whoever moved first in the crisis will have the upper hand.

France therefore believed that both France and Russia should move first in a crisis to better their hopes of victory in war. France was willing to see Russia move first, even if this triggered a war that sucked in France, because the alternative was probably a war in which Germany moved first and exploited the advantage it gained by so doing to sweep to victory over Russia and France.

Hence French leaders approved Russian and French preemptive preliminary and full mobilizations.

For these three reasons France probably agreed during on Poincaré's trip to Russia that France would support a Russian war to save Serbia; and would support Russian preemptive preliminary and full mobilization. (We can infer this from French acceptance of Russia's actions during July 24-30).

Both French promises stem from the cult of the offensive.

A possible fourth consideration: France may have believed war was inevitable, because Germany and Austria were pushing things to war, especially after Austria unveiled its ultimatum on July 23. This expectation of war would further incline France toward defensive belligerence, on grounds that France should now prepare for war while dropping efforts to prevent war as being futile.

In short France was belligerent for defensive reasons. France took steps to win the next war at the expense of preventing it. It did this partly because it believed its survival hung by a slender thread--that small advantages in the early days of the coming war could make all the difference; and that war seemed likely.

4. It is logically possible that France also struck a deal with Russia, under which Russia would sacrifice itself by

attacking Germany prematurely to save France, and France would in exchange give Russia a free hand to decide on war with Austria, and to pre-mobilize. But I doubt this. If the French and Russia believed in the cult of the offensive there would have been no tension between French and Russian interests; both Russia and France would have supported each others' hard-line policies as matters of self-interest, and would have needed no inducement from the other to do so. France would have seen a self-interest in Russia's firm stand on Serbia and in Russian pre-mobilization, partial mobilization, and full mobilization. And Russia would have seen a self-interest in relieving France from bearing the full weight of the German attack, and hence in launching a premature attack on Germany in late August. In short each saw themselves as having an interest in taking belligerent steps that the other also favored.

If so, no exchanges were necessary. This fits the amiable atmosphere of the French-Russian discussions in July 1914, The record indicates a relaxed relationship between Poincaré and the Russians--they are having a relaxed time on the St. Petersburg trip. There is no tension in the air, as there would be if tough bargaining was taking place. Implication: both sides saw a harmony of interest between Russia and France.

Bottom line: France took bellicose acts for defensive reasons.

Judging these acts (Fischer debate):

Yes, France and Russia took belligerent steps (standing by Serbian refusal to accept the entire AH ultimatum; and premobilizing) that importantly set the stage for war. Without these belligerent steps we can imagine war not occurring.

However, these steps responded to threats to French and Russian security posed by German/Austrian attempts to change the status quo in the Balkans, and by belligerent German talk of preventive war against Russia. In short, France/Russia were responding to belligerent acts by others. Under normal international law we accept that belligerent acts taken to defend oneself are legitimate. Two things made these acts legitimate: German/Austrian threatening actions; and the COTO, which magnified the threat these actions posed in French/Russian minds.

We can blame Fr/Russia for believing COTO. We cannot blame them for seeking empire or seeking change in status quo. Only AH and Germany (and Serbia) sought to do that.

P2: Evidence of French expansionism, desire to change the

status quo. We don't see this. See Weber--French desire for Alsace-Lorraine had faded by 1911.

P3: Evidence of a French "war council" or other planning to instigate a war. We don't see this. French planning is directed at responding to crises, not instigating them.

G. Predictions from "Russia caused the war". Discussion.

P1: Belligerent Russian acts that helped trigger the war.

>> We do see such Russian acts. But in response to threats...

Russia took these war-risking and/or war-causing steps in July 1914:

Russia stood firm on Serbia, advising Serbia not to concede on issues of Serbian sovereignty and mobilizing against AH when AH declared war on Serbia. And Russia pre-mobilized and launched general mobilization.

Thus Russia was highly belligerent in the July 1914 crisis. But its belligerence was defensive in nature. Russia was not expansionist--not because it was virtuous, but because it was sated by its vast conquests in the 19th century. It would have moved to take Ottoman territory if and only if the Ottoman empire collapsed. It took belligerent steps in 1914 not for predatory reasons but from fear that otherwise it faced invasion and defeat by Germany. It *responded* to Austrian and German aggression.

Russians had these perceptions:

Russian leaders, like French, saw Serbia as an important asset in the European power balance. "A European question" was the language. See Albertini II: 295: Sazonov is quoted there saying on July 24 that the Serbian question is "but part of the general European question," meaning that Serbia's demise would affect the wider European balance of power, which in turn would threaten Russian security.

Russian leaders thought was likely, from the first moment of the July crisis. Sazonov: *c'est la guerre Europeenne!*

Russian leaders (Sazonov) believed both Russia and Germany could mobilize in secret. Hence the first mover could gain an important jump on the other.

In short, Russia believed its own safety required that Serbia be preserved, and that Russia strike early. So like France it sacrificed the possibility of preventing war to increase its chances of victory. It believed belligerent measures

were necessary to preserve the status quo.

Two more Russian perceptions somewhat exculpate Russia from responsibility for the war:

Krivoshein hoped that belligerent military moves would deter Germany, when in fact Germany took these moves (premobilization) as pretexts for a war they wanted.

And Sazonov did not realize that mobilization meant war; hence he launched mobilization in false belief that his step still left room for negotiation.

If so, Russia launched pre-mobilization without realizing that it would trigger war. It saw pre-mobilization as a prudent measure that might deter war; and, if it failed to deter, would not inexorably provoke war.

Bottom line: Russia was belligerent to defend itself and the status quo--unlike Germany and Austria, which sought vast changes in the status quo. And it failed to see the scope of the dangers raised by its belligerent actions.

P2: Evidence of Russian expansionism, desire to change the status quo. We don't see this. Russia discussed seizing the Straits in February 1914, but only if the Ottoman empire was collapsing. There is no evidence of Russian desire to trigger such collapse, or to seize Ottoman territory absent such a collapse. (But check McMeekin, Russian Origins of the First World War--does he have anything??)

P3: Evidence of a Russian "war council" or other planning to instigate a war. We don't see this.

P4: No evidence of Russian efforts to avert war. But we do see four such efforts (by Sazonov) during the July crisis. See Van Evera, "European Militaries," in Rosecrance ed., note 151, p. 266.

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