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1914 in world historical perspective: The 'uneven' and 'combined' origins of World War I

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Abstract
The causes of World War I remain a topic of enormous intellectual interest. Yet, despite the immensity of the literature, historiographical and IR debates remain mired within unhelpful methodological dichotomies revolving around whether a 'primacy of foreign policy' versus 'primacy of domestic politics' or systemic versus unit-level approach best account for the war's origins. Given that this historiography is the most prolific body of literature for any war within the modern age, it reveals a much deeper problem with the social sciences: how to coherently integrate 'external' and 'internal' relations into a synthesized theory of inter-state conflict and war. Drawing on and contributing to the theory of uneven and combined development, this article challenges standard interpretations of the war by distinctively uniting geopolitical and sociological modes of explanation into a single framework. In doing so, the article highlights how the necessarily variegated character of interactive socio-historical development explains the inter-state rivalries leading to war. Contextualizing the sources of conflict within the broad developmental tendencies of the Long 19th Century (1789–1914) and their particular articulation during the immediate pre-war juncture, the article seeks to provide significant contributions to recent debates in IR and historical sociology, as well as those concerning the relationship between history and IR theory.

Keywords
historical sociology, International Relations, international system, Marxism, uneven and combined development, World War I

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Introduction

Nearly a century after the 'lights went out' in Europe the causes of World War I remain a topic of immense intellectual attention and lively debate. Existing scholarly literature on the subject is 'probably the largest for any war in human history' (Hamilton and Herwig, 2004: 1) representing 'the most analyzed and contested case' within the study of International Relations (IR) (Copeland, 2001: 56).[1] Despite the immensity of literature, the 'long debate' remains mired within unhelpful methodological dichotomies. Whether a *Primat der Aussenpolitik* versus *Primat der Innenpolitik* approach best explains the war continues to dominate debates. Here, the historiographical literature intersects with and informs IR and social theory, which remain ensnared within these binary frameworks.

Traditional historiographical and realist studies generally explain the war from the perspective of a European-centred changing distribution of power. They focus on developments within the international system and their effects on foreign policymaking and military strategizing. For all their differences, classical Marxist theories of imperialism also view the war's origins as a *structural crisis*, one nonetheless rooted in a very different system: world capitalism. A problem common to these systemic approaches is that they elide the question of *agent differentiation* in explaining variations in state action. Consequently, there is a tendency among Marxist and realist schools of thought (particularly defensive realism) to conceive World War I as exemplary of an 'inadvertent war'.[2]

Though a focus on the universal, systemic sources of the 1914 crisis is necessary, the notion of an unintended slide into war has been challenged by a wealth of evidence produced by Fritz Fischer and his students. Most historians now agree that during the prewar juncture (1912–1914), Austrian and German policymakers engaged in a series of provocative diplomatic moves risking — if not seeking — a European-wide war. This was a conflict that, as German policymakers realized (though not always consistently), would likely involve all the European powers including Great Britain (see, *inter alia*, Joll and Martel, 2007; Mombauer, 2002).

By contrast to these 'system'-level approaches, many scholars (notably the Fischer School) have sought the origins of the war within the *Sonderweg* ('special path') of Prussian-Germany's internal development. This places responsibility for war squarely with the old ruling elites, locating the mainsprings of Germany's 'grab for world power' in the crisis-ridden character of the country's incomplete modernization. Dominated by tenacious anachronisms, German imperialism is conceived as 'atavistic' in nature, rooted in the pre-modern illiberalism of an authoritarian state. Such explanations reveal the exact opposite problem from systemic theories: an *essentializing* analysis of a single state's so-called pathological development as the primary cause. Yet as Fischer's critics have tirelessly contended, the role and effects of other states' actions leading to the conflict — both during the 1914 crisis and before — still need to be taken into account. For German policymakers were not the only ones prepared to risk war in the midst of domestic crises and external pressures (Schmidt, 1990).

The changing nature of the historiographical debates has largely moved between these two poles of 'externalist' and 'internalist' forms of explanation. Over their course, many scholars have recognized the need to integrate 'system-level' and 'unit-level'

factors into a single framework (Blackbourn, 2003: 335). Yet attempts to do so have thus far largely proven unsatisfactory as the character of theoretical integration has overwhelmingly taken the form of a 'mix and match' of domestic and international determinants. In the lexicon of mainstream IR, external and internal factors are conceptualized as relating to one another as 'independent variables' incorporated at different, discretely conceived levels of analysis. The relationship between the international and domestic is thereby shorn of any theoretical basis in the same socio-historical process from which they emerged. In other words, there persists a clear dissociation of 'geopolitical' and 'sociological' modes of explanation.

The problems with these kinds of explanation become clear enough when looking over the main issues generally cited within the historiography as decisive to the conflict's outbreak: the decline of British hegemony in the face of newly industrializing powers; the time-compressed quality of Russia's and Germany's state-led industrializations destabilizing their respective domestic polities; the steady subversion of the Ottoman Empire and its consequences in reshaping the trajectory of European geopolitics; the rising nationalities problem in the Balkans threatening the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and so on. All these causal processes were inextricably entwined in the making of war. What is missing, then, is the formulation of an alternative logic of explanation uncovering the historical and sociological origins of the war: one genuinely combining 'geopolitical' and 'sociological' causalities as forming interlocking dimensions of a wider ontology of social development and reproduction.

Building on Leon Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development (U&CD), this article offers a first attempt at fleshing out such an approach. It highlights how the necessarily *multiform* character of interactive socio-historical development explains the war's causes, contextualizing the sources of conflict within the developmental tendencies of the Long 19th Century (1789–1914), while analys their particular articulation during the pre-war juncture. In doing so, the article aims to contribute to recent debates in IR and historical sociology.

Thus far, calls for an 'international historical sociology' have been pitched at unsustainably high levels of abstraction, specifically those drawing on the concept of U&CD (but see Green, 2011; Matin, 2007). This work redresses this lacuna, developing the theory *in* and *through* the rich historical terrain of the pre-war period, demonstrating U&CD's utility as both a theory of international relations *and* foreign policy. It thereby provides an empirically focused contribution to recent IR debates on the relationship between history and theory (Hobson and Lawson, 2008), elucidating an approach sensitive to the interaction of *structural* tendencies and *conjunctural* trends. This aims to transcend the persistent disjuncture between the 'abstract-theoretical' and 'empirical-historical' while offering a means of conceptualizing 'contingencies' as a theorizable object of analysis.

There are, of course, limits to the explanatory scope of such a historically and geographically expansive account. What follows is necessarily a 'first-cut' approach to the origins of World War I in its global dimensions. It does not offer a 'total' explanation of the war's causes, which would need to address such crucial issues as the role of strategic cultures and racist ideology in policymaking, among others. While the historical materialist perspective offered below provides a general framework for exploring such themes, the article does not take them up.

The article is divided into three sections. Drawing on the concept of U&CD, Section 1 outlines the theoretical framework informing the empirical analysis, identifying different spatial-temporal vectors of unevenness emerging over the 1789–1914 epoch. Sections 2 and 3 form the bulk of the thematically organized historical narrative structured around the theoretical perspective specified in Section 1. The article then considers the articulation of structural forces operative (or non-operative) in driving the series of interlocking crises developing during the 1912–1914 juncture. The conclusion discusses the question of timing in relation to 'radical contingency' explanations of the war before drawing out the analysis's broader implications for IR theory.

Uneven and combined development over the Long 19th Century

Conceptual horizons

The debate over the causes of World War I is arguably the most prolific historiographical body of literature for any period within the modern age. Its shortcomings reveal a fundamental problem within the social sciences: how to coherently integrate external and internal relations into a synthesized theory of inter-state conflict and war. The concept of U&CD offers a potential resource in transcending this obstinate dichotomy of 'geopolitical' versus 'sociological' modes of explanation, uniquely interpolating an international dimension of causality as interior to development itself as Justin Rosenberg's work (2005, 2006) has shown. This overcomes both realist reifications of the international system as an absolutely autonomous 'supra-social' sphere and classical sociology's reduction of its distinct determinations to a preformed theory of domestic society.

The theory of U&CD can be briefly summarized as follows.[3] The unevenness of social development in history is perhaps its most enduring, essential feature. This is represented not only by the sheer diversity of levels and tempos of development within societies but also between them. Development is ineluctably multilinear, polycentric and co-constitutive by virtue of its very interconnectedness.

Capitalism emerges within this pre-existing structure of unevenness. From its origin, its expansion takes on a 'combined' character fusing with the plurality of existing sociopolitical forms through its internationally mediated spread. Systemically, capitalism progressively gains mastery over this extant unevenness reconstituting its fundamental quality as it unifies the many instances and forms of uneven development into a single, causally integrated, world totality (Trotsky, 1936: 19–20). A 'whip of external necessity' is thereby inflicted upon late comer societies to industrialize in response to the military-geopolitical pressures emanating from the more advanced capitalist centres. The former are compelled to adopt the ready-made developmental designs of the latter.

Reaping these 'privileges' of late development, societies amalgamate distinct 'stages' of the historical process whereby the logics of different modes of production interact with one another in causally consequential ways suffusing every aspect of society. Here, 'development is no longer gradual and "organic" but assumes the form of terrible convulsions and drastic changes' (Trotsky, 1972: 199). In other words, accelerated industrialization results in its own unique 'class of effects', 'ramifying' and unhinging social

structures (Rosenberg, 2008: 10). These contradictions of sociological amalgamation react back upon the inter-societal conditions that produced them, thereby creating the conditions for revolution, inter-state conflict and war. Crucially, the form each 'combination' takes depends on the historical *timing* of the society's incorporation into international capitalism. If U&CD is a universal condition of capitalism, it is one defined by a *norm of differentiation*: there is no singular model of capitalist development.

How might U&CD contribute to explaining the causes of World War I? To answer this, one need detail exactly what must be explained in order to judge whether this alternative perspective marks an advance upon the dominant existing approaches.

Vectors of unevenness and chains of causation

A satisfactory theory of World War I's causes must fulfil a minimum of three criteria. It requires: first, an analysis of the central tendencies of the epoch setting and conditioning the international–domestic contexts leading to war; second, an account of how these structural tendencies related to the different social formations in the immediate pre-war period; and, third, an elucidation of the structural specificities of the war juncture delimiting it from the broader epochal context of which it nonetheless formed a part. What is needed, in other words, is an explanation capturing the precise articulation of a universal crisis — itself emerging from the *general* structural tendencies of the era — with the *particularities* of the pre-war conjuncture differentiating it as a distinct, but in no sense autonomous, temporality. This would address two important questions posed by Gustav Schmidt (1990: 97): first, 'what is special about the conjunction of the July crisis, apart from the simple fact that an explosion was becoming more and more likely after a series of acts of brinkmanship?'; and, second, 'are the general explanations of the causes of the First World War satisfactory, if the structural elements of the crisis … did not result in the outbreak of war during any of the other Balkan crises' of 1908–1913?

A sufficient theorization of the war would need to be able to account for why war did *not* occur under similar circumstances. The real trick, then, is formulating a methodology that avoids the dual dilemma of a historically underspecified causality or a radically contingent historicism: that is, either subsuming the conjunctural phenomenon under unmediated abstract sociological laws or treating it as a hermetically sealed temporality constituted by contingently determined, self-contained causes. One needs to weave the interaction of structural and conjunctural causes into a single explanatory whole. The theory of U&CD worked through as both a 'general' and 'concrete' abstraction offers such a multifaceted framework (Rosenberg, 2005; see Allinson and Anievas, 2009).

Examining the war's general and proximate causes, one can identify three distinct but overlapping spatial-temporal vectors of unevenness whose progressive entwinement transformed the nature and trajectory of European geopolitics.[4] These include: (1) a 'West–East' plane of unevenness capturing the spatial-temporal ordering of industrializations taking place across Europe and beyond over the 1789–1914 period; (2) a 'Transatlantic' one representing the contradictory interlocking of the North American and European economies and the multiple cultural-linguistic, socio-economic and political links connecting the British Empire with its original white settler colonies; and (3) a 'North–South' constellation interlinking and differentiating the multi-ethnic empires

from Central Eastern Europe to the Asia-Pacific (India and China) into a dynamic of asymmetrical interdependency with the capitalist-industrial powers. For each vector, a specific pattern of interdependent and co-constitutive development can be identified — respectively, the variegated patterns of interconnected industrializations; the emergence of a distinctive 'Anglo-Saxon' sphere; and the deepening impediments to modern nation-state building resulting in partially 'blocked' forms of development.[5] This gives each vector its own unique developmental inflection permitting their demarcation as an *object of theorization* rather than simply describing a series of arbitrary instantiations of socio-political differences.

From the intersection of these three constellations of unevenness, one may then deduce four interlacing streams of causation leading to World War I. This partially follows Richard Ned Lebow's (2000) argument that World War I can be best understood as the non-linear convergence of multiple chains of causation which, by the 1912–1914 conjuncture, effected decisive '*gestalt* shifts' in European policymaking circles. However, whereas Lebow stresses the coincidental timing of the four causal streams[6] — thereby asserting the war's *radical contingency* — the account given below emphasizes their necessarily interconnected nature resulting from a unified world-historical process driven by U&CD.

The first causal chain highlights British hegemonic decline in the face of multiple peer-competitors as the Empire's 'advantages of priority' turned into strategic burdens. The second revolves around the interrelations between the domestic socio-political crisis and international security dilemma confronting Germany's elites flowing from the nature and timing of the country's industrialization. The third centres on Russia's combined development which, in the wake of a 'confluence of external setbacks' and 'internal crises', made policymakers apprehensive of the international-domestic costs of another foreign policy defeat driving their decision for war in 1914 (Lebow, 2000: 597). The fourth chain focuses on the destabilization of the Balkans resulting from the precipitating weakening of the Ottoman Empire and connected crises facing the Dual Monarchy. The mutually constitutive development of Slavic nationalisms and eroding Ottoman supremacy enticed the Western powers to geographically reorient their expansionist strategies driving them into increasingly destabilizing inter-imperial conflicts within the region. The confluence of these developments set in train the events leading to World War I.

Advantages and disadvantages of 'priority' and 'backwardness': The development-strategy nexus in the making of war

Ascendency, decline, conflict: British Empire and alliance formations in a world of 'many capitalisms'

The story of the origins of World War I is often told in terms of the decline of British hegemony in the face of the manifold challenges posed by newly emerging powers. Whether in Marxist or realist form, such analyses largely conceive the global conflagration from the perspective of the radical changes in the conditions and distribution of power driven by the uneven development between the great powers (see e.g. Gilpin,

1981; Hobsbawm, 1987; Kennedy, 1980). While recognizing the myriad impacts of unevenness, neither classical Marxism nor realism theorizes its deeper *sociological* effects in determining the war's outbreak.

For most Marxists, the theories of U&CD and imperialism remain disassociated in their objects of explanation (national-international revolution, on the one hand, inter-state rivalry and war, on the other) despite their rootedness in the same historical process of development. For realists, uneven development is powerfully recognized but detached in reified form from its underlying social sources and effects.[7] This severely blunts the analytical scope of its most cherished categories (namely, 'anarchy' and the 'balance of power'). For both theories, the role of interactive political multiplicity as *generative* of sociological difference and inter-state conflict is obscured. The following seeks to rectify these issues, tracing the common foundations of these entwined 'geo-social' transformations.

The rise of the world economy and accompanying industrialization process over the Long 19th Century was largely the outcome of British development in all its *global-colonial* dimensions.[8] That British business could internationalize to such an extraordinary degree was itself the result of the Empire's military superiority benefitting from the country's almost complete monopolization of industrial power for over half a century. Such were the 'advantages' bestowed upon Britain's 'first-comer' industrialization. Yet Britain's hegemonic position was relatively fleeting. For the direct corollary of British capitalist expansionism was that it enabled other states to acquire the means to industrialize in much more intensive time-spans. Later-developing states no longer needed to start from scratch in their industrialization drives, but could acquire and innovate upon the most advanced technologies and organizational forms pioneered by earlier developers. Consequently, Britain's unmatched supremacy soon found itself under the strains of an increasingly crowded field of economic competitors.

Thus emerges the West–East axis of unevenness represented by the classical Gerschenkronite sequencing of capitalist industrializations: Britain (1780s), France (1830s), Germany (1850s), Russia (late 1880s), Japan (1890s) and Italy (late 1890s). This series of causally interwoven industrializations was characterized by an interactive 'leapfrogging' process (Trotsky's 'skipping of stages' accrued by the 'privileges' of late development) emanating from the 'whips of external necessity'. The greater spatial and temporal distance travelled from the origin of capitalism's inception, the more socio-political differences accumulated in an 'orderly system of graduated deviations' (Gerschenkron, 1962: 44; cf. Trebilcock, 1981; Weaver, 1974).

By the late 19th century, this historically staggered and socially interconnected character of capitalist industrializations reconstituted the conditions of state authority and military capability, reconfiguring the European balance of power in the process. The geopolitical benefits afforded to capitalist development were dramatically accelerated with the 'industrialization of war' (McNeill, 1982) as military power became overwhelmingly reliant on levels of industrial development. For the quasi-absolutist empires of central and eastern Europe industrialized warfare translated into a direct interest in promoting capitalist relations necessary to facilitate the production of advanced technologies and transport systems upon which military success increasingly depended. The extraordinary changes in the production and application of the means of destruction effected by industrialized warfare set a new criterion for state power and its successful employment. These

novel military-strategic conditions reflected the historically determinant *social logic* of industrialization unique to the capitalist epoch — a critical point often obscured by realist conceptions of technology and change as socially neutral phenomena.

As the Second Industrial Revolution transformed the technical and organizational foundations of militaries, it also changed the ways state managers strategized and conducted war. Decades of British strategic planning for a crippling naval blockade of Germany, for example, proved a formidable weapon in the latter's eventual defeat in World War I. So too did the global reach of the British Empire and its former Anglo-Saxon colonies, which made vital contributions in terms of economic resources and materials to the Allied war effort (Offer, 1989). The conduct and outcome of World War I were thus crucially determined by Britain's 'advantages' of historical priority.

Yet growth of industrialized warfare also contributed to a dramatic rise in imperial defence costs affecting British military strategy. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 signalled London's abandonment of agricultural protectionism as part of the country's growing international strategy of capital accumulation and industrialization. Thereafter, it was essential for British policymakers to maintain maritime supremacy as the island's growing demand for food and raw material imports required military control of the seas. Naval hegemony became vital not only for the country's continuing prosperity but also for its very survival (Offer, 1989: 118).

This was not so much a problem as long as the trade-off between cheap imports and naval spending remained positive as during the first two decades of the Long Depression (1873–1896). By the mid-1880s, however, naval costs soared as continuing technological innovations blazed apace with the globalization of industrialized warfare. The tide irrevocably turned as unit costs of grain imports per year increased by 30% (at current prices) between 1894 and 1912 while the costs of naval defence rose by a whopping 186% (Offer, 1989: 119–120). This marked the point at which the 'advantage' of historical priority began to turn into a burden.

By the mid-1870s, the international conditions undergirding Britain's 'free trade' order had largely crumbled. The Long Depression inaugurated an era of neo-mercantilist protectionism and imperialist agitation converting economic and geopolitical conflicts into a mutually reinforcing zero-sum game (Hobsbawm, 1987: 46–47, 51–52). Crucial to the Depression's onset was the interconnected chain of industrializations uniting the European and North American food economies — a consequence of the contradictory interlocking of the West–East and Transatlantic vectors heralded by the rapid, convulsive expansion of the world economy. During the 1870s and 1880s, the development of modern transportation systems within the US unleashed vast quantities of grain upon the European market. This shock coincided with the enormous expansion of grain exports by which Russia planned to fund its own industrialization drive. Consequently, a cyclical industrial downturn was transformed into a protracted crisis of downward-spiralling agricultural prices adversely affecting British military power (Hobsbawm, 1987: 36–38; cf. Rosenberg, 2008: 25). The 'advantages of priority' and late development were thus mutually conditioning dimensions of the same overall unevenness of capitalist development.

British policymakers' two-pronged global strategy of protecting overseas investments, colonies and export markets while simultaneously defending against European continental domination by a single state was not a problem so long as Britain remained the pre-eminent

world industrial power. However, once inter-state competition for space 'intensified under the impact of the transport revolution and the industrialization of war', Giovanni Arrighi notes (2005: 93), 'the protection costs of Britain's metropolitan and overseas domains began to escalate, and its imperial possessions turned from assets into liabilities'. Holding 'vast accumulations of capital in relatively backward technologies and a financial sector geared primarily to overseas investment' (Callinicos, 1989: 109), British policymakers faced the dual dilemma of reallocating finances into state-of-the-art defence technologies whilst simultaneously protecting capital investments spatially embedded throughout the Empire. To cope, the Admiralty reduced expenditures by relinquishing naval stations overseas. A diminished British presence in the Far East translated into a diplomatic search for strategic partnerships in the region (Sugiyama, 1988: 28–33; cf. Offer 1989). This eventuated in diplomatic agreements with the US in 1900 and the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902. Hence, Britain's specific temporal location in the development of the world economy produced a structural incentive towards the formation of strategic-military alliances in this brave new world of 'many capitalisms' (cf. Anievas, 2011).

The time-space relations of industrialization effected other crucial strategic-military realignments as exemplified by the rapprochement between Republican France and autocratic Russia. That this long-held rivalry would be settled in the form of an alliance with Britain against Germany was all but unthinkable to most contemporaries. Here, the exorbitant role of foreign finance in Russia's feverish industrialization presents a particularly revealing illustration of the tight interrelation between the sequencing of industrializations and alliance formations.

Like other late developers, Russia was starved of the massive resources required for an intensive state-led industrialization centred on the militarily crucial railway systems. Initially, German foreign loans satisfied Russia's money demands (Geyer, 1987: 150–151; Trebilcock, 1981: 224–227). But as Germany's own fastened industrialization got under way, domestic resources became strained. No matter how much the *Wilhelmstraße* wanted to buttress its diplomacy by financial means, permanent shortages of financial capital thwarted such endeavours (Fischer, 1975). Thus, Russian state and business managers looked elsewhere. Fortunately for French policymakers — who were by this point anxiously searching for a reliable ally to counter German expansionism — Paris money markets had the capital 'surpluses' to spare. For a significant consequence of France's earlier, more gradual industrialization was a higher rate of domestic savings (McGraw, 1983: 243–245; see Trebilcock, 1981). Whatever other factors contributed to the formation of the Franco-Russian alliance, the staggered, interactive sequencing of their respective industrializations proved crucial (Rosenberg, 2008: 25).

German development in international context

This structurally interconnected and contradictory pattern of industrializations, spread out in both time and space, and fundamentally transformed the texture of world politics. Crucial in this spatio-temporal sequencing forming the West–East vector was the location of the Prussian-German state. Unique among the European powers, it merged rapid industrialization and national state-formation into a single compressed 'stage' of development. Squeezed between the interval of earlier industrializers such as Britain and

France to the west and late comers Russia and Japan to the east, German development was internationally pressurized in multiple directions at once.

This middling position of German industrialization had decisive geopolitical and sociological consequences. One may partly agree with David Calleo's (1978: 6) suggestion that '[g]eography and history conspired to make Germany's rise late, rapid, vulnerable, and aggressive'. The *Kaiserreich*'s relatively belated arrival on the international scene occurred after the world was already partitioned among the great powers, making German expansionism appear aggressive and prone to geopolitical counter moves. A persistent disequilibrium emerged between Germany's spectacularly rising economic power and perceived political influence fostering a simmering national sense of injustice and vague search for status recognition as demonstrated in Wilhelm's *Weltpolitik*. The specificities of German foreign policy can be explained by the timing and speed of its internationally stimulated social change representing a 'classical case of an *uneven and combined development*' (Anderson, 1974: 234).

Under the force of its inter-societal milieu, a pre-capitalist Prussian state embarked upon agrarian reforms institutionalizing capitalist relations in the countryside while politically strengthening the Junker aristocracy. After defeating Napoleonic France and incorporating the mineral-rich regions of Rhine-Westphalia, the Junkers strapped themselves to the burgeoning industrial-capitalist forces of Western Germany. Imitating and borrowing technologies from abroad, the Prussian-turned-German state thus witnessed a dramatic acceleration of industrialization granted by the 'privileges' of late development, itself *buttressed by* and *further strengthening* anti-liberal, authoritarian forms of political rule. This socio-economic 'dualism' of the Prussian-German state played itself out politically between the liberal bourgeoisie and conservative Junkers in the constitutional conflicts of the 1860s. Tendencies were, however, already laying the economic bases for their eventual rapprochement. This eventuated in the contradictory amalgam of heavy industrial and agrarian interests into a single hegemonic project (the 'marriage of iron and rye') providing the socio-political foundation for Bismarck's 'revolution from above' which sought to preserve the conservative, absolutist Prussian order while unifying the German nation under its hegemony. This political blueprint of Germany's 'combined' development came to dominate politics and society, albeit in an increasingly crisis-ridden way, up to 1914 (see Anderson, 1974; Berghahn, 1993; Wehler, 1985).

The contradictory nature of German political order was clear from the start. Bismarck's state-led industrialization drive aimed at building a military powerhouse quickly undermined the political conditions upon which the *Kaiserreich* was founded. The conservative countryside, in which Bismarck laid his counter-parliamentary hopes, was drastically depleted during the 1890–1914 period. Massive urbanization accompanied the explosive transformation of German society from a number of small, moderately backward principalities into the most technologically advanced European capitalist state. A numerically diminished, but increasingly radicalized, conservative agrarian class thus emerged in tandem with the hastened rise of the largest, most well-organized and politically significant working-class movement in the world. The challenge to the domestic status quo represented by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) ignited near-hysterical reactions within the ruling classes. Imperialist agitation was increasingly used to ensure that bourgeois and conservative parties remained united against the 'socialist threat'. Between

1912 and 1914, this political situation reached such an impasse 'that many Germans began to see war as a possible catalyst for stabilization at home as well as abroad before time ran out' (Beckett, 2007: 26; cf. Berghahn, 1993: 156–174; Fischer, 1975: esp. 230–236; Gordon, 1974: 198–199; Wehler, 1985: 192–233).

Critical to explaining this cumulative process of socio-political destabilization and corresponding *Weltpolitik*-orientation of German foreign policy was the severe economic dislocations resulting from the Long Depression. This too was primarily a result of the *timing* of German industrialization and its concomitant economic liberalization. As Paul Bairoch has shown, the differential effects of the Depression on specific regions can be explained 'essentially in terms of the *different stages of economic development'*, achieved by states at the time of their economic liberalization. Since Germany was the 'most liberal [commercially speaking] of the major European continental countries' at the onset of the Depression it was also the hardest hit (Bairoch, 1989: 48, 41).[9]

The Depression transformed the foundations of the Bismarckian order. Hitherto, free trade had formed the bedrock of the domestic coalition with the Liberals, providing outlets for the country's growing industries and commerce that Bismarck's laissez-faire policies fostered at home. As long as free trade prevailed, Germany could remain, in Bismarck's words, a 'satiated power'. But as Russian and American grain exports threatened German agriculture, the traditionally free trade Junkers turned protectionist (Calleo, 1978: 13–15). German industrialists in turn demanded the expansion of protected export markets and state contracts. The creation of a large-scale, modern navy satisfied these demands, cementing a strategic alliance between the German Admiralty and heavy industrialists. The protectionist cartel turn of the ruling industrial–Junker bloc resulting from the Depression was particularly significant as the agrarians threatened to veto naval expansionism unless the bourgeois parties repealed the reduced Caprivi tariffs of 1892 (Berghahn, 1993: 39–40, 53–54). There was, then, a direct link between Tirpitz's naval bills and increased agricultural protectionism setting German expansionism on a 'collision course' (Gordon, 1974: 207) with Russia while increasingly antagonizing British policymakers. This gave the heavy industrial–Junker bloc a new lend of lease but at the cost of eventually destabilizing the National Liberal Party, which increasingly divided between internationally-oriented light industries and conservative-protectionist heavy industries (cf. Eley, 1980).

While the Junkers were committed to keeping out cheap Russian grain, industrialists sought to capture the Russian market. Yet, as Gordon notes (1974: 206), these 'two goals were irreconcilable, and the only way for the German government to try squaring them was by applying ever greater dosages of political pressure on Saint Petersburg'. This was exemplified by the 1904 Russo-German commercial treaty, imposing severely disadvantageous terms on a temporarily weakened Tsarist regime, and contributing to Russia's expansionist reorientation into the Balkans directly conflicting with Austro-Hungarian and German interests.

The (geo)politics of German combined development: Towards 'preventive war'

To explain why domestic threats proved so destabilizing, contributing to the ruling classes' so-called *Flucht nach vorn* ('flight forward'), one must turn to investigate

specific *political* features of Germany's combined development. For a key legacy of the 1871 Constitution was the creation of a weakly centralized federal state unable to raise the adequate tax revenues from a Junker-dominated *Bundesstaat*. Since imperial budgets required parliamentary consent, Junker hegemony and the emerging power of the SPD in the *Reichstag* meant that increased armament expenditures faced fierce opposition from both sides of the political spectrum. Only by working with the SPD in 1913 was the liberal bourgeois fraction able to pass joint legislation on tax reforms and increased military expenditures. This drove a wedge between the German government and Conservatives, thereby further undermining an already fragile political coalition without solving the structural dilemmas facing public finances (Ferguson, 1994: 158, 162–154; cf. Eley, 1980).

While the Army Bill of 1913 constituted the largest rise in military expenditure in the Reich's history, it fell far short of the 33% troop increase called for by the General Staff. As the 1913 Bill prompted similar spending measures by other European countries (most worryingly, Russia), it only heightened military leaders' anxieties regarding their ability to raise the needed funds for further armament increases, thus contributing to General Moltke's and others' calls for 'preventive war' (Mombauer, 2001: 151–153). By summer 1914, German policymakers' continuing inability to meet dramatically rising tax revenues to finance the Reich's growing armaments was a major factor contributing to their decision to risk war sooner rather than later. State and military managers believed that by waiting a few years longer to launch a preventive war against Russia, Germany would lose its competitive edge as the political deadlock over tax increases would continue. According to Ferguson (1999: 140), 'the domestically determined financial constraint on Germany's military capability was a — perhaps *the* — crucial factor in the calculations of the German General Staff in 1914'.

Further contributing to the decision for 'preventive war' was the unique socio-political physiognomy of the imperial army. As the mainstay of aristocratic power, the Prussian army offered the 'last bastion of the status-quo' fulfilling the 'dual function' of defending the monarchy against enemies from within and without (Berghahn, 1993: 26–28). Given the geographical position of Germany as a major land-power at the heart of continental Europe it would be expected, according to realist logic, that military strategy would be tailored towards buttressing land armaments and manpower. However, until the army spending Bills of 1912–1913, the strategy pursued was exactly the opposite.

As a percentage of GNP, 1890–1912 saw naval armaments grow exponentially as army expenditures remained relatively stagnant. In terms of total defence expenditures as a percentage of GNP, spending up until 1914 — that is, even *after* the Army Bills — consistently lagged behind France and Russia (see figures and tables in Ferguson, 1994: 148–155). This was *despite* German policymakers' identification of an advancing Russian power after 1908 as *the* primary threat to the European balance of power.[10]

To explain this anomaly facing realist theory, two related factors need to be noted. The first concerns the international interests of German capitalists which favoured a larger navy for commercial purposes and, therefore, generally supported the *Weltpolitik*-orientation of Admiral Tirpitz (cf. Berghahn, 1993; Eley, 1980). A second class-based factor was military managers' attempts to maintain the aristocratic constitution of the Prussian army in the face of the rising social power of the bourgeoisie (Craig, 1955).

Fearing further contamination from the middle and working classes, from 1897 to 1912 the War Ministry repeatedly forwent increases in manpower and expenditures as the navy was allowed to take priority (Berghahn, 1993: 16). Nonetheless, the proportion of noblemen within the Prussian officer corps fell from 65% to 30% between 1865 and 1914. While aristocrats remained overrepresented in the army's highest ranks, by 1913 70% of the Great General Staff were 'commoners' by birth (Craig, 1955: 232–238; Ferguson, 1994: 155; Stevenson, 1996: 41).

In the debate over the Army Bills of 1912–1913, the peculiarly modern, reactionary character of the army's aristocratic *élan* came to the fore as General Heeringen's position against universal conscription and other institutional changes won out. Such reforms, he reasoned, would compromise the army's 'permanent function as guarantor of domestic stability'. General Wandel succinctly put it: 'If you continue with these armament demands, then you will drive the people to revolution' (quoted in Herwig, 1994: 263–264). Revolution was likely an overstatement. If war in 1914 was not a direct means to avert revolution, the direction of German armaments nonetheless proved a vital *mediating link* between domestic and foreign policies (Stevenson, 1996). As the worsening international environment after 1912 necessitated a substantial expansion of the army, risk of 'bourgeoisifying' the officer corps would, conservatives feared, inevitably sever the special bond between army and monarchy. 'All this raised doubts' within ruling circles 'as to their ability to overcome the growing military and strategic problems without resorting very soon to the extreme solution of a major war' (Mommsen, 1981: 29–30).

In sum, Germany's 1871 imperial constitution formed a contradictory amalgam of autocratic and representative features — a 'combination of modern capitalism and medieval barbarism' as Trotsky characteristically called it. These socio-political relations expressed the internationally pressurized nature of the Empire's simultaneous traversal into an industrial-capitalist nation-state. German development drastically 'diverged' from those earlier roads to capitalist modernity set out by Britain and France. Yet the alleged *Sonderweg* of German development may only be considered 'deviant' from the static comparative perspective: that is, one obfuscating the spatio-temporally variegated but interactive history of capitalist development, thereby subsuming Germany's trajectory under an implicit unilinear stagism (see Blackbourn and Eley, 1984). Accordingly, the German experience (authoritarian, illiberal and militaristic) is conceived as a pathological anachronism within the history of capitalism. Such an approach lacks appreciation of the ways in which the sequencing of capitalist transitions were central to the form subsequent 'bourgeois' revolutions took. That German development differed from those of previous states such as Britain and France is precisely explained by these earlier developments.

The putative 'peculiarities' of German development must therefore be conceived as one among many different forms of U&CD characteristic of the *international conjuncture as a whole*. The destabilizing effects of Germany's 'modernization' were less a result of its incomplete or arrested character than a consequence of its *over stimulation* from within and without. This was an intensified 'combination of the basic features of the world process' (Trotsky, 1962: 23) — a consequence of the particular spatio-temporal site of Germany's development within the interactive matrix of capitalist industrializations.

Collapsing empires and rising nationalisms: The 'peripheral' sources of geopolitical conflict and war

Imperial rivalry and revolutionary nationalism: The 'Eastern Question' in the history of uneven and combined development

The twin forces of modernity — nationalism and imperialism — form two sides of the same uneven and combined process of capitalist development. By the early 20th century, the structured inequality of the world economy emerging from the uneven development between states proved a major source of friction among the great powers, a generative condition and rallying point of nationalist bourgeois forces budding within societies, and a means through which the developed capitalist metropoles enforced — individually or in competitive collaboration — their domination over the 'periphery'. The grafting of capitalist relations onto the social structures of the 'backward' countries and rapidly industrializing powers resulted in contradictory hybrids of different social systems, simultaneously unleashing centrifugal and centripetal tendencies uncoupling collective identities from their local and regional contexts and reconstituting them on national foundations. The interlacing dynamics of imperialism and revolutionary nationalism thus formed the basis of empire-building and reconstruction, as well as laying the conditions for their ultimate destruction. Two cases of the latter process of empire disintegration — Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire — are particularly relevant to the discussion here, as their steady decline set the overall conditions leading to world conflict in 1914.

The 'North–South' vector of unevenness, as Rosenberg (2008: 27) terms it, interconnects the ancient multinational empires whose relative power was being progressively undermined by this overall process of capitalist industrialization and nationalist effervescence. While the multi national formations of the Dual Monarchy and Ottoman Empire (like Dynastic China) were far from stagnant in the decades before the war, the *relative* disparities between these states and the western European powers were drastically increasing. The effects of this intersection of West–East and North–South vectors were largely manifested through the series of wars, treaties, revolutions and diplomatic crises witnessed during the period following the start of the German wars of national unification and ending before the First Balkan War. This chain of causally interlinked events configured — and *re* configured — the pattern of military-strategic alliances that eventually went to war in 1914. It also fixed the geographical zone where World War I was ignited.

The emergence of the 'Eastern Question' from the late 18th century onwards constituted a particularly explosive element within European politics as the advancing capitalist states struggled to come to grips with the myriad consequences of Ottoman decline first made plain by the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774. The clichéd 'sick man' of Europe, like the later Dual Monarchy, was propped up by the great powers throughout the 19th century with the aim of maintaining the European military balance of power. If either empire fell, policymakers calculated, a geopolitical vacuum would emerge generating imperialist land grabs in the heart of the European landmass and strategically vital commercial sea-lanes in the Eastern Mediterranean. The result would be a massive

rearrangement of the distribution of power, leaving Germany without its only reliable ally (Austria-Hungary), opening the way for the swift application of Russian power in the Balkans and Straits — two prized areas long sought after by the Tsarist regime. It was precisely such a situation that the European powers (particularly Britain and Germany) long sought to avoid (Anderson, 1966).

The artificially prolonged decline of Ottoman power, interspersed with periods of internal renewal, was intrinsically connected to the phenomenal expansion of the world market and corresponding growth of European military strength. Throughout the 19th century, the Sublime Porte sought desperately to reform its internal structures to meet the threats posed by European states seeking to pry open Ottoman markets. The ability of the British and French empires to eventually impose a series of highly disadvantageous 'free trade' treaties on the Porte in the mid-19th century was the result of an increasing military superiority derivative of the immense productive advantages emerging from their capitalist bases (Kasaba, 1988: 55–56). By contrast, Ottoman attempts to regularize administration and revenue clashed with the tax-farming and tribute-taking structures on which the empire had hitherto relied (Bromley, 1994: 50–51).

Unable to catch up and surpass the advanced industrializing states, the Ottoman formation suffered from a partially 'blocked development'. Escaping formal colonization by the imperialist metropoles, the slowly crumbling Empire eventually fractured into a multiplicity of foreign-ruled and semi-autonomous areas providing the opportunity for the Western powers to siphon off parts of Ottoman lands, while creating the conditions through which the 'Young Turks' seized power in 1908. The contrasting regional developments between an economically dynamic industrial-capitalism emerging in Northwestern Europe (part of the 'West–East' vector) and the relatively stagnant tributary structures of the Porte ('North–South') was thus not only socio-economically uneven but geopolitically 'combined' (Bromley, 1994: 61).

In addition, Ottoman development *sociologically* combined different 'stages' within the anterior structures of the Porte itself as the interventions and pressures of capitalist states in the Middle East resulted in the superimposition of capitalist social relations onto the tributary structures of the Empire. The Young Turks' aspiration to 'turn the foe into tutor' resulting from this process in turn fed back into the international political crises leading to World War I as the 'new regime in Istanbul, espousing a more assertive Turkish nationalism, became embroiled in the Balkan war, the direct prelude to August 1914' (Halliday, 1999: 197). Trapped within the wider maelstrom of Eastern Mediterranean unevenness, the Ottoman formation — transformed through the 'geo-social' ripple of capitalist industrialization — came to restructure the international system in causally significant ways. To fully understand these dynamics turning the Balkans into the 'powder keg' of Europe, attention must be turned to the two other multinational Empires of the region: Austria-Hungary and Russia.

The Ausgleich*, Austro-Hungarian development and the dual alliance*

A major outcome of the Austro-Prussian War was the *Ausgleich* (Compromise) of 1867 establishing the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The *Ausgleich* was of decisive significance to the future direction of European geopolitics in Central and Southeastern

Europe, particularly by institutionalizing Prussian-Magyar hegemony within the Monarchy. This not only buttressed stronger economic-political relations with Germany, helping nurture the Dual Alliance of 1879, but also readjusted the Monarchy's policy towards the Balkans.

The ascendancy of Magyar power was symbiotically conditioned by the steady withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from Europe, gradually enhancing the aggressiveness of the Hungarian landowning nobility. Extending their territorial possessions eastward, the class's overall economic importance grew in central and eastern Europe. Simultaneously, as the Habsburg Monarchy stumbled from one foreign disaster to another, its internal relations became ever more strained. Consequently, the dynasty was 'driven, logically and irresistibly, towards its hereditary foe' (the Hungarian aristocracy) which now became the only class capable of propping up the Empire's authority. The *Ausgleich* of 1867 formalized this tendency towards Magyar hegemony, shifting the 'geopolitical and economic axis of the Monarchy irrevocably … eastward' (Anderson, 1974: 325).

The crucial diplomatic event here was the Congress of Berlin in 1878 signalling the decisive retreat of Ottoman domination in the Balkans with the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Though officially remaining an Ottoman possession, the provinces inhabited by Croatian, Serbian and Muslim populations were now administrated by the Dual Monarchy. With this move, the Habsburgs thereby *internalized the powder magazines of the Balkans into the foundations of its own 'heteroclite' socio-political edifices* (Anderson, 1974: 299). Austria-Hungary's incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its annexation 30 years later and the assassination of the Archduke at Sarajevo 'though separated by decades are inextricably linked' (Williamson, 1991: 59). A further consequence of the Habsburg's eastward drive was the conclusion of the Dual Alliance of 1879 which undoubtedly contributed to closer Franco-Russian relations. Originally conceived as a defensive strategy by Bismarck, over time the Alliance turned into yet another factor destabilizing international order (Joll and Martel, 2007: 54–55; Mulligan, 2010: 27–29).

The exacerbation of tensions in central and eastern Europe was a consequence of the particularities of the Monarchy's combined development. Formed at the interstices of the West–East and North–South vectors of unevenness, Austro-Hungarian development took on a unique hybridity of 'Western' and 'Eastern' forms. The Empire's 'heteroclite structures' expressed 'the composite nature of the territories over which it presided, and which it was never able in any lasting fashion to compress into a single political framework'. As the Magyar aristocracy was the chief obstacle to either a federal or unified royal state solution, the *Ausgleich* failed to resolve the nationalities problem. Instead, increasing the power of the most 'combative and feudal nobility left in Central Europe' (Anderson, 1974: 299, 325) only further aggravated the Monarchy's relations with the Southern Slavs and Romanians. Magyar hegemony was the 'gravedigger of the Monarchy' as witnessed by the Hungarian nobility's bellicose policy of Magyarization which, according to R.W. Seton-Watson (1914: 109), 'led directly' to World War I.

Perhaps more than in any other country of the pre-war era, the foreign policy of the Dual Monarchy was a function of the intractability of these internal problems. Since Magyar influence blocked all reforms aimed at quelling nationalist discontent, Vienna

became convinced that controlling the Serbian 'Piedmont' was fundamental to state survival. The Monarchy thus became the 'one power which could not but stake its existence on the military gamble [of 1914] because it seemed doomed without it' (Hobsbawm, 1987: 323).

After the Annexation crisis of 1908–1909, cracks began to surface in the international consensus propping up the Monarchy as subject nationalists began to look for foreign support (particularly Russia) for their claims to national autonomy. By that time, the constitutional dualism established by the *Ausgleich* was taking its toll on the Monarchy's ability to maintain itself as a formative military power. Since the constitution of the Dual Monarchy mandated that parliament sanction most legislation, the only way the government could bypass the assembly was to pass legislation by decree. This made the Empire's common army a key institutional arena of factional disputes through which the Magyar minority could assert their independence from Vienna. Under these conditions, 'the army functioned as a barometer of separatist pressures in general' (Herrmann, 1997: 33). As Franz Josef was unwilling to risk making any move that could be interpreted as a coup d'état by Vienna, domestic conflicts 'practically paralyzed' the Monarchy's military expansion until the Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911 finally galvanized the government into rapid rearmament. Yet, by that time it was too late. The military balance had already tilted decisively against the Dual Alliance in favour of the Franco-Russian Entente (Herrmann, 1997: 33–34, 173–174; Joll and Martel, 2007: 152–153).

Russian development in the crucible of war, imperialism and revolution

The 19th century witnessed a massive competitive gulf opening up between the ancient Chinese and Indian empires and a handful of Western capitalist states. Though more geographically peripheral to European geopolitics, the slowly collapsing power of the Qing Dynasty in China, as well as the already colonized Indian landmass, were no less important in restructuring the direction and dynamics of inter-imperial rivalries. The Chinese Empire in particular formed the geo strategic 'heartland' of the Asian-Pacific region drawing the imperialist powers into a maelstrom of social upheaval with promises of its immense export market potentials and investment opportunities. The orderly, managed decline of Imperial China was of profound importance to the capitalist metropoles (Mulligan, 2010: 43).

The effects of the power vacuum created by the deterioration of Qing rule was most consequential for Russian development, resulting in the unhinging of Europe's relative equilibrium of forces precipitating the continent's descent to war. As long as the crumbling Chinese empire deflected Russian economic expansionism into Manchuria — Witte's policy of *pénétration pacifique* — it acted to at least partly alleviate European rivalries in the Balkans and Ottoman Empire. This relieved tensions between Austria-Hungary and Russia as demonstrated in their entente of 1897 pledging to secure the Balkans status quo. More generally, the 'Chinese Question' offered a momentary means of great power cooperation, as exemplified by the 'ultra-imperialist' experiments of the 'Open Door' and suppression of the Boxer Rebellion (Mulligan, 2010: 43–45).

At the same time, by drawing Russia into conflict with Japan over Manchuria, eventuating in the Tsarist regime's humiliating defeat and revolution of 1905–1907,

the disintegrating Qing Dynasty effected a dramatic reconfiguration of the European strategic balance. As David Herrmann notes (1997: 7), the 'history of the balance of military power in Europe in the decade between 1904 and the outbreak of World War I was in large measure the story of Russia's prostration, its subsequent recovery, and the effects of this development upon the strategic situation'. The 'geo-social' conflicts formed at the triangular intersection of the differentiated development of the Chinese, Russian and Japanese empires fundamentally augmented the geopolitical axis of European order. This Asia-Pacific 'periphery' of the North–South vector constitutes an important, if overlooked, factor unsettling the international system in the immediate pre-war years.

The disastrous defeat of Russia in the 1904–1905 war signalled a collapse of its military clout resulting in an 'unstable equilibrium' in European land armaments from 1905 to 1908. The impotency of Tsarist power after 1905 was recognized within the policy-making circles of all the main European countries. Nowhere was this more clearly revealed than in Berlin and Vienna, which embarked upon a more assertive policy course in the Balkans. Russia's military weakness was, however, quickly followed by an extraordinarily rapid recovery of its industrial-military capacities. Russia's rearmament drive was largely catalysed by the regime's humiliation in the face of Habsburg intransigence during the Bosnian Annexation Crisis, itself set off by the Young Turk Rebellion of 1908. This marked a point of no return in Austro-Hungary's relations with Serbia and Russia. Unlike previous Austro-Hungarian aggressions in the Balkans, this time they were backed by German threats of war. The 'unstable equilibrium' quickly collapsed as the newly accelerated arms race opened up a new phase of unease within Europe (Stevenson, 2007: 133–134; cf. Geyer, 1987: 255–272; Herrmann, 1997: 113–146).

The war-revolution crises of 1904–1907 were also an important factor in the evolution of Russian–German rivalry. On the Russian side, the military defeat of 1905 marked a decisive *westward reorientation* in Russian foreign policy. Policymakers now sought to avoid further antagonizing Japan over Manchuria and traditional British colonial interests in Persia, Afghanistan and India (Geyer, 1987; McDonald, 1992). The new liberal-leaning Foreign Minister, Aleksandr Izvol'skii, was determined to resolve outstanding quarrels with them in the Far East and Inner Asia. This led to the conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement recognizing their respective spheres of influence in Persia and similar agreements with Japan in July 1907 and 1910 that did much the same in the Pacific. Russian foreign policy now focused westward to the more 'traditional' focal points of Tsarist imperialism: gaining control over the economically vital Straits and securing influence in the Balkans (Geyer, 1987). By the early 20th century, 37% of all Russian exports and over 90% of its critical grain exports travelled through the Straits at Constantinople. With Ottoman collapse looming, Russian policymakers became intensely worried that a rival power might come to dominate the Straits, thereby controlling this 'windpipe of the Russian economy' (Stone, 2007: 13).

On the German side, state managers sought to exploit the opportunity of a momentarily prostrate Russian power bogged down in war and revolution by, first, pushing through the Commercial Treaty of July 1904 and, second, pressing its economic claims in Central Africa. The latter sparked off the First Morocco Crisis of 1905. While designed by German policymakers to break up the *entente cordiale*, it ended up only strengthening the Franco-Russian alliance while laying the first 'bridge between the Anglo-French Entente and Russia' (Fischer, 1975: 57; see Lieven, 1983: 29–31).

The nexus of relations between these three events — the 1904–1905 war, the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 and First Moroccan Crisis of 1905 — also had a number of crucial long-term effects on German military strategy. First, it resulted in the General Staffs drawing up the Schlieffen Plan for a two-front war against France and Russia. This proposed the concentration of superior German forces in the west in a knock-out campaign against the French, before turning to confront Russia in the east. The Plan was based on calculations of Russia's *current* military-industrial power then in a condition of acute weakness. With the rapid recovery of Russian military capabilities and its completion of its western railway lines, the Schlieffen Plan's days were numbered — particularly after the 'Great Program' announced in 1913 (Herrmann, 1997; Stevenson, 1996).

German strategists now calculated that the 'window of opportunity' to launch a successful two-front war would close no later than 1916–1917. This incited growing demands within German military circles for the launching of a 'preventive war' before Germany's strategic advantage was overtaken. Such arguments were part of a broader consensus forming within Berlin and Vienna policymaking circles since 1912 that the military balance would soon swing against them. The time to increase armaments with the aim to strike was fast approaching (Copeland, 2001; Herrmann, 1997; Stevenson, 1996). In March 1914, the younger Moltke explained to Foreign Secretary Jagow that a war *had* to come soon or everything would be lost. As Jagow reported the conversation:

> Russia will have completed her armaments in 2 to 3 years … In his view there was no alternative to waging a preventive war in order to defeat the enemy as long as we could still more or less pass the test. The chief of the General Staff left it at my discretion to gear our policy to an early unleashing of a war. (Quoted in Berghahn, 1993: 181–182)

The tightly knit Schlieffen Plan was enticement for the General Staff to demand war before the circle of largely self-made enemies could arm in time to render it unviable. Despite the General Staff's continuing hopes, the Plan was in fact already inoperable.

Since the First Moroccan Crisis, a *three-front* war had become increasingly likely as the debacle drove British policymakers further into the Franco-Russian camp, as revealed by the signing of the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907. Already before German provocations at Tangiers, conditions had emerged for an eventual Anglo-Russian détente. Specifically, the Russian defeat of 1905 diminished St Petersburg's ambitions in Central Asia, lessening the threat posed to British colonial interests in the region. The 1904–1907 war-revolution imbroglios also reduced London's fears of Russian power providing 'the essential backdrop' to the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 (Lieven, 1983: 31). Though the issue of British participation in a future war on the side of France became a predominating question within German policymaking circles from then onwards, the Schlieffen Plan — as later altered by the younger Moltke — circumvented any chance of assuring British neutrality as it called for a first-strike offensive against France through Belgium (Gordon, 1974).

Likewise, the 1905–1907 Russian revolution had crucial international socio-political effects: reverberating serially across the 'West–East' and 'North–South' planes, it causally interconnected with and hastened structurally analogous developmental dynamics within the different polities thrown up by the same international pressures of capitalist development. Of 'all the eruptions in the vast social earthquake zone of the

globe', Hobsbawm writes (1987: 300), the 1905–1907 revolution had 'the greatest international repercussions'. For it 'almost certainly precipitated the Persian and Turkish revolutions, it probably accelerated the Chinese, and, by stimulating the Austrian emperor to introduce universal suffrage, it transformed, and made even more unstable, the troubled politics of the Habsburg Empire'. Additionally, the 'knock-on' effects of the revolution fed into the series of Balkans crises immediately preceding the July–August 1914 diplomatic crisis.

From Agadir to Sarajevo: Into the conjunctural abyss

At this point of the investigation, the moment is reached where deep structures and world-historical phenomena appear to recede into the background noise of the frenzied chaos of the diplomatic juncture. This is the realm of 'radical contingencies', where even the greatest of historically minded theorists proclaim 'cock-up, foul up' as a main cause of World War I (Mann, 1993: 740–802, esp. 746–764 766, 798). Yet in the rush to eschew all modes of monocausal explanation — if not 'grand theory' altogether — scholars simply relinquish the task of theorizing the socio-historical process as a single whole in all its richness and complexity. The following attempts to sketch how the framework developed above applies to examining the chain of events leading to the July 1914 crisis. In so doing, it analyses the form of geopolitics as it appeared 'on the surface of society' in 'the ordinary consciousness' of the decision-making agents themselves (Marx, 1981: 117).

In any investigation of the pre-war juncture, the Second Moroccan Crisis (June–November 1911) plays a critical role. The Crisis signifies the decisive *caesura* in the international relations of the pre-war period. What were its proximate causes? Why did it *not* result in world war in 1911? And how did it nonetheless set off the chain of events leading to world war in August 1914?

The immediate background to the Moroccan Crisis was French colonialists' use of an indigenous revolt as the pretext for military intervention aimed at further expanding French economic interests in North Africa. The German Foreign Ministry in turn sought to score a diplomatic success against France with a view to weakening Germany's external enemies while strengthening the tottering ruling bloc against the SPD challenge in the forthcoming 1912 elections. In the short term, the diplomatic move had its intended effect. The '*Pather's* leap in Agadir' inspired a groundswell of domestic popular support, particularly among the conservative establishment (Fischer, 1975: 71–75). But, its eventual failure was met by an outburst of nationalist fury further destabilizing the heavy industrial–Junker bloc. Among the radical-nationalist right, the episode strengthened calls for launching a preventive war as a means to domestic unity — 'War as the only cure for our people' (quoted in Eley, 1980: 323; cf. Berghahn, 1993; Mommsen, 1981). Economic interests clamoured ever more loudly for decisive action as significant business segments perceived the raw materials and potential future markets of the African colonies as vital to the health of the German economy (see Fischer, 1975: 80–81). German state managers shared this identification of the 'national interest' with the perceived exigencies of the *Kaiserreich*'s expanding industrial economy. But, with the exception of Foreign Secretary Kiderlen-Wächter, they were *not* yet ready to

risk the '*ultimate step*' (as he called it) of possible war with Britain over Morocco (quoted in Fischer, 1975: 76). Why?

Much of their reluctance had to do with their fears that Germany still lacked the necessary naval armaments to adequately meet the British challenge and, further, that the 'masses' would not yet back war. Tirpitz repeatedly expressed such reservations, advising the Chancellor and Emperor 'to postpone this war which was probably unavoidable in the long run until after the completion of the canal' (quoted in Fischer, 1975: 85). Ex-Chancellor Bülow's retrospective analysis was even more revealing:

> In 1911 the situation was much worse. Complications would have begun with Britain; France would have stayed passive, it would have forced us to attack and then there would have been no *casus foederis* for Austria … whereas Russia was under an obligation to co-operate. (Rathenau in Pogge von Strandmann, 1985: 167–168)

The threat of British intervention and Austria-Hungary's abdication of fulfilling its alliance role were principal issues. For most German policymakers, securing British neutrality in the case of a Continental war was of the utmost importance.

During the July 1914 crisis, Chancellor Bethmann repeatedly sought to lock down such a pledge. Though remaining *hopeful* that Britain might remain neutral, in the end Bethmann risked provoking a European war cognizant that their neutrality was unlikely (cf. Copeland, 2001: 64–66, 111–116; Mommsen, 1973: 33, 37–39; Trachtenberg, 1991: 85–86). The Chancellor's supposed 'calculated risk' was largely the result of his belief that a European war was sooner or later inevitable and that Germany's chance of a decisive military success was steadily declining with every passing year given the incredible resurgence of Russian power since 1911 and specifically after the 'Great Program' of 1913 (Berghahn, 1993; Fischer, 1975: ch. 9). As Bethmann warned on 8 July 1914, 'The future belongs to Russia which grows and grows and becomes an even greater nightmare to us' (quoted in Fischer, 1975: 224).

The necessity of the spark for war affecting the vital interests of the Dual Monarchy was made apparent by Austrian Prime Minister Aehrenthal's refusal to go to war on behalf of German colonial claims. As Chancellor Bethmann was already aware, if and when war came it was hoped that it would be against the Austro-Hungarians so that they were not left to decide whether or not to fulfil their alliance obligations (see quotes in Fischer, 1975: 86–87). This is a particularly significant point. For it reveals the *specificity* of the 1914 'spark' involving Austro-Hungarian interests in the Balkans. It was not just *any* incident that could provoke a generalized world war, but only one directly involving Austro-Hungarian interests — meaning some issue relating to the 'Eastern Question' and thereby also inciting Russia.

The Second Moroccan Crisis was also important for the effects it had on the arms spiral. The Crisis offered the ideal opportunity for Tirpitz to introduce another naval bill, as well as new demands for increases in the size and spending on the army. Due to the already severe strains the military budget was having on the Reich's finances, the result was a rather modest, though still fiscally damaging, rise in German army spending and the scheduling of building three new battleships. But, most importantly from Tirpitz's perspective, the *Reichstag* moved forward the date of the fleet's battle-readiness (Herrmann, 1997: 167–171; cf. Berghahn, 1993: 115–135).

Then in 1913 came the crucial revelation of Russia's 'Great Program' aimed at transforming the country into a military 'super power' greater than Germany in less than four years. Moltke's 'sooner the better' position for a preventive war against Russia, argued since the so-called War Council of December 1912, was appreciably strengthened. The completion of Russia's strategic railways allowing for the Tsarist army's rapid mobilization on Germany's eastern frontier now seemed destined, thereby undermining the foundations of the Moltke–Schlieffen plan. In other words, the time for 'preventive war' had arrived.

Conclusion: Timing is everything

In a fascinating piece, Richard Ned Lebow (2000) emphasizes the coincidental character of the various causes that came together in 1914 to make World War I possible. According to Lebow, Russian security threats facing Germany and Austria-Hungary were largely 'independent' in their causal sources. There was, moreover, 'no particular reason why they should have become acute at the same time'. He thus concludes that '[t]iming was everything in 1914, and time was fortuitous', making World War I 'highly contingent' (Lebow, 2000: 600). Accordingly, Lebow charges structural IR theories as being both underwhelming and overdetermining in their inability to adequately account for contingent, system-altering catalysts in the war's origins. Yet, despite his insistence on the 'multiple streams of independent causes' (Lebow, 2000: 597) producing the war, there is a very different reading to be gleaned from his analysis — one at least partially and ambiguously formulated by Lebow himself. For if the above *general* argument regarding the various relations between the different configurations of developmental dynamics is correct, then the supposedly 'contingent' sources of World War I's origins become rather suspect.

To re trace just one thread of this interconnected picture: West European and Russian expansionism drove the disintegration of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. The Young Turks Revolt in turn fed into the causal conditions resulting in the Bosnian Annexation Crisis of 1908–1909 and Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911. The former irrevocably damaged Austro-Serbian relations while Russian policymakers simultaneously became determined in their resolve to avoid the domestic and international costs of yet another humiliation (a major legacy of the earlier Russo-Japanese war that had reoriented Russian strategy westward in the first place). The Moroccan Crisis (largely the product of Germany's worsening domestic-international position pushing it towards diplomatic brinkmanship) then resulted in the Italian occupation of Tripoli aggravating the Ottoman's precipitous decline and worsening Austro-Hungary's external/internal 'security dilemma' by setting off the two Balkan Wars. A further effect of the Moroccan Crisis was the dramatic acceleration of the Continental arms race into a classic action–reaction spiral as German rearmament set off Russia's 'Great Program' rendering the widespread perception among German policymakers that preventive war must be risked sooner rather than later.

The concatenation of events producing the strategic 'window of opportunity' to be exploited by German and Austria-Hungarian policymakers was the result of the intertwining nature of the socio-historical processes detailed above. The conception of causality here is necessarily 'multi-perspectival' (Rosenberg, 2006: 322), capturing the 'synergistic interaction' of the different causal chains. To this extent, Lebow is broadly correct that a world war would *not* have resulted from any one chain of causation, but

only from the *interaction of multiple streams*. But how this translates into an interpretation of discretely constituted independent causes is much less clear. This is not to make the banal point that everything in the world is related, and thus nothing can be considered an independent cause: the precise links connecting each stream have been pin pointed, as has their shared basis in a theorizable object of analysis.

What is to be made of Lebow's argument that 'timing was everything'? No doubt, as emphasized, the temporal specificity of the conjuncture was important. Earlier crises did not result in European-wide war, and had a Sarajevo-like crisis erupted some years later it may not have resulted in World War I as the 'window of opportunity' was quickly closing. Yet given the fragility of the geopolitical and domestic environments in central and eastern Europe after the Balkan wars of 1912–1913, it seems difficult to imagine that some crisis in the region would not have developed before the window closed. Once the '*gestalt* shifts' in European policymaking circles occurred, a world war became the likely (not inevitable) outcome.

The implications of the above analysis for IR theory span far beyond the specific case of World War I in at least three ways. First, it shows how a theory of 'the international' can be developed as a theory of foreign policy providing a possible resolution to arguably one of the most intractable debates in contemporary IR. Second, and relatedly, it demonstrates the potential for a genuine synthesis of 'sociological' and 'geopolitical' logics of causality within a unified theoretical apparatus. Third, it elucidates how abstract-theoretical concepts only 'operate' through the concrete-historical, thus demonstrating how 'contingent' sources of social phenomena need not be conceived as theoretically exogenous.

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Notes

1. Given the enormity of the literature, I have narrowed my engagement to select works most directly relevant to key arguments. For an extensive bibliography, see Copeland (2001).
2. Notable exceptions include Copeland (2001), Levy (1990) and Trachtenberg (1991).
3. For the original theory, see Trotsky (1959). For the concept's transhistorical extension as a theory of 'the international', see Rosenberg (2006) and the sympathetic critique by Allinson and Anievas (2009).
4. This follows the conceptual approach sketched by Justin Rosenberg (2008: 25–28) with significant alterations including, *inter alia* its expanded geographical scope.
5. India and China are best described as cases of '*de*-development' resulting from European imperialism.
6 Originally three in Lebow's model.
7. Though Gilpin (1981) identifies U&CD as a basis for his theory, nowhere does 'combined' social development enter his analysis.

8. The global-colonial foundations of Britain's industrialization cannot be stressed enough. Likewise, capitalism did not emerge from developments *internal* to Europe. Unfortunately, these issues cannot be pursued here further (see Shilliam, 2009).
9. I must thank Justin Rosenberg for alerting me to this work.
10. See quotes in Geiss (1967: 65–68, Docs. 3, 4), Fischer (1975: 172–174, 370–387), Berghahn (1993: 164–167, 203), Ferguson (1994: 144–145), Herrmann (1997: 136–137, 213–215), Mombauer (2001: 122, 145, 173–179, 189) and Copeland (2001: 64, 69–70, 83–84).

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