

HISTORY 158C - MODERN EUROPE: OLD AND NEW EUROPE, 1914-PRESENT

Lecture IV Outline – The Underlying Causes of World War I

Underlying Causes of WWI

Themes

1. Mobilization in detail
2. War plans of the Great Powers
3. Anxieties of the Central Powers (Germany & Austria)
4. Attitude of Powers toward war in summer of 1914
5. Real issue –not advantages to be gained by going to war, but perils of remaining at peace (some repetition here)

Mobilization

After 1870, all powers rely on alliances for their own security, but they rely more on their own strength. After 1871, powers adopt the German system of security, which is roughly this.

- In all countries, every young man will receive intensive training for either 2 or 3 years and remains liable for recall (length of time varies from country to country) for some years after.
- Then, he goes into the reserves for 2 or 3 years.

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- These reservists are not fit to join the front-line troops unless they have additional training. Exception is Germany—their reservists are as strong as any front-line force in Europe.
 - This rule is not watertight. Those who attend University in western countries, get away with one year of service. In countries with bloated bureaucracies, like Russia, many men escape with no service at all.

All great powers can count on having under arms in a matter of weeks millions and millions of men

How The Great Game of Mobilization Works

- At a given sign of danger, there will be a poster on a public notice board
- Then, every man recently discharged from his unit returns to that unit
- These units join other units and other units join still more units until they are all in place.
- Note: Not only soldiers are involved. Also involved are...
 - Artillery and supply wagons
 - Field kitchens and first aid kits
 - Above all, HORSES by means of which officers communicate with each other.
 - Importance of Horses—they must eat.

Two more points

- All mobilization is done by railroad

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- **SPEED IS ESSENTIAL.** The power that mobilizes first is the power that will win the war.

Repeating points made about mobilization plans.

- They have been worked out in detail
- They bear no relation to world of real life. For one thing, they are conducted in summer. For another, a war would have to break out.
- They make no allowance for enemy interference

The Fatal Lure of the “Short” War – Ivan Bloch

But something else— 2 recent wars are deemed irrelevant...

- The Boer War—1899/1902
- The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05

All military planners believe the war will be short—will be decided (like the wars of mid-century in a matter of months) probably weeks

- These wars were fought far away from Europe. The first in Africa
- The second on the wastelands of Siberia.

One man denies these theories. Ivan Bloch is one of the most far-sighted observers of war there has ever been.

Bloch is a Polish banker and a Jew. Between 1898 and 1899, he writes a work of 6 volumes. It is translated into an abridged one volume English edition.

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- *The Next War* -book's title lays down these devastating predictions
- The next war will be....
 - One long murderous siege
 - An entrenchment in which the spade and the shovel will be more important than the rifle or machine gun
 - A stalemate that cannot be broken—if at all!!—by the commitment of troops numbering in the millions on the part of governments that fight it
 - A slaughter in which success will favor the defense even when outnumbered 4 or 5 to one
 - An inferno that will not end in victory or defeat but famine, destruction, and revolution

The Boer War confirms Bloch's theories, but short war school has explanations

- It was fought in faraway Africa
- The navy, not the army, was involved
- Boers were fighting on their home turf

Bloch replies in 1901. Critics seem to miss the role of weapons and new technology and ammunition

- Small bore rifle—deadly
- And smokeless powder rifle creates makes it impossible to tell where fire coming from

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Bloch dies in 1902, before the Russo-Japanese war breaks out, but it confirms all his theories in spades (reading)

1. Trench warfare
2. Useless slaughter
3. Incompetence of command
4. Revolution in defeated country

Often called the dress rehearsal for ww1 in which the actors miss their cues.

The War Plans Of The Great Powers

Great Britain

- Do not have much of an army (BEF –British Expeditionary Force) except for colonial purposes
 - Will mobilize in England
 - Move to channel where it will be shipped to France and placed under French command

Problems with British War Plans

Language barrier—few Brits speak French and few still French speak English

Highest educated British officers (who survive) come home and write memoirs that are bitterly anti French

- These memoirs become best sellers and are read by policy makers in 1930s who have to deal with...

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Russia

- Army will gather at center of mobilization and then decide what to do next
- To attack Germany or Austria-Hungary
 - If AH=partial mobilization of army
 - If Germany=general mobilization

Note: Once a decision is made, it cannot be reversed. Trains moving according to one timetable, would have to back up and move according to another. This kind of confusion is unthinkable.

Austria-Hungary

Has 4 possible enemies (another sign of weakness)

- 4 possible enemies—Russia, Serbia, Rumania, or Italy!

France—Plan 17

Fear: Their ally Russia will throw all its weight against Austria-Hungary while the Germans are invading France

- Hope (insistence) that Russian throw all their forces against Germany—give Russians money to build railroads to their German (Polish) frontier
- But their only possible enemy is GERMANY and here is what they propose to do
 - Jump onto trains at the onset of war, cross the German frontier on the Rhine, jump out and defeat the Germans with 6-7" bayonets

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- They will stab their way to victory
- Rays of sunshine on their bayonets will blind their Germans and they will fall into pools of blood

Problems with French War Plans

1. Their strategy depends on attacking through the Rhine—Rhine is the most heavily fortified frontier in Europe
2. Their uniforms—Their pants are too bright, too tight, and most of all too red. Make them easy to spot and easy to kill. Officers tried to get politicians to change color, but red on of colors of French revolution, and politicians refuse.

French consider that Germans might not want to fight on frontier. They might go through Belgium instead. But rule this out as impossible because they would have to call up their reservists and dismiss this idea as impossible.

Germany's Strategy

Springs from geographical reality—Germany is between 2 Great Powers, Russia and France, who have become allies

- For almost 20 years after the Franco-Prussian war, military planners have decided that in the event of a two-front war they would have knock out Russia first, while maintaining a small holding force in the west to stall the French.
- Why Russia first?

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- Russian commanders incompetent
- Russian bureaucracy bloated
- Russia can raise only small armies that can easily be defeated

A Shift in German Strategy

In 1891 Germans get a new chief of the general staff, who rejects this strategy. It sucks, it makes no sense.

- Russian commanders incompetent? So are all others.
- Russian bureaucracy bloated? So what? So are all the others
- Russia can raise only small armies? So what, small armies can always be replaced with larger ones AND Russia is a populous country—one of world's greatest
- Someone else tried this in 1812—look what happened to Napoleon

(Note: Schlieffen deeply influenced by Franco-Russian military convention.—It requires the French to commit 1,300,000 troops against Germany vs only 800,000 by Russians)

The Schlieffen Plan

3 Elements to Schlieffen Plan

- 1) Take Paris
- 2) Defeat France
- 3) Turn against Russia

The problem—how to get to Paris?

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- Cross the frontier? No, that is where the French are planning to fight. Besides, it is the most fortified line in Europe
- Go thru Switzerland? No way, Switzerland is too mountainous and besides, where does that get our army? On the Riviera—we do not want to swim; we want to fight
- That leaves BELGIUM—and that's the only way to go.
 - First, Holland, Luxembourg, then Belgium (by 1914—Holland is eliminated)
 - 5/6 of the German army will march through Belgium, then in a giant flanking motion, turn into France, on the English Channel. Encircle the French army (ies)
 - “Let the last man on the left brush the English Channel with his sleeve.”
 - And pin them to the Swiss frontier

The Schlieffen Plan is brilliant—in some ways

- Has the element of surprise
- And, if successfully carried out, involves little or no bloodshed

But truly disastrous in others....

1. **Timing**—depending far too much on rapid German mobilization combined with a slow Russian mobilization

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2. Topography—Belgium is a hilly country, full of canals and rivers—what if the Belgians blow up the bridges over rivers and dikes?
3. Psychology—what if the Belgians don't like being invaded? What if they pick up rifles and shoot at the German armies as they march thru? –this is exactly what happens
4. **Political**—Belgium's independence and neutrality have been guaranteed by all the great powers, including Germany, in 1839. This is likely to bring Britain into the war
5. Moral—Belgium an innocent country; plan makes Germany the aggressor
6. Time, the plan allows no time for pauses, respites – which Germany desperately needs in last days of crisis.

Note—This is the ONLY plan Germany has. If it's attacked by Chile or Argentina, it must USE THIS PLAN.

The Navies Of The Great Powers

All Great Powers have navies, all are defensive, all guard coasts

- One exception is, of course, the British who have the greatest assembly of the most powerful warships the world has ever known.
- British naval base is at Scapa Flow, in Orkney Islands, in Scotland

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- In the event of war, British plan to assemble their fleet at Scapa Flow, then sail into the North Sea and defeat the Germans
- But Germans have no plans to use their fleet except to defend coastline. We now know that Germans could have inflicted heavy damage on the British in the channel ports in the early days of the war, because Scapa Flow was far away
- But Germans do not use their navy except in one battle, though they will use another form of sea weapon, the submarine

Anxieties Of The Central Powers—The Bechtold Memo Of 14 June 1914

The Russian announcement of summer 1913

- Front line strength will double by 1917
- Light infantry will increase by 3x
- All this with French money and interest rates all but non-existent

German Response—in July decide to increase front line strength from 761,000 to 810,00

- But Germans are pessimistic
- French and Russian troops will double those of Triple Alliance by 1917
- Italy hardly counts to the Triple Alliance's efforts—and is disloyal anyway
- And Austrian figures are miserable—can raise only 500,000 front-line troops

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Desperation of AH—Berchtold's letter to Bethmann-Holweg (German chancellor 14 June 1914)

A Survey of Austria's problems:

At Home

- Nationalities –especially Austrian Serbs who want to destroy monarchy and join Serbia (the country)

Abroad—Balkans

- Serbia is a mortal foe
- Rumania gone
- Only Bulgaria and Albania (and are unsure of Bulgaria)

Abroad—Russia

- Panславists—group that wants all the Slavs of Europe in one empire governed by tsar of Russia--gaining the upper hand
- They are bent on crushing the monarchy
- But once they do, they will turn on Germany
 - So:
 - In being Austria's ally Germany is doing Austria no favors but instead acting in own interests
 - And:
 - Not acting in Austria's interests
 - In 2nd Balkan war, "we wanted to aid Bulgaria and defeat Serbia but you wouldn't let us"
 - Next crisis will be the test of this Alliance
 - "Either use it or lose it!"

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Note: This letter isn't delivered until 5 July 1914—8 days after the murder of Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to Austrian throne, at Sarajevo

Attitude Of Europeans Toward War In Summer Of 1914

I—War Is Going To Come

- Arms Race
- Solidarity of F-R alliance
- Desperation of Austria-Hungary
- Tension that's pervaded the atmosphere of Europe since Bosnian Crisis

II—Better War Come Now Than Later

- Triple Entente belief—Germany bidding for mastery of Europe
- Triple Alliance (esp. German) belief—Germany is becoming encircled

III—War Will Be Short

- Modern technology will make it so
- No European war between the Great Powers since 1870
- No war on continent since 1914—no one alive now who remembers it

IV—War Will Solve Problems Of Society –In General

- For liberals, successful war will open the door to social reform
- For conservatives, successful war will restore order, tradition, authority

V-War Will Solve Problems Of Specific Countries

For **Austria-Hungary**, it will settle the nationalities problem inside the Habsburg Monarchy

- It will bring down Serbia
- It will quiet the Serbs who live inside the monarchy

For **Germany**, it will make social democrats loyal to the emperor, not to socialism

For **Russia**, it will prevent, not cause, another revolution. .

For **France**, it will restore the prestige of the army officers hope of getting back lost provinces taken by Germans in 1870

- Settle the problem of endemic strikes

For **Great Britain**, it will crises over Ireland and women's rights (right to vote)

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Put differently, the advantages of going to war not the question, but *rather the perils of remaining at peace*. Here we can be a little more specific.

The Perils of Peace

Vienna, Austria—Where it starts, if no war, then Abroad

- Serbia (immensely strengthened after 2 Balkan Wars) becomes even stronger. Fate of Bosnia now in doubt.

At home

- Nationalities problem gets worse; master nationalities inside monarchy grow more restive
- Heir to throne can't assume power in an atmosphere of triumph and glory

A successful war energizes the monarchy and holds out the possibility of solving all these problems

Berlin, Germany—If No War, What Has It to Lose

- Austria-Hungary as an ally
- Encirclement by Franco-Russian alliance
- A Russia whose army size will double by 1917

St. Petersburg, Russia—No to War Means....

- Abandoning Serbia
- Wrath of the Pan Slavs
- Loss of the French alliance

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Paris, France—no to war means

- Helplessness before Germany
- Loss of the Russian alliance

London, Great Britain—suspicious of militarism and continental involvement. But the costs of remaining at peace high....

- A Franco-Russian defeat of Germany raises questions about the value of the agreements of 1904 and 1907
- A continent dominated by Germany
- A German naval threat
 - Status of the British empire in doubt

In all cases saying no to war means two things:

1. Social upheaval –maybe even revolution