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CHAPTER 6

## The Role of Crisis Mismanagement in the Outbreak of World War I

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In this study I analyze the extent to which the outbreak of World War I can be explained by the mismanagement of the July 1914 crisis by political and military leaders.<sup>1</sup> I begin by identifying the preferences of each of the great powers over the set of most likely outcomes of the crisis, along with the assumptions, interests, and expectations that help shape these preferences. I then specify a number of critical decision points in the processes leading to the war and the diplomatic, military, institutional, and domestic constraints facing political leaders at each point. This provides the framework for an analysis of whether this combination of interests and constraints precluded political leaders from taking alternative actions that might have avoided a major war without sacrificing their vital interests.

World War I is the most frequently cited illustration of "inadvertent war" and is the source of many hypotheses on this phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> For this reason it is essential that we understand precisely in which respects (if any) World War I was inadvertent. Such understanding is especially important in light of the current debate over the validity of Fritz Fischer's argument that German political and military elites seized the opportunity created by the assassination of the Austrian archduke to provoke a great power war in order to secure Germany's position on the continent, establish its status as a world power, and solve its domestic political crisis.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that the images of World War I, either as inadvertent or as the deliberate outcome of Germany's drive for world power, are each exaggerated and that a hypothesis based on a belligerent Germany is not necessarily inconsistent with a crisis management/inadvertent war perspective.

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### THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One point that has received inadequate attention in the theoretical literature is that not all international crises are equally amenable to crisis management by political leaders. Some crises are structured in such a way—in terms of the preferences of the actors and the diplomatic, geographical, technological, and organizational constraints on their freedom of action—that they are likely to escalate to war in spite of the desires of statesmen to avoid it.<sup>4</sup> In other cases, political decision makers may give far higher priority to securing their objectives than to avoiding war and may be willing to accept a high risk of war for that purpose. Or, they may actually prefer war to other possible outcomes. The outbreak of war under such conditions should not be treated as a failure of crisis management but instead as the result of antithetical interests of states.

Because of their exclusive focus on short-term considerations, applications of crisis management frameworks often underestimate the importance of the underlying interests and structural constraints that generate the crisis, shape the context within which decisions are made, and, to a great extent, determine the interests of the actors and the strategies available to them. The result is often an exaggeration of the causal importance of the management or mismanagement of the crisis by decision makers. In order to avoid this, a study of crisis management must begin by specifying the underlying preferences of each of the actors and the structural constraints on their actions.<sup>5</sup> This analysis of preferences must incorporate a set of outcomes that is sufficiently differentiated to reflect accurately the definition of the situation by the actors themselves. The common dichotomy between war and nonwar is not useful in all cases, for political leaders often have significantly different evaluations of the desirability of different *kinds* of war based on their assessments of likely outcomes. For example, they may prefer a limited war to a negotiated peace but prefer peace to a larger war involving outside intervention. The failure to incorporate a differentiated set of possible outcomes into the analysis is a serious limitation of many studies of the causes of World War I and other wars, and it has led to some unproductive debates about whether or not decision makers really "wanted war."

The existence of irreconcilable interests between states is not necessarily inconsistent with a strategy of crisis management. A state may prefer the military defeat of an adversary through war to any reasonable negotiated compromise but still wish to conduct the war in such a way as to minimize the likelihood of hostile intervention by third parties. This may require a strategy of intrawar crisis management and intrawar deterrence, and Alexander George's political and operational requirements for successful crisis management are still relevant. We can continue to speak of political limitations on the decision makers' objectives and on the means employed to achieve those objectives in wartime as important criteria for intrawar crisis management designed to secure one's interests without provoking a costly escalation of the conflict. If central decision makers preferred a limited war, yet for whatever reasons fought the war in a way that triggered an undesirable escalation, then the outcome could be attributed in part to the failure of crisis management.

My analysis of the role of crisis mismanagement in the outbreak of World War I will begin with an analysis of the preferences of each of the great powers over

various possible outcomes of the crisis.<sup>6</sup> I will then identify a number of critical decision points in the processes leading to war. At each point I specify the options available to each of the great powers; identify the expectations of political leaders (and differences among them) regarding the intentions of their adversaries and the likely outcomes of various courses of action, including the chances of victory or defeat and likely diplomatic and domestic consequences; analyze whether the actions of political and military leaders contributed to the escalation of the crisis to war and whether those actions deviated from the political and operational requirements of crisis management; and assess the extent to which departures from these principles of statecraft were compelled by the interests and expectations of political leaders and the structural constraints under which they operated, and the extent to which those actions can be better explained by flawed information processing, decision making, and crisis mismanagement.

I will also attempt to evaluate whether the probability assessments of the political leaders were reasonable given the information available, whether more timely actions might have had more favorable consequences, and whether more creative statecraft might have generated new options and changed the structure of incentives in a way that could have led to a less costly outcome. Because my primary concern is to evaluate whether the combination of interests and constraints prevented political leaders from acting in a way that might have avoided a major war and to do so within a reasonably parsimonious framework, I will not give much attention to the psychological factors and human limitations that affected the behavior of decision makers.<sup>7</sup>

I want to emphasize that the question of the role of crisis mismanagement in the processes leading to war is not equivalent to the question of the causes of war. Whereas the latter question is concerned with both the underlying (or remote) and immediate (or proximate) factors contributing to war, the question of crisis mismanagement is concerned primarily with the immediate causes. Focusing on these proximate causes directs attention away from the broader structural forces that shape the military, political, social, and economic context within which the crisis occurs.<sup>8</sup> These factors are not ignored in this study but are incorporated into the interests and preferences of each of the great powers and the structural constraints of their choices.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the complexity of the crisis leading to the outbreak of war in 1914 and the critical importance of the timing of actions, I have included a timeline of key events in the appendix.

### THE INTERESTS, PREFERENCES, AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE ACTORS

In the aftermath of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the leaders of all of the European great powers expected that Austria-Hungary would seek some form of compensation from Serbia. Serbia had been suspected of some complicity in the assassination, and its actions had become an increasing threat to the internal stability of the fragile Austro-Hungarian empire. There was little fear in the immediate aftermath of the assassination that war or even a major crisis would

inevitably follow, for it was generally assumed that significant Serbian concessions would be forthcoming and sufficient to maintain the peace.<sup>10</sup>

The fear of war increased dramatically on July 23 and 24 with the news of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and its extreme demands.<sup>11</sup> The sense of danger was intensified by the fear that because of interlocking alliance agreements, there was a good chance that an Austro-Serbian war might draw in Russia in support of Serbia, Germany in support of Austria-Hungary, and France in support of Russia, along with the respective Balkan allies of each of the great powers, creating a continental war. It was also feared that the war could expand further into a general European or world war through the intervention of Britain on the side of the Entente.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, most of the leading political decision makers in July 1914 perceived four possible outcomes of the July crisis:

1. A peaceful but one-sided *negotiated settlement* based on Serbian acceptance of most of the Austrian demands
2. A *localized Austro-Serbian war* in the Balkans
3. Expansion of the Austro-Serbian conflict into a *continental war* involving Russia, Germany, and France as well as Austria-Hungary and Serbia
4. Expansion of the continental war into a *world war* through the intervention of Britain<sup>13</sup>

In the decision-theoretic framework that will guide this study, these four possibilities constitute the set of feasible outcomes of the crisis.

First let us consider *Austria-Hungary*. Faced with increasingly intractable ethnic problems and internal decay in its multinational empire, the increasing strength and hostility of Serbia, and the deterioration of the dual monarchy's position among the great powers, Austro-Hungarian leaders had become increasingly desperate and saw only two alternatives: the preservation of the dual monarchy through the reconstruction of the Balkans under its own domination, or the collapse of the monarchy.<sup>14</sup> They believed that the assassination of the archduke provided the perfect opportunity to move against Serbia, that immediate military action would be perceived as legitimate by the other powers, that although Russia and France were gaining in strength they were not yet ready for war, and that a preventive war against Serbia to arrest both external and internal decline was necessary while the military and diplomatic contexts were still favorable.<sup>15</sup>

The only concessions that Vienna would have accepted in lieu of war were those that provided an opportunity to check Serb nationalism and break Serbia's hold on the loyalties of the minorities of the dual monarchy, which would have required Serbia's total and humiliating acceptance of all Austrian demands. Austrian leaders recognized that no Serbian government could accept the demanded infringement on Serbian sovereignty without soon being overthrown, and in fact they constructed the ultimatum in such a way that it was too humiliating for Serbia to accept. When Serbia surprisingly accepted the vast majority of the terms of the ultimatum, Austria-Hungary still proceeded with a declaration of war, which

revealed its preference for war over a settlement involving anything short of unconditional Serbian capitulation.<sup>16</sup>

The evidence is mixed regarding the extent to which the risk of Russian intervention was acknowledged and incorporated into Vienna's decision-making calculus. Although they recognized some risk of Russian intervention, Austrian leaders (and particularly Chief of Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf) believed that an intervention could in all likelihood be avoided by a *fait accompli* against Serbia backed by firm assurances of German support (just as German threats had forced Russia to back down in the Balkans crisis of 1908).<sup>17</sup> Though Austria clearly preferred a local war to a continental war, the status quo was so intolerable that a continental war was preferable to a negotiated peace. Thus, Austria was willing to risk a larger war through Russian intervention, particularly as long as Russia was perceived to be unready for war.<sup>18</sup>

Although Austria perceived British intervention to be highly unlikely, it would have been very costly, for by putting more pressure on Germany in the west, British intervention would further delay Berlin's ability to divert its armies to the east and therefore leave Austria-Hungary in a vulnerable position with respect to Russia. If Austrian decision makers had been faced with the choice between a negotiated settlement or a world war, they probably would have preferred the former. But because they preferred a local war to a negotiated settlement, they pursued a policy of crisis management only to the extent that they believed a *fait accompli* against Serbia would minimize the risks that a local war would escalate.

There is little doubt that the Austro-Hungarian preference for a local war over a negotiated settlement based on unilateral Serbian concessions was not unconditional but was contingent on German support. Austrian leaders needed German support for both diplomatic and domestic political reasons. Both Foreign Minister Leopold von Berchtold and Chief of Staff Conrad feared being abandoned by Germany and strongly preferred a negotiated settlement to an Austro-Russian/Serbian War without German support for Austria. Austrian leaders also believed that their decaying monarchy could embark on war only if it was united internally, and this was problematic. Emperor Franz Joseph wanted to wait for the results of the official investigation of the assassination to prove Serbian complicity, and Hungarian Prime Minister Stephan Tisza also opposed war, perhaps for domestic political reasons.<sup>19</sup>

The German blank check of July 5 and 6 was sufficient to satisfy Conrad and (after some negotiation) to persuade the political opposition within Austria-Hungary that war was a desirable solution. Luigi Albertini concludes that if Germany had not wanted Austria to move against Serbia, "neither Francis Joseph, nor Berchtold, nor even Conrad would have gone ahead with the venture." Thus, German support was a necessary condition for an Austro-Hungarian war against Serbia.<sup>20</sup>

Serbia contributed more to the onset of the crisis (by failing to prevent the assassination) than to the escalation of the crisis to war. Serbia preferred peace to war with Austria and was willing to make significant concessions in order to preserve it, but only up to a point. The Serbian documents show that Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pasic intended to accept no demands that infringed on Serbian sovereignty, in part because extreme concessions would be politically impossible. Although Russian support and, in fact, encouragement of Serbian firmness were undoubtedly

helpful, Belgrade's hardline position predated the ultimatum.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that Serbia's rather conciliatory reply to the ultimatum<sup>22</sup> represented its maximum concessions, that it was not inclined to be more flexible in extended negotiations with Austria-Hungary, and that the concessions likely to appease Vienna would probably have been unacceptable to Belgrade.<sup>23</sup>

Russia's leaders believed that their strategic and economic interests in the Turkish Straits depended on maintaining Serbia and Romania as buffer states and that Russia's influence in the Balkans and indeed its great power status depended on its influence among the southern Slavs and its patronage of Serbia. Yet the tsar and other officials were appalled by the assassination and could not risk alienating Britain. On balance, they were willing to allow Serbia to be chastised severely as long as Austria removed from the ultimatum "those points which infringe on Serbia's sovereign rights."

Thus, the tsar preferred peace based on some Serbian concessions to an Austro-Serbian war, but he also preferred a continental war and even more a world war with British intervention against Germany to a local war in the Balkans, for Russia could not allow Serbia to be crushed by Austria. This position was reinforced by public opinion and the press, which was strongly pro-Serbian, and by the belief among many Russian leaders that an assertive foreign policy was necessary for their own domestic political purposes and for the internal development of Russia.<sup>24</sup>

Russian leaders also believed that Russia's reputation was at stake, both as a great power in Europe and as the traditional protector of the Balkan Slavs. They were particularly sensitive to its recent humiliations in the annexation crisis of 1908-1909 and the Russo-Japanese War and believed that to back down again would seriously undercut its future power and influence in the Balkans and in the European great power system as a whole. Foreign Minister Sergius Sazonov spoke for most Russian leaders, including many moderates without panslav leanings, when he stated that if Russia were to abandon the Slavs now, "she would be considered a decadent state and would henceforth have to take second place among the powers."<sup>25</sup>

Nearly all factions within Britain preferred a negotiated settlement, based on Serbian concessions, to any war, and British leaders made considerable efforts to discourage Austria-Hungary from attacking Serbia. British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey had no sympathy for Serbia, and although he preferred a negotiated settlement based on significant Serbian concessions to an Austro-Serbian war, he was willing to tolerate some Austrian military action against Serbia. Grey was more concerned with localizing the war and preventing escalation than with avoiding Austrian action per se, and hence he strongly preferred a local war to a continental war as long as Austrian actions were kept within limits.<sup>26</sup> He believed that the best way to avoid a continental war was to prevent a local war, and to that end, Grey undertook several diplomatic initiatives. These included his July 26, 1914, proposal for a four-power conference in London and his proposal on the 29th that Austria halt its military advance in Belgrade.<sup>27</sup> But if the war were to escalate to a general continental war, Grey, other Liberal Imperialists, and Unionists believed that British interests in the integrity of France and the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe would be sufficiently threatened that British intervention would be necessary. Thus,

they preferred a world war to a continental war. But the radicals, Labour, middle-of-the-road liberals, and many in the cabinet preferred neutrality, and it took the German violation of Belgian neutrality to sway the idealists on the left.<sup>28</sup> Thus, British preferences between a continental war and a world war were context dependent, unstable, the source of considerable internal debate, and they only emerged over time.

France had no direct strategic or reputational interests in the Balkans and had not given her Russian ally much support there in recent diplomatic crises. But the alliance with Russia was the cornerstone of France's security policy and its only protection against Germany. France had to support Russia in any war with Germany, but for domestic reasons it was highly desirable that the war be over an issue that was perceived to involve a direct threat to France and that Russia not initiate the war (as specified in the alliance treaty).<sup>29</sup> President Raymond Poincaré and Premier René Viviani hoped that Austria would not push too hard and that Russia could tolerate some Serbian concessions; they thus preferred a negotiated peace to a local war and a local war to a continental war. They did their best to restrain Russia without alienating it and to support plans for the localization of any Austro-Serbian war (including the Halt in Belgrade Plan), though their absence from France during much of the crisis limited their influence in the other capitals.<sup>30</sup> But if Russia insisted on war, French leaders knew they would be forced to follow rather than risk the disintegration of the alliance, and in that case they preferred a world war with Britain on France's side.

The critical case is that of *Germany*, for key Austrian and particularly Hungarian decision makers were unwilling to move against Serbia without German support. The early revisionist view in the 1920s was that Germany did not want war of any sort but needed to maintain Austria-Hungary as its only great power ally in Europe, and that in spite of its best efforts to restrain Vienna, Germany ultimately allowed itself to be dragged unwillingly into a world war by its weaker ally.<sup>31</sup> After the path-breaking work of Fischer, it is now generally agreed that Germany preferred a local war in the Balkans even to a one-sided negotiated settlement, that it exerted sustained pressure on an already eager Austria-Hungary to initiate a war, and that it was willing to tolerate a high risk of a continental war in the process.<sup>32</sup> But the outcome that German political leaders feared most, and almost certainly did not expect, was the expansion of a continental war into a world war through British intervention.

In response to the assassination of the archduke and Vienna's subsequent proposal "to eliminate Serbia" as a key actor in the Balkans, the kaiser informed Austrian Ambassador Count Ladislas Szogyeny on July 5 that Austria-Hungary could "count on Germany's full support" even in the case of "grave European complications," including Russian intervention. This infamous "blank check" was formally issued by Chancellor Théobald von Bethmann-Hollweg the next day, and there is substantial evidence that Germany not only gave Austria-Hungary a free hand but actually encouraged it to move militarily against Serbia. Many German leaders doubted Vienna's resolve and urged Vienna to move as quickly as possible in the hope that a *fait accompli* would minimize the likelihood of the expansion of the war. Germany also insisted that the ultimatum to Serbia be framed in such strong

terms as to make Serbia's acceptance virtually impossible, which only reinforced Vienna's determination. Two weeks later, when Grey and Sazonov were trying to buy time and manage the crisis, Germany gave no support to proposals for mediation between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, did all that it could to sabotage them, and continued to press Austria-Hungary to act quickly. Thus, the evidence is fairly clear that Germany preferred a local war even to a one-sided peaceful settlement of the Austro-Serbian conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Although German political leaders were willing to accept the risk that a local war would escalate into a continental war, they actually preferred a local war to a continental war. They hoped and expected that an Austrian *fait accompli* against Serbia, backed by German threats against Russia, would enable the central powers to manage the intrawar crisis in such a way as to minimize the risk of escalation, though they recognized some risk of Russian intervention and were willing to tolerate that risk.<sup>34</sup>

Austria would almost certainly emerge victorious from a localized Austro-Serbian war. Such an outcome would do more, however, than strengthen Austria at the expense of Serbia and reduce the Slavic threat in the Balkans; Bethmann-Hollweg and others believed that if France were economically and militarily unable or unwilling to come to the aid of Russia, there was a good chance it might be divided from Russia. In Fischer's words,

the central objective of [German] diplomacy . . . was to split the Entente, and this Bethmann-Hollweg meant to enforce at any price, with or without war. In any case the Serbian crisis would bring about a re-grouping of continental power relationships in a sense favorable to Germany and without intervention by Britain. The conflict must be localized . . . and Germany hoped to bring about a new grouping of forces in both the Balkans and the Mediterranean.<sup>35</sup>

Jarausch makes a similar argument:

A local Balkan war would bring a diplomatic triumph, a realignment of the south-eastern states and the breakup of the Entente. Equally likely seemed a continental war, engulfing Russia, Austria, France, and Germany. In such a conflict, the general staff promised a good chance of winning. Less desirable than a localized conflict, a continental struggle might ease the Russian pressure from the east, revitalize faltering Austria and regain the diplomatic initiative in the Balkans. In Bethmann's mind only the last alternative was fraught with unacceptable danger: world war.<sup>36</sup>

Jarausch concludes that Germany wanted a "quick punitive strike, but not . . . a continental or world war. . . . Bethmann clearly preferred local war, was willing to gamble on continental war, but he abhorred world war."<sup>37</sup> There is little doubt that world war was the last preference of all German leaders. Even Fischer and Imanuel Geiss, the strongest supporters of the German war guilt argument, do not go so far as to argue that Germany sought a world war and argue instead that the neutralization of Britain was a central aim of Bethmann-Hollweg's foreign policy.<sup>38</sup> It would be much easier to handle Britain after either a defeat of France and Russia or an Austrian smashing of Serbia that left the Entente in shambles.

The question of German preferences between a continental war and a local war is more difficult to establish, though the bulk of the evidence suggests that most German political leaders preferred a local war but were willing to risk a continental war. The view of Fischer and his associates that Germany preferred a continental war<sup>39</sup> is based in part on the view that Germany wanted a preventive war against Russia before the completion of Russia's military reorganization and the modernization of its railroad system. Support for a preventive war among German civilians as well as the even more hawkish military is thoroughly documented,<sup>40</sup> though the question of whether they actually preferred continental war to a local war is rarely addressed. My argument is that the fear of Germany's relative decline led German political leaders to prefer a continental war to the status quo, but that their expectations that a localized Austro-Serbian war would lead to the splitting of the Entente and the regrouping of European diplomatic alignments (as well as an Austrian victory) led them to prefer such a war as a less costly means of achieving Germany's larger security interests. It was in part for this reason that Bethmann-Hollweg opposed a preventive war against Russia.<sup>41</sup>

The incentive for a continental war might have been further enhanced by the hope of German political leaders that a major war would bolster their domestic political support and give them added time to deal with the internal crisis arising from the consequences of industrialization and the rise of the Social Democracy movement.<sup>42</sup> Although German political elites recognized the domestic benefits of an external war, they also recognized that such a war carried substantial risks; a victorious war by Austria against Serbia, on the other hand, would bring domestic benefits with a minimum of risks.<sup>43</sup> Thus, because of a combination of preventive and scapegoat motivations, German political leaders preferred a local war to a continental war and the latter to a negotiated settlement but were willing to risk the second in pursuing the first so as to avoid the third. These motivations were strong enough to increase the critical risk of escalation the Germans were willing to accept in encouraging Austrian military action against Serbia but not so strong that they actually preferred Russian intervention and the continental war that would follow.

We can now summarize the preferences of the five leading great powers plus Serbia in the set of the four most plausible outcomes of the crisis: a negotiated peace based on significant but not unconditional Serbian concessions (NP), a localized war in the Balkans between Austria-Hungary and Serbia (LW), a continental war involving Germany on the side of Austria, and Russia and France on the side of Serbia (CW), and a general European or world war with Britain joining the war against the central powers (WW). Here the symbol > means preferred to and ? indicates that a definitive preference cannot be established.<sup>44</sup>

Austria-Hungary	LW	>	CW	>	NP	>	WW
Germany	LW	>	CW	>	NP	>	WW
Russia	NP	>	WW	>	CW	>	LW
France	NP	>	LW	>	WW	>	CW
Britain	NP	>	LW	>	WW	?	CW
Serbia	NP	>	WW	>	CW	>	LW

Thus, all of the European great powers plus Serbia preferred a negotiated settlement to a world war. Yet they found themselves entrapped in a world war that resulted in enormous human and economic costs, profound social and political changes, and the collapse of three empires, but that achieved few of their goals, settled little, and set the stage for another cataclysmic world war two decades later. How could this happen? Was the crisis structured in such a way that each state's rational pursuit of its own interests led inevitably to a world war, or did statesmen fail to manage the crisis in a way that might have avoided a world war while preserving their vital interests?

It must be recognized that political leaders were not confronted with a single decision as to whether or not to go to war in 1914 but, instead, with a series of decisions at a succession of critical decision points as the crisis unfolded over time. Their preferences concerning outcomes were relatively stable over time, but their policy options, strategic constraints, available information, and policy dilemmas were often different at these successive decision points. Moreover, each decision altered the constraints that decision makers faced at the next critical juncture and further narrowed their freedom of maneuver. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the calculus of choice at each of these critical decision points.<sup>45</sup>

### CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

The key decision points were as follows:

1. The Austro-Hungarian decision of whether to attack Serbia or to accept a negotiated settlement based on extensive but not unconditional Serbian concessions.<sup>46</sup> An Austrian declaration of war was a necessary condition for war of any kind.
2. The German decision of whether to support or encourage an Austro-Hungarian attack against Serbia. German support for Austria was a necessary condition for war of any kind.
3. The Serbian decision of whether to give an unconditional acceptance to the Austrian terms. Unconditional acceptance of the ultimatum would have been sufficient for peace and the absence of a war of any kind.
4. With the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war, the decision for each of the great powers as to whether to accept the Halt in Belgrade proposal. Austrian (and German) acceptance of this proposal would probably have been sufficient to prevent a continental war (and therefore a world war) and to terminate the Austro-Serbian conflict in its early stages.
5. The Russian decision of whether to intervene in support of Serbia or to allow her to be crushed by Austria. Nonintervention by Russia was a necessary and sufficient condition for the localization of the conflict.
6. The German decision of whether to stand aside in an Austro-Russian war, intervene against Russia alone, or initiate a war against France as well as Russia.
7. The British decision of whether to intervene or not in the continental war. Intervention meant world war.

The choices made at several of these critical junctures are fairly easily explained in terms of the preceding discussion of the various great powers' preferences and their expectations regarding possible actions and their consequences. Austria wanted to reduce Serbia to the status of a vassal either through war or through Serbia's total capitulation and, once assured of German support, refused to compromise. Germany's support for Austria follows from its preferences for a local war and its assumption of British neutrality in the event of a continental war. Serbia was willing to compromise but not to the point that would infringe on its sovereign rights. Because both Germany and Austria wanted a local war, in one sense crisis mismanagement played essentially no role in the outbreak of the Austro-Serbian war on July 28. In another sense, however, the two countries did engage in intrawar crisis management, for they believed that an Austrian *fait accompli* in conjunction with German deterrence of Russia would be sufficient to secure their objectives while at the same time minimizing the risks of Russian intervention and the expansion of the Austro-Serbian war. Their willingness to risk a continental war was contingent, however, on the critical assumption of British neutrality, to which we now turn.<sup>47</sup>

### THE ASSUMPTION OF BRITISH NEUTRALITY

Because German support of Austria was a necessary condition for an Austro-Serbian war and German expectations of British neutrality in a continental war were a necessary condition for its support of Austria, German perceptions of the strong likelihood of British neutrality emerge as the key to the escalation of all stages of the crisis. I will argue that Bethmann-Hollweg and other German political leaders were quite confident of British neutrality, that they based their policy on that expectation, and that only with the shattering of their assumption on July 29 did they reverse their policy and attempt to manage the crisis to avoid war. I will then attempt to explain why Germans clung to this dubious assumption, focusing both on the British failure to give a clear commitment to intervene and on the German failure to recognize the warnings that did exist.

The kaiser had been convinced from the beginning of the crisis that Britain would stand aside from a European conflict. Later in the war he exclaimed, "If only someone had told me beforehand that England would take up arms against us!" The evidence is less clear concerning Bethmann-Hollweg, who at times appeared to waver on the question of the likelihood of British intervention and who recognized the degree of uncertainty involved.<sup>48</sup> But the bulk of the evidence seems to suggest that Bethmann-Hollweg was generally confident of British neutrality and that he had based his entire policy on that assumption. He assured the kaiser (July 23) that "it was improbable that England would *immediately* enter the fray," implying that if England did intervene it would probably be too late. Bethmann-Hollweg remained convinced of British neutrality until the night of July 29, when the German ambassador to England, Karl Lichnowsky, conveyed an unequivocal warning from Grey that although Britain would stand aside in an Austro-Serbian war, it would probably be forced to intervene if France were involved.<sup>49</sup>

The German military, perhaps reflecting a tendency toward worst-case military planning, generally did not share the assumption of British neutrality. Alfred von

Schlieffen's original plan was based on the expectation of British intervention in response to a German attack against France, and this assumption was shared by Helmuth von Moltke and most other military leaders. The German military had little respect for the British and discounted the impact that their intervention would have on the war. The Germans expected a short war that would be decided before the British had time to make an impact and for that reason did not push the civilian leaders particularly hard to secure British neutrality. There is no doubt that Bethmann-Hollweg, even in his most pessimistic moods, accepted this minimum assumption that Britain would not intervene early in a continental war.<sup>50</sup> In any case, the German military did not begin to have a decisive influence on key decisions until July 30, and by that time perceptions of British intentions were fairly uniform among German civilian and military leaders.<sup>51</sup>

The assumption of British neutrality by Bethmann-Hollweg, the kaiser, Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, and others was the cornerstone of German policy throughout the July crisis up until July 29. Albertini concludes that there is little doubt that in allowing Austria to attack Serbia, "Germany started from the assumption that, if the attack developed into a European war, England would remain neutral." The importance of British neutrality is suggested by Bethmann-Hollweg's efforts throughout the crisis to secure a formal commitment of neutrality from the British. He believed that British policy could be influenced by German diplomacy and concessions and that the likelihood of Britain's neutrality depended upon its perception that Germany was fighting a defensive war in response to Russian aggression.<sup>52</sup>

This concern for British neutrality was reinforced by domestic political considerations. Bethmann-Hollweg wanted to ensure a united front at home and was uncertain of the intentions of the Social Democrats, who had vacillated between a socialist-internationalist and a socialist-patriot position (they had supported the Army Bill in 1913). Bethmann-Hollweg believed that the Social Democrats were virtually certain to support a defensive war for which Russia could be blamed. Thus, for both diplomatic and domestic political reasons, he went to great lengths to ensure that Germany did not mobilize before Russia so that Russia would bear the onus for starting the conflict.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of British neutrality to the Germans is also demonstrated by their reaction to Lichnowsky's reports beginning July 26 that Grey had changed his position (after Austria's rejection of Serbia's response to the ultimatum). The kaiser was the first to take these warnings seriously (July 27), and within a day he made his compromise Halt in Belgrade proposal.<sup>54</sup> It was not until Lichnowsky's telegram on the 29th that others' expectations of British intentions began to shift, but the response in Berlin was immediate, drastic, and quite revealing. As Fischer argues, German political leaders, especially Bethmann-Hollweg, were "shattered" by that telegram, for "the foundation of their policy during the crisis had collapsed." Bethmann-Hollweg responded with a flurry of six increasingly urgent telegrams that night. He proposed that Vienna accept mediation and the Halt in Belgrade plan, and warned that Germany would not allow itself "to be drawn wantonly into a world conflagration by Vienna."<sup>55</sup> These efforts by the chancellor appear to represent a sincere effort to find an acceptable resolution to the crisis that would

avoid the one outcome he had always feared but had recognized was likely only on the 29th. In a span of several hours, Bethmann-Hollweg reversed the policy that had guided Germany throughout the July crisis.<sup>56</sup>

Berchtold's first response was to reject the chancellor's proposal, though he delayed a formal response. After three weeks of German pressure to move against Serbia, Austria-Hungary had made the politically difficult decisions to issue the ultimatum, declare war, and begin the bombardment of Belgrade and the mobilization for war. Once these actions were taken it was difficult to modify and redirect them. This would involve an enormous loss of credibility, the upsetting of a coalition of domestic political interests that had not been easy to construct, and the undoing of a psychological commitment. As Lebow argues, "[H]aving finally crossed their psychological Rubicon, the Austrian leaders obviously felt a tremendous sense of psychological release and were hardly about to turn back willingly."<sup>57</sup>

This episode demonstrates the importance of the timing of actions designed to reinforce crisis management. Had Germany pressured Austria-Hungary for restraint prior to the declaration of war on the 28th, it would have been far more difficult for Vienna to resist, particularly given Tisza's likely support for the peace proposals and the consequences of his defection for the internal unity that Austrian leaders perceived to be essential for any war effort. Austrian acquiescence would have been even more likely had the German pressure come before the ultimatum was delivered on the 23rd, and there is every reason to believe that an earlier warning from Grey would have been sufficient to trigger a German warning to Vienna. Albertini concludes that "if Grey had spoken before 23 July, or even after the 23rd but not later than the afternoon of the 27th, as he spoke on the 29th, Germany would very likely have restrained Austria from declaring war on Serbia and the European war, at least for the time being, would have been averted."<sup>58</sup>

It is conceivable, however, that even as late as July 30 the war could have been avoided, though the margin for maneuver was admittedly thin. Berchtold continued to delay a response to Bethmann-Hollweg's proposal, and the chancellor continued his pleas for peace but with less enthusiasm. He refrained from intensifying the pressure on his Austrian ally, perhaps because of an increasing fatalism, a sense of narrowing options, and a loss of control induced by the psychological stress of the crisis.<sup>59</sup> This restraint was unfortunate, for stronger German pressure on Austria-Hungary probably would have worked at this point. In spite of the diplomatic, domestic political, and psychological costs to Vienna of reversing course after a declaration of war, the prospect of being left to fight Russia and Serbia alone would have been even less desirable. In addition, strong German pressure might have provided Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza with an excuse to back out of a decision he had undertaken only with the greatest reluctance, and his defection would have undermined the internal unity necessary for a successful war effort.<sup>60</sup>

It is easy to say that Germany should have known that Britain would intervene in any continental war involving its French and Russian allies, particularly if Belgium's neutrality were violated. A German victory in a two-front war would give Berlin a position of dominance on the continent and control of the channel ports that were so critical for British naval security, leave Britain without strong allies on the continent, and provide Germany with a strategic and industrial base

from which it could challenge Britain on the global level. British support for France in the 1905 and 1911 Moroccan crises was a clear indicator that no British government was likely to stand aside while Germany increased its influence at the expense of France. The naval agreements with France, of which the Germans had some knowledge, created an additional British obligation, and British reputational interests were also at stake. Thus, Moltke had argued (in a 1913 memo) that Britain would intervene in a Franco-German war "because she fears German hegemony and true to her policy of maintaining a balance of power will do all she can to check the increase of German power."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, there had been numerous warnings from Britain in the past that it would not stay neutral in a continental war.

Although the dismissal of these warnings by German leaders and their failure to appreciate British strategic interests can be explained in part by their motivated psychological biases and wishful thinking,<sup>62</sup> they did have some reasons to believe that the British might remain neutral. There were multiple signals (or noise) coming out of London, and these were not all consistent with the warnings from Lichnowsky. Though Grey repeatedly refused to give Berlin an unconditional commitment of neutrality, he also refused to give France and Russia a commitment to come to their defense. Thus, the uncertainty generated by the failure of British leaders to give a formal commitment was exacerbated further by their statements and actions. Given the equivocal nature of incoming information and its low signal-to-noise ratio; prior expectations of German leaders, which had been reinforced by an overall improvement in Anglo-German relations over the previous three years; and the strategic dilemmas, political difficulties (particularly in terms of civil-military relations), and psychological stress that would have been generated by a different interpretation of the evidence, it was perhaps not surprising that German political leaders concluded that Britain would stay out of a continental war, particularly if British decision makers perceived the war as being initiated by Russia.<sup>63</sup>

That German misperceptions were the product of the inherent ambiguity of the incoming signals as much of their own motivated biases is suggested by the fact that officials in France and Russia, whose motivated biases would have led in the opposite direction from Germany's and who had constantly pressured Britain for a clear commitment, were also uncertain of British intentions.<sup>64</sup> Even the British were uncertain as to what they would do. Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, were both skeptical regarding whether the government would intervene on the continent,<sup>65</sup> and Grey himself was uncertain. On the 29th, Grey told Jules Cambon (French Ambassador to Berlin) that "[i]f Germany became involved, we had not made up our minds what we should do." On August 1, the cabinet rejected a proposal to dispatch the British Expeditionary Force to the continent and forbade Churchill from ordering the full mobilization of the navy.<sup>66</sup>

The British failure to give a clear and timely commitment in support of its allies was a critical step in the process leading to an Austro-Serbian war and its expansion into a world war, for it eliminated the one threat that would have led German political decision makers to restrain their counterparts in Vienna. Yet British leaders were faced with some serious diplomatic and domestic political constraints, and it

is not clear that they could have acted differently. Diplomatically, they were confronted with a difficult strategic dilemma: While a clear commitment would reinforce deterrence against Germany, it might at the same time encourage Russia to pursue a riskier course against Austria-Hungary. Many British leaders assumed that by leaving their commitment ambiguous, they could maximize the likelihood that they could restrain Russia without alienating it and deter the Germans without provoking them.<sup>67</sup> This reasoning was undoubtedly less compelling after July 27–28, for the German rejection of Grey's proposal for a four-power conference and the Austrian declaration of war greatly reduced any remaining doubt regarding the intentions of the central powers.

Another factor contributing to Britain's failure to make commitment from the beginning of the crisis was the optimism generated by the general improvement in Anglo-German relations over the previous three years. Although the naval rivalry between Britain and Germany remained unresolved, in other respects relations were much improved. This led Grey and others to assume erroneously that the July 1914 crisis could be resolved through Anglo-German cooperation, as had the earlier Balkan Wars, and therefore they chose to dilute and delay their deterrent threat in the hope that a more accommodative policy might achieve their desired goals with fewer risks.<sup>68</sup> Evidence suggests that Grey perceived that Berlin was divided between a war party and a peace party (headed by Bethmann-Hollweg), that his hesitancy to issue a deterrent threat was motivated by his fear that it would only strengthen hardline elements in Berlin, and that his conciliatory actions were aimed at strengthening Bethmann-Hollweg in his internal political struggles with the military.<sup>69</sup> By July 28, however, it became increasingly clear that Germany had no intention of restraining Austria-Hungary, and therefore these considerations cannot explain Grey's continued failure to issue an unequivocal warning to Germany after that date.

By July 27, but probably not before, the primary factor precluding Grey from issuing a clear warning to Germany was cabinet politics in England. A majority of the liberal cabinet was opposed to British involvement in war, and Grey knew that it would be difficult to secure any commitment from them.<sup>70</sup> At a full meeting of the cabinet on the 27th, Grey asked if Britain should intervene if France were attacked by Germany. Five ministers warned that they would resign if such a vote were taken. On July 29, the same day as Grey's informal warning to Germany through Lichnowsky, the cabinet agreed that "at this stage we were unable to pledge ourselves in advance either under all circumstances to stand aside or on any condition to go in." On August 1, Grey stated, "we could not propose to Parliament at this moment to send an expeditionary military force to the continent."<sup>71</sup> As Churchill later argued with regard to a possible warning to Germany that Britain would declare war if Germany attacked France or violated Belgian territory, "I am certain that if Sir Edward Grey had sent the kind of ultimatum suggested, the Cabinet would have broken up, and it is also my belief that up til Wednesday (29th) or Thursday (30th) at least, the House of Commons would have repudiated his action. Nothing less than the deeds of Germany would have converted the British nation to war."<sup>72</sup>

It is significant that Churchill refers to *German* deeds. Austrian action against Serbia was not sufficient to bring in Britain, for, as I argued earlier, if a negotiated

peace were not possible, Britain preferred a localized war in the Balkans, whatever its outcome, to a continental or world war. But what specific German deeds were necessary and sufficient to bring Britain into the war? For Grey, any Franco-German war was enough of a threat to British interests to require intervention. This was probably not true for the cabinet, unless the course of the war were to pose such a threat to France that only British intervention could block German hegemony on the continent. Although it is difficult to know for sure how the cabinet would have responded under various contingencies,<sup>73</sup> it appears that the critical trigger for cabinet approval of British intervention in the early stages of the war was the German violation of Belgian neutrality, which was an integral part of the Schlieffen Plan.<sup>74</sup> The significance of Belgium for Britain, and particularly for the radicals in the cabinet, was more political than strategic, for the balance of power on the continent and the future of Belgium and its channel ports would ultimately be dependent upon the outcome of a Franco-German war quite independently of whether Belgian neutrality was violated at its outset. For years the radicals had refused to be swayed by balance of power arguments, and in the end they need a moral justification, which was provided by the 1839 guarantee of Belgian neutrality. As Zara S. Steiner argues, "[T]he issue of Belgium was all-important because the radical conscience needed a *raison d'être*."<sup>75</sup>

Grey's domestic political constraints did not leave him bereft of means of influencing Germany. Although a formal threat to Berlin was probably precluded by cabinet politics, an informal warning was not. Recall that although Grey's warning of July 29 through Lichnowsky was not approved by the cabinet, it had a tremendous impact on Germany, and that a similar informal warning could have been issued much earlier. As I argued above, such a warning probably would have been sufficient to maintain the peace, at least for a time. But Grey perceived other constraints during this period, including the fear of giving too much encouragement to Russia and not enough to what he saw as the peace party in Berlin. Although we now know that Germany was more in need of restraint than was Russia and that earlier pressure from London on Berlin would probably have avoided war, it is more difficult to say that Grey should have known this for certain in July 1914.

I have argued that in the absence of a German violation of Belgian neutrality, the probability of British intervention in a continental war would have been considerably less. Such intervention would also have been delayed, for British radicals would probably have needed to see severe military setbacks to France in order to be convinced of the strategic necessity of military action. Thus, the Schlieffen Plan and the envelopment of France through Belgium not only precluded German decision makers from effectively managing to avoid the world war they feared but also ensured that the British would enter the war at an early stage and thus maximize their impact. Thus, part of the explanation for the erroneous assumption of British neutrality by German political decision makers must be traced to their miscalculation of the consequences of the Schlieffen Plan, to which we will return.

Although the erroneous assumption of British neutrality was a necessary condition for German support of an Austrian invasion of Serbia and, consequently, also a necessary condition for a continental or world war (at least until the Austrian declaration of war on July 28), it was not a sufficient condition. It is conceivable

that a continental war could have been avoided if Austria had undertaken military action immediately following the assassination, for under some conditions a *fait accompli* strategy involving quick and decisive military action may be optimum in terms of securing one's objectives with minimum risk of escalation.<sup>76</sup>

### THE DELAY OF AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MILITARY ACTION

Although Austria did pursue a *fait accompli* strategy, it waited for a month after the assassination of the archduke, and the timing may have been critical. The combination of universal outrage over the assassination, the belief that some Austrian response in defense of its honor would be legitimate, the fear of a wider war, and German deterrence of Russia might have been sufficient to localize the war. Thus, Taylor asserts that "[t]he one chance of success for Austria-Hungary would have been rapid action." Ritter concludes that "Swift action would have been politically much more effective and less dangerous to the peace of Europe than the endless delay that did take place." Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., writes that "What had appeared in early June to be a calculated, acceptable risk—a local war with Serbia—would loom more dangerous and provocative two weeks later."<sup>77</sup>

The assumption that a larger war might be avoided through immediate action was held by most German leaders and was a major rationale underlying their pressure on Austria-Hungary to move as quickly as possible. It was also accepted by Grey.<sup>78</sup> There is less evidence regarding Russian decision makers, and their views, of course, were critical. For the tsar, the principle of monarchical solidarity may have outweighed strategic and reputational interests in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. The greater the delay, however, the more the punishment of Serbia would be decoupled from the assassination and the indignation it generated, and the legitimacy it might have provided. A punitive strike against Serbia that did not involve extensive territorial acquisitions would have lessened Russian (and British) concerns. Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza's demand that Austria-Hungary renounce any territorial annexations at Serbian expense, and the acceptance of this renunciation by the Austro-Hungarian Council of Ministers, was in fact designed to minimize the likelihood of Russian intervention, though it came too late.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps a major consequence of the delay was to transform the possibility of an early punitive strike into a local war that was much more likely to escalate.

How do we explain the Austro-Hungarian delay? Immediate action was not possible because of the necessity of securing German support. There were several reasons for the extensive delay after Germany issued a blank check on July 5–6. One reason concerned military constraints. Berchtold had initially wanted to attack Serbia without first mobilizing and was distressed to learn from army chief of staff Conrad on July 6 that an invasion could not begin until two weeks after mobilization.<sup>80</sup> Although this explains the delay in military action, it does not explain Austria's delay in issuing the ultimatum or declaring war. One important factor here derives from Austria-Hungary's domestic structure and internal political situation. Tisza opposed any form of military action, and the risk of a major war with Russia required a united monarchy. Tisza was not won over until July 14,

when others accepted his demand for a renunciation of territorial annexation at Serbia's expense.<sup>81</sup>

Two additional factors combine to explain the additional ten-day delay in the issuance of the ultimatum. One was organizational constraints imposed on the army by the timetable of the harvest leaves, which Conrad had agreed to in response to agrarian pressures. Early in July, Conrad learned that sizable numbers of Habsburg troops were dispersed throughout the empire on harvest leave and were not scheduled to return until July 21–22. An early recall of the troops would disrupt the harvests and possibly the railroad-based mobilization plans and would eliminate the possible benefits of surprise associated with the ultimatum.<sup>82</sup> A second factor was diplomatic: Austrian decision makers did not want to deliver the ultimatum to Serbia until after the state visit of French president Poincaré and Premier Viviani to St. Petersburg on July 23, for they feared that the French might encourage a stronger Russian response.<sup>83</sup> The ultimatum to Serbia was delivered that day, followed by Serbia's reply on July 25 and Austria's declaration of war on the 28th.

By this time, any Austrian military action would be so decoupled from the outrage following the assassination that it would have lost the halo of legitimacy that might have accompanied earlier action. Moreover, once the unprecedented terms of the ultimatum became known, Serbia was no longer perceived as the primary violator of international norms. At this point, it was more likely that the best hope for peace lay in a *delay* in the declaration of war. The timing of the declaration of war was absolutely critical and deserves more attention in the literature. First, it led directly to a partial Russian mobilization, which initiated a rapid and nearly irreversible sequence of mobilization threats and actions over the next four days.<sup>84</sup> Second, it made it much more difficult for Vienna to give in to German pressures for restraint, which began on the night of July 29–30 after Lichnowsky's warning from Grey. Why the rush to declare war if an invasion could not begin for two weeks?

The matter was addressed by Berchtold and Conrad on July 26. Conrad wanted to delay a declaration of war until August 12, when a crushing military *fait accompli* against Serbia could be carried out. But Berchtold insisted on an early declaration of war to pacify Germany, which had been strongly pressing for immediate action. In addition, he now seemed to welcome the lapse between the declaration of war and the beginning of military operations and hoped that it would provide time for additional pressure on Serbia from its allies.<sup>85</sup> That is, his preferred strategy (and that of Emperor Franz Joseph) apparently had switched from military victory over Serbia to securing its "unconditional submission" through a particularly strong variant of coercive diplomacy.<sup>86</sup> But Berchtold's strategy backfired, only strengthening Serbia's resolve and that of her allies and accelerating the conflict spiral.

This is not surprising, for a declaration of war is rarely an effective instrument of coercive pressure, particularly in the context of a refusal to provide the adversary (or its allies) with a face-saving way out of the crisis. The more general problem lies in the inconsistency in Austrian policy. Vienna deliberately designed the ultimatum so that it could not be accepted and would therefore provide a justification for war.<sup>87</sup> Finding that it lacked the means for an immediate *fait accompli*, Austria switched to a highly coercive policy but did not combine it with diplomatic measures

that might have made it effective. Austrian leaders did not soften the degrading terms of the ultimatum to provide Serbia with a face-saving way out of the crisis and only compounded matters further with a premature declaration of war that could only lead to the further escalation of the crisis.

In retrospect, one can probably conclude that Conrad's preference for a delay in the declaration of war until military operations could begin would have increased the probability of a peaceful settlement, though perhaps not by much. Austrian mobilization would still have begun, so that countermobilizations by Russia and then by Germany could not be far behind. But that might have taken a few days and would have provided additional time for some important new developments to have an impact. Bethmann-Hollweg's efforts to restrain Vienna would have been more likely to succeed in the absence of an Austrian declaration of war, which put its credibility at stake and in so doing increased the domestic political and psychological costs of backing down. In this different diplomatic context, the combination of German pressure and the new Halt in Belgrade proposal might have been sufficient to delay, at least temporarily, a world war that none of the great powers wanted.<sup>88</sup>

### THE HALT IN BELGRADE PROPOSAL

Europe learned the details of Austria's 48-hour ultimatum on July 24. The Russians concluded that Austria-Hungary was deliberately trying to provoke war, and the next day the tsar authorized preparatory military actions (short of mobilization) in order to deter an Austrian move against Serbia and, if that failed, enable the army to intervene in Serbia's defense. Grey began exploring the possibility of British mediation on the same day and on July 26 invited France, Germany, and Italy to send their ambassadors to London for a conference. Austria refused, as did Germany, which continued to press for immediate military action as a means of localizing the war.

By July 27, the kaiser had begun to fear British intervention and at the same time believed that after the conciliatory Serbian reply, "every cause of war has vanished." On the 28th, he instructed Jagow to request that Vienna accept "a temporary military occupation of a portion of Serbia (Belgrade)" as a "guaranty for the enforcement and carrying out of the promises." Grey's proposal the next day was nearly identical, asking for mediation under the following conditions: Russia would suspend military operations against Serbia, while Austria would occupy Belgrade and "hold the occupied territory until she had complete satisfaction from Serbia. . . . [but] not advance further," pending great power mediation between Austria and Russia. These proposals for a halt in Belgrade demonstrate a sincere effort by the kaiser, Jagow, and Grey to manage the escalating crisis and to localize it in the Balkans. Their basic aim was to allow Austria to gain a significant diplomatic victory and to demonstrate its military prowess and prestige without damaging Russia's reputation.<sup>89</sup>

Austrian Foreign Minister Berchtold's immediate response to German Ambassador H. L. Tschirschky was that it was too late to change course, and his formal response was then delayed and deliberately evasive. Berchtold believed that the

temporary occupation of Belgrade would not be sufficient to achieve Austria's initial crisis objectives—the removal of the threat from Serbia and the southern Slavs. He feared that although a temporary occupation of Belgrade would provide leverage against Serbia, it would also generate diplomatic pressure on Vienna to soften its demands. Moreover, even if Russia were willing to tolerate an Austrian occupation of Belgrade, it would be "mere tinsel," for the Serbian army would remain intact, see Russia as its savior, and provoke another crisis in two or three years under conditions much less favorable to Austria. He was also concerned about the reputational and domestic political costs of reversing course after an earlier declaration of war.<sup>90</sup>

In spite of the costs to Austrian leaders of reversing course and scaling back their objectives, the costs of defying German pressure would also be enormous, particularly if such pressure were accompanied by explicit threats that Germany would withdraw its support from Austria if the Austrians did not accept the proposal. There is a good chance that additional German pressure would have been sufficient to compel Vienna's acceptance of the Halt in Belgrade Plan and deter more extensive military action at that time. Albertini concludes that on the day of the order of general mobilization, "Berchtold was assailed by doubts and hesitations, so that it remains an open question whether he would actually have put the order into execution if he had received further strong pressure from Berlin in favor of the 'Halt in Belgrade' and mediation." Similarly, David Kaiser argues, "the Vienna government could not possibly have held out against united pressure to accept some variant of the 'Halt in Belgrade' plan."<sup>91</sup> A critical reason for Vienna's failure to accept the proposal was the fact that German pressure on Vienna was only moderate in intensity, accompanied by mixed signals, and withdrawn prematurely.

Although the Halt in Belgrade proposal was fully consistent with many basic principles of crisis management, it failed in part because of the violation of the principle that top-level decision makers maintain centralized political control of diplomatic and military actions and ensure that their diplomatic signals to allies as well as adversaries are not subverted by subordinates. The kaiser's proposal was ready for delivery early on July 28 (before the declaration of war), but Bethmann-Hollweg delayed its delivery to Vienna for twelve hours and distorted its contents in significant ways to reduce its impact. Whereas the kaiser insisted only that Austria had to have a "guaranty that the promises were carried out," the chancellor emphasized in his telegram to German ambassador Tschirschky that the aim of the temporary occupation was "to force the Serbian Government to the complete fulfillment of her demands," and he deleted the phrase about war no longer being necessary. Bethmann-Hollweg also told Tschirschky "to avoid very carefully giving rise to the impression that we wish to hold Austria back." Tschirschky delayed further and, in fact, may have encouraged Austrian belligerency. In addition, Albertini concludes that Tschirschky and Berchtold "were in league" to deceive Berlin, deflect German pressure for restraint, and delay a response to German pressures.<sup>92</sup> The ambiguous signals from Berlin continued even after Bethmann-Hollweg reversed course on July 29 and began pressing Vienna to accept Grey's Halt in Belgrade proposal. At the same time that Bethmann-Hollweg was urging Berchtold to consider the Halt in Belgrade proposal, Moltke was urging Conrad to

press forward with mobilization and warning that any further delay would be disastrous. This led Conrad to complain, "Who actually rules in Berlin, Bethmann or Moltke?"<sup>93</sup>

Not only was Berlin's pressure too weak to impress Austrian leaders with the urgency of an immediate acceptance of the peace proposal and with the potentially serious consequences of their failure to do so, but the pressure was not sustained. Bethmann-Hollweg reversed his position and effectively withdrew German support from the Halt in Belgrade proposal on the evening of July 30, after receiving reports that Russia was about to begin general mobilization, that Belgium had begun preparations for war (which could bottle up the German invasion of France and therefore disrupt the entire war on both fronts), and that Austria was concentrating its forces against Serbia (which would leave inadequate strength in Galicia for an offensive against Russia).<sup>94</sup> These reports had led to an abrupt shift in Moltke's position, a general uneasiness among the military, intense pressure for the declaration of a "state of imminent war," and increased military influence on the political decision making process, which up to that point had not been significant.<sup>95</sup> Thus, a real opportunity for peace was lost. Albertini concludes that "if on the 30th Bethmann had not let himself be overruled by Moltke, had insisted with Berchtold, on pain of nonrecognition of the *casus foederis*, that Austria should content herself with the Anglo-German proposals, and had then waited for Sazonov to follow suit, the peace of the world might have been saved."<sup>96</sup>

With the announcement of the Russian mobilization on the morning of July 31, political as well as military decision makers came to perceive that a continental war was inevitable, and these perceptions soon took on a self-fulfilling character. Efforts to deter war gave way to concentration on how to prepare for an unavoidable war. Military requirements came to dominate the agenda, and the military acquired a leading role in decision-making processes. The sequence of events from July 28 to August 4 seemed to follow an inexorable pattern, and political leaders came to believe that they had lost control of events.<sup>97</sup> This loss of control is often traced to the rigidity of the Austrian, Russian, and German mobilization plans, which we now consider. We will find that these rigidities provided some interesting and often unrecognized opportunities as well as constraints.

### THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MOBILIZATION

The nature of the Austro-Hungarian mobilization and war plans derived largely from the strategic dilemma confronting the dual monarchy—the need to be able to fight a two-front war against both Russia and Serbia. The plans were designed to permit a certain degree of flexibility, allowing for partial mobilization against either or both of these adversaries and for offensive action against one and defensive action against the other, depending on the nature of the threats to Austrian interests. But once a partial mobilization was initiated against Serbia, the troops involved could not easily be shifted back to the Galician front to meet a major Russian attack. If Vienna moved with two of its three groups against Serbia, it would have difficulty dealing with a major offensive from Russia. Thus, the constraints on Austria-Hungary, which are often attributed to the rigidity of the army's mobilization

plans, actually stemmed from the inherent difficulties of fighting a two-front war, the poor quality of the Austro-Hungarian railway system, and the inability and unwillingness of the Germans to provide significant help against Russia in the early stages of the war because of the requirements of the Schlieffen Plan.<sup>98</sup>

These constraints provided military incentives for Vienna to speed up the flow of events rather than slow them down once mobilization had been initiated. Conrad insisted that he had to know by the fifth day of mobilization whether the Russians were planning to intervene, else his plans would go awry. In fact, an early Russian decision to intervene might have been better for Vienna than a delay accompanied by uncertainty regarding Russian intentions.<sup>99</sup> The Austrians' dilemma was that the longer they delayed mobilization against Serbia, the more time they would have to learn of Russian intentions and plan accordingly, but this would also mean more time for external diplomatic pressure on Austria to show restraint and soften its demands on Serbia.

### THE RUSSIAN MOBILIZATION

These constraints on Vienna provided an opportunity for Russia that is rarely acknowledged in the literature. Russian leaders hoped that a mobilization, in conjunction with diplomatic pressure from the other powers, would deter Austria from an all-out military attack against Serbia, limit the concessions Serbia would have to make, and improve its own ability to defend Serbia in the event of war. But it is not clear that Russia had to mobilize in order to deter Austria from sending more than a minimal defense force to the Balkan front and, therefore, limit the damage to Serbia from an Austrian attack. These objectives could have been accomplished through a mere *threat* to mobilize. And there was no immediate threat to Serbia, for an Austrian invasion could not begin until August 12. Thus, Turner argues that "it was very much to Russia's advantage to delay any mobilization until a substantial part of the Austrian army was entangled in operations against Serbia."<sup>100</sup>

This suggests that a Russian partial mobilization was not really necessary to support Russian interests in the Balkans and that it could have been delayed for several more days, perhaps accompanied by coercive threats against Austria. Such restraint would have presumably delayed the alarm felt by Moltke and the German generals, eliminated the need for German mobilization or even preparatory military action, and thus provided more time for Bethmann-Hollweg to continue his pressure on Vienna to accept the Halt in Belgrade Plan. It is in this sense that the Russian mobilization was the critical action leading to the war. Turner suggests that it was taken in part because "Sazonov and the Russian generals failed to grasp the immense diplomatic and military advantages conferred on them by the Austrian dilemma."<sup>101</sup>

But protecting Serbia was not Russia's only aim. Russian leaders recognized that if deterrence failed and they were forced to intervene on Serbia's behalf, Germany would certainly follow and be led by the Schlieffen Plan to attack France first. It was imperative for Russia to come to the aid of its French ally before it was crushed by Germany.<sup>102</sup> Russian leaders also perceived that speed was of the essence, that a few days' delay would put France in an increasingly precarious position, and, therefore, that they had to mobilize as quickly as possible, particularly once war

appeared inevitable. They also thought they could get an additional jump on Germany by conducting some mobilization measures in secret, and, in fact, the initiation of "the period preparatory to war" on July 26 is best seen as the first stage of mobilization.<sup>103</sup>

For technical military reasons, it was not feasible for the Russians to order a partial mobilization against Austria-Hungary and then wait before mobilizing against Germany. A partial mobilization would disrupt railway transport and delay for months a systematic general mobilization against Germany. It would not only leave Russia dangerously exposed to a hostile and war-prone Germany but also leave it unable to come immediately to the aid of France. Thus, the tsar, after some wavering and intense pressure from the military, decided to order general mobilization for July 31 rather than a partial mobilization against Austria-Hungary alone.<sup>104</sup>

### THE GERMAN MOBILIZATION

In order to increase the likelihood of securing the support of the Social Democrats at home and the neutrality of Britain abroad, German officials wanted to shift the blame for the war to Russia and had a strong incentive not to be the first to mobilize. Thus, some form of Russian mobilization was a necessary condition for German mobilization, and general mobilization by the Russians was a sufficient condition for German mobilization. The question is whether a Russian partial mobilization was also a sufficient condition for a German mobilization. Although Albertini and others may be correct that a Russian "partial mobilization would have led to war no less surely than general mobilization,"<sup>105</sup> the causal linkage was delayed and indirect rather than immediate and direct: A partial mobilization by Russia would eventually have led to a German mobilization because of the Russian threat to Austria, not because of the direct threat to Germany. In fact, the threat to Germany would have been lessened somewhat as Russian partial mobilization measures progressed because these measures would have delayed and interfered with a subsequent Russian general mobilization.

The historical record suggests that German military and political leaders were cautious in reacting to Russian military actions prior to the general mobilization. On July 29, three days after Russia had begun pre-mobilization measures, Moltke refused to support the proposal of War Minister Erich von Falkenhayn for a proclamation of a "threatening danger of war." After hearing of Russia's partial mobilization, Bethmann-Hollweg refused to order an immediate German mobilization, a decision that generated only slight opposition from Moltke. Bethmann-Hollweg believed that the *casus foederis* had not arisen and that Germany must wait for a state of war between Russia and Austria-Hungary "because otherwise we should not have public opinion with us either at home or in England." For the same reasons, it was imperative that Austria should not appear as the aggressor.<sup>106</sup> The German military began pressing hard for mobilization only on July 30, after new information regarding the intensity of Russian military preparations, but the German's demand was rejected by Bethmann-Hollweg. It was only with the news of the Russian general mobilization the following day that the chancellor agreed to a German mobilization.

Once both sides had mobilized, however, Germany had a strong incentive to strike first because of the Schlieffen Plan. Because the capture of Liège and its vital forts and railroad lines was necessary before the invasion of France could proceed, the Schlieffen Plan required that German armies cross the frontier and advance into Belgium as an integral part of the mobilization. The perception that even small leads in mobilization would have significant military benefits and that small delays could be catastrophic created additional military incentives to move as quickly as possible.<sup>107</sup> Thus, once Russia moved to a general mobilization, the German decision for war was determined entirely by the structure of the alliance system and existing mobilization plans. Military requirements for preparing for war took precedence over political requirements for avoiding one, and there was no feasible role for crisis management in avoiding a continental war. And because the Schlieffen Plan involved the movement through Belgium, a world war was almost certain to follow.<sup>108</sup>

It is important to note that the Schlieffen Plan made it inevitable that any war involving Germany would necessarily be a two-front war in which Britain would be forced to intervene, regardless of the particular issues at stake or the political conditions under which war occurred. This was particularly tragic because a world war was the outcome German leaders most wanted to avoid. The reliance on the Schlieffen Plan in spite of its escalatory dynamic can be explained in part as a result of the separation of military planning from the political objectives it was presumably designed to serve. German mobilization and war plans in general, and the Schlieffen Plan in particular, were constructed exclusively by the military, with minimal consultation, with civilian leaders, and on the basis of technical military considerations rather than political ones.<sup>109</sup> The sweep through Belgium, for example, did not take into account the impact on England of the violation of Belgian neutrality. Jagow's request in 1912 that the need to violate Belgian neutrality be re-evaluated was rejected by Moltke, and, until 1913, there was not even an inquiry into the feasibility of alternative operational plans that might carry fewer political risks.<sup>110</sup>

Taylor concludes that the military mobilization plans "aimed at the best technical results without allowing for either the political conditions from which war might spring or the political consequences which might follow." They reflected the traditional military priority placed on winning any war that breaks out, rather than doing everything possible to prevent it from occurring. The plans were also rigid and were very difficult to change at the last minute in response to changing political circumstances. Ritter concludes that "[t]he outbreak of war in 1914 is the most tragic example of a government's helpless dependence on the planning of strategists that history has ever seen"; and Albertini concludes that the primary reason that Germany "set fire to the powder cask" was "the requirements of the Schlieffen Plan, which no doubt was a masterpiece of military science, but also a monument of that utter lack of political horsesense which is the main cause of European disorders and upheavals."<sup>111</sup>

The problem of the separation of military planning from political objectives was exacerbated further by the lack of knowledge on the part of political leaders of the details of their military plans and those of their adversaries. The basic problem was decision makers' ignorance of the discrepancy between their foreign-policy

objectives and the limited range of military instruments available to support them. Whereas the military generally conceived of mobilization as a means of preparing for a certain and immediate war and designed military plans with that in mind, political leaders generally conceived of mobilization as an instrument of deterrence or coercive diplomacy. They had little conception of how few options they had, how inflexible and indiscriminate they were, or of the extent to which their room to maneuver had been limited. In particular, although political leaders were vaguely familiar with the idea that "mobilization means war," they lacked a profound understanding of what this really meant, how quickly one would follow from the other, and how their freedom of action to conduct policy would be affected. They were unaware that diplomatic options would be foreclosed and war begun before mobilization had been completed. They took certain actions in all sincerity to manage the crisis and avoid war, assuming that the risks were limited or at least manageable, only to find that they had forced their adversary to escalate and that their subsequent choices had been narrowed even further.<sup>112</sup>

If political leaders had only understood the consequences of certain mobilization measures, it is conceivable that at certain critical decision points they might have acted differently. At a minimum, they might have delayed taking certain actions for as long as possible in order to provide more time for managing the crisis through diplomacy to protect their interests without war. Like many others, Foreign Secretary Grey did not realize that German mobilization meant war. Perhaps more important, he failed to recognize the dangers of the Austrian and Russian mobilizations and the chain reactions they would trigger. He made no effort to restrain his Russian ally and, in fact, initially thought it reasonable that Austria, Russia, and France mobilize while he continued to work for peace.<sup>113</sup> Because of the importance to Russia of securing a British commitment to enter the war, British pressure would have reduced the likelihood of Russian intervention or at least delayed the critical Russian mobilization, though by how much it is difficult to say. Such a delay would have reduced the probability of a continental war, but in so doing, it would have increased the probability of an Austrian move against Serbia.

Until fairly late in the crisis, Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov perceived partial mobilization as a usable and controllable instrument for the purposes of coercion and did not realize that it would undercut the process of negotiating for peace. On July 24, he proposed the mobilization of the military districts of Kiev, Odessa, Moscow, and Kazan (but not Warsaw, Vilna, or St. Petersburg) as a means of pressuring Austria while at the same time not alarming Germany. He did not realize that Austria would be forced to order a general mobilization, which would involve the Austro-German alliance, and therefore require a general mobilization by Germany and lead to war. Nor did he realize that a partial mobilization by Russia would seriously interfere with a subsequent general mobilization.<sup>114</sup>

Albertini concludes that if Sazonov had understood these aspects of the mobilization process and known that for Germany any mobilization was equivalent to war, there is "no doubt" that he would have acted differently. He "would never have got the Council of Ministers on 24 July or the Tsar on 25 July to approve it [the partial mobilization] in principle, nor would he have proclaimed it on the evening of 28 July with incalculable consequences."<sup>115</sup> He would have attempted

to delay a partial mobilization (even more so if he had understood the strategic dilemmas faced by Austria-Hungary and the potential military advantages to Russia of a delay in its own mobilization), and the tsar would probably have gone along. This would have delayed the point at which the military in Germany and Russia began to exert a significant influence on their respective political processes. Bethmann-Hollweg's pressure on Vienna to accept the Halt in Belgrade Plan could have continued, and the likelihood of a peaceful settlement would have been increased, although by how much is uncertain.<sup>116</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that the political decision makers of each of the great powers in the 1914 crisis preferred a peaceful settlement, based on extensive Serbian concessions, to a world war. Yet they ended up with the war that none of them wanted and none deliberately sought, and, in this sense, World War I was inadvertent. The primary explanation for this outcome lies in the irreconcilable interests of the great powers, the structure of power and alliances that created difficult strategic dilemmas, the military mobilization and war plans that were designed to deal with those dilemmas, some critical assumptions on each side regarding the likely behavior of its adversaries, and miscalculations by each great power as to the consequences of its own actions and those of others. Thus, the causes of World War I are to be found primarily in the underlying economic, military, diplomatic, political, and social forces that existed prior to the onset of the crisis and that created a mutually irreconcilable set of political interests among the great powers. Although the perceptions, decisions, and actions of statesmen during the July crisis increased the probability of war, that probability was already fairly high immediately following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

To say that war was likely in July 1914, however, is not to say that it was inevitable. There were several critical points in the July crisis at which political leaders could have behaved differently without seriously threatening their vital interests, and thereby they might have facilitated other attempts to manage the crisis. The set of actions that would have been mutually acceptable was not only quite small, however, but was critically dependent on timing, for the windows of opportunity in July 1914 were not only narrow but were constantly changing, and at different times for each of the great powers. I have argued that the failure to undertake the necessary actions can be interpreted as the failure to follow some basic principles of crisis management. Although many of the departures from these principles can be explained in terms of strategic necessities following from underlying preferences, others were due to strategic miscalculations and failures of individual judgment that might have been avoided and to domestic and bureaucratic pressures that might have been finessed.

One opportunity for a local Austro-Serbian conflict to be contained occurred in the two weeks immediately following the assassination. Because of the hostility the assassination aroused toward Serbia, the perceived legitimacy of a modest Austrian response, and the concern to avoid a great power war, it is conceivable that an Austrian *fait accompli* might have been successful without provoking

Russian intervention. The prospects for localization would have been enhanced if the Austrian *fait accompli* had been limited to the weakening of Serbian military power without significant territorial readjustments, particularly if it were accompanied by a great power agreement based on something comparable to the Halt in Belgrade proposal. But Austrian action was delayed because of Vienna's need to secure absolute assurance of German support and then to overcome internal political divisions in the dual monarchy. An additional cause of delay was the technical military constraints deriving from the cumbersome Austro-Hungarian mobilization process. Great power consensus on a halt in Belgrade was probably impossible until the crisis had intensified to the point that Grey realized the need to warn Germany and Bethmann-Hollweg realized that Austria must be restrained. Thus, the opportunity for localizing the conflict at this stage was probably slim.

Adequate German pressure would almost certainly have been sufficient to restrain Austria and prevent war, but such pressure was not forthcoming prior to July 29 because German political leaders wanted a local war and were willing to risk a continental war as long as they were fairly certain of British neutrality. Their erroneous assumption of British neutrality resulted not only from wishful thinking but also from the inherent ambiguity of the signals coming from London and the absence of a firm British commitment. This lack of firmness was due to (1) Grey's fear that an explicit threat to Germany would only encourage Russian meddling in the Balkans and, at the same time, undermine the assumed "peace" party in Berlin; (2) his hope that the crisis could be managed through cooperation with Berlin; and (3) opposition from radicals in the British cabinet. The terms of the July 23-24 ultimatum, the preliminary mobilization measures by Austria, Russia, and France beginning on the 26th, and the German rejection the next day of Grey's four-power conference proposal should have been enough, however, to convince Grey of the need to issue an earlier warning to Germany. Had this come before the Austrian declaration of war, German pressure would probably have been enough to force Austria to accept the Halt in Belgrade Plan rather than launch an all-out invasion of Serbia.

The Austrian declaration of war was itself premature and unnecessary on strictly military grounds, for Austria could not begin an invasion of Serbia until August 12. Had Berchtold followed Conrad's preference to delay the declaration of war, the few extra days before Austrian mobilization triggered a Russian mobilization would have provided additional time for Bethmann-Hollweg to force Austria to accept the Halt in Belgrade Plan and for Grey to solidify Russian and French support for the plan. The timing of the declaration owes more to pressure from Germany than to strategic calculations, and German pressure itself was based on the erroneous assumption that the likelihood of localization would be enhanced by immediate military action. But the time for a successful military *fait accompli* had long passed. A strategy of coercive diplomacy based on the ultimatum was probably more likely to succeed. Berchtold seems to have been thinking along these lines, at least by the 26th, but his failure to soften the terms of the ultimatum to make it consistent with his new strategy precluded the successful use of coercive diplomacy.

Even if the declaration of war had not been delayed, however, a major war might have been avoided. Adequate German pressure would still have been sufficient

to restrain Austria and force it to accept the Halt in Belgrade Plan. But only modest pressure was forthcoming from Bethmann-Hollweg, and that was diluted further in Vienna's eyes because of independent actions by Moltke and Tschirschky, which encouraged an immediate attack. Bethmann-Hollweg's pressure ended prematurely on the 30th because of Russia's partial mobilization and fears that a general mobilization would soon follow, the requirements of the Schlieffen Plan that German mobilization and war must eventually follow a partial mobilization and must immediately follow a general mobilization by Russia, the underlying assumption regarding the superiority of the offensive and the incentive this created to strike first, and perhaps by the belief that war had become inevitable.

A Russian mobilization immediately after the Austrian declaration of war was not necessary to protect Serbia, however, for Austria could not begin an invasion until August 12, and Russia should have recognized that technical constraints on Austrian mobilization meant that Russia would reap some strategic advantages by delaying mobilization. Given the certainty of German intervention in an Austro-Russian war and the nature of the Schlieffen Plan, however, Russia had an incentive to get a jump on Germany in order to aid France. Nevertheless, had the Russians known that Germany would almost certainly not mobilize before a Russian partial mobilization and perhaps not even before a general mobilization, they could have delayed action without weakening Russia's own position or Serbia's. This would have provided a few extra days for Bethmann-Hollweg to coerce Austria to accept the Halt in Belgrade Plan, and to do so in a context in which the German military was not forced to respond to Russian mobilization efforts and in which Grey could attempt to restrain Russia and France.

We can conclude that there were several points at which decision makers could have done more to manage the July crisis in a way that secured their vital interests without the costs of a world war that none of them sought and few really expected, and, in this sense, the mismanagement of the July 1914 crisis contributed to the outbreak of World War I. It is necessary to repeat, however, that the primary explanation for the outbreak of the war lies in underlying diplomatic, political, economic, and social forces at work long before the emergence of the crisis in July 1914. These forces largely shaped the preferences of key decision makers and the structural and domestic constraints on their choices. Because of these preferences and constraints, the window of opportunity for successful crisis management was fairly small and placed enormous demands on the intellectual, diplomatic, and political skills of leading decision makers. Moreover, the structure of the European system in 1914 and the set of interests it fostered provide little grounds for believing that a negotiated settlement arising from successful crisis management would have been stable and that another equally intractable crisis would not have arisen in the next few months or the next few years.<sup>117</sup>

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE JULY 1914 CRISIS

### June

- 28 Assassination of Austrian archduke and heir apparent Franz Ferdinand by Serbian nationalists.

## July

- 5 Austrian cabinet chief Hoyos mission to Berlin.  
Kaiser gives "blank check" to Austria.
- 6 German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg formally issues "blank check."
- 7 Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza opposes war.  
Austrian Ministerial Council adopts plan for ultimatum.
- 14 Tisza agrees to war without territorial annexations.
- 19 Austro-Hungarian council approves ultimatum to Serbia.
- 20-23 French President Poincaré and Prime Minister Viviani visit St. Petersburg.
- 21 Text of ultimatum sent to Berlin.
- 23 Austria-Hungary delivers 48-hour ultimatum to Serbia.
- 24 Austria informs France, Russia, and Britain of ultimatum.  
Russia warns Austria not to crush Serbia.  
Germany requests that the conflict be localized.  
British Foreign Secretary Grey proposes mediation.
- 25 Russian tsar authorizes pre-mobilization measures.  
Serbia mobilizes against Austria; replies to ultimatum  
Austria-Hungary rejects Serbian reply, breaks diplomatic relations, decides  
to mobilize against Serbia (to begin July 28), and assures Russia that  
no Serbian territory will be annexed.  
Kaiser orders return of fleet.  
Grey again proposes mediation.  
German Foreign Secretary Jagow forwards Grey's proposal to Vienna.  
France assures Russia of its support.
- 26 Russia asks Germany to restrain Austria.  
Russia begins "period preparatory to war."  
Germany learns of Russian military preparations.  
Grey proposes four-power conference of British, French, German, and  
Italian ambassadors.  
Austria rejects British proposal.  
France takes precautionary military measures.
- 27 France accepts Grey's proposals.  
Bethmann-Hollweg rejects Grey's proposal for conference.  
Grey asks Berlin to request Vienna's acceptance of Serbian reply.  
Russian pre-mobilization measures extended.  
Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff Conrad reluctantly agrees to Foreign  
Minister Berchtold's request for Austrian declaration of war.

- 28 Kaiser requests Jagow to call for halt in Belgrade (10 A.M.).  
Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia (11 A.M.); bombards Belgrade;  
begins mobilization.  
Kaiser appeals to tsar.
- 29 Russia mobilizes Kiev, Odessa, Moscow, and Kazan military districts and  
Baltic and Black Sea fleets (12 A.M.).  
Tsar appeals for kaiser's help in averting war (1 A.M.).  
Vienna refuses to enter into negotiations with Serbia.  
Poincaré and Viviani return to Paris.  
Grey calls for halt in Belgrade.  
German ambassador to Vienna Tschirschky transmits kaiser's Halt in  
Belgrade proposal.  
Germany warns Russia against general mobilization.  
Bethmann-Hollweg requests British neutrality.  
Russian army prepares to order general mobilization.  
Tsar decides against general mobilization.  
Tsar proposes Hague Conference.  
German general staff learns of Belgian military preparations (4 P.M.).  
Jagow (5 P.M.) and Bethmann-Hollweg (much later) learn of Russian  
partial mobilization.  
Arrival of Ambassador Lichnowsky's report of Grey's warning that Britain  
could not remain neutral in a continental war (9:12 P.M.).
- 30 Bethmann-Hollweg urges restraint (3 A.M.).  
German Chief of Staff Moltke presses for general mobilization; encour-  
ages Austria to mobilize.  
Bethmann-Hollweg rejects (12 noon and again at 9 P.M.) Moltke's request  
for declaration of "state of imminent war"; promises decision by noon  
on July 31.  
Conrad note (delivered later) that Austria will stay on defensive against  
Russia.  
Bethmann-Hollweg agrees to declaration of imminent war (9 P.M.).  
Tsar orders general mobilization for July 31 (5 P.M.).
- 31 Berlin learns of Russian general mobilization (12 P.M.).  
Austrian general mobilization.  
Kaiser proclaims "state of imminent war" (1 P.M.).  
Germany sends 12-hour ultimatum to Russia to stop military measures  
on German frontier; rejects British request to respect Belgian neu-  
trality.  
France orders mobilization for August 1, 10 km withdrawal.

## August

- 1 Lichnowsky report of possible British neutrality.  
British cabinet refuses to dispatch expeditionary force.  
French mobilization (3:55 P.M.).

- German mobilization (4:00 P.M.).  
Germany declares war on Russia (7:00 P.M.).
- 2 British cabinet agrees to protect north coast of France and Channel against German attack.  
Germany invades Luxembourg; demands free passage from Belgium.
  - 3 Italy declares neutrality.  
Germany declares war on France.  
German-Turkish treaty concluded.  
Britain mobilizes army; cabinet issues ultimatum to Berlin.
  - 4 Germany invades Belgium.  
British ultimatum to Berlin.  
Britain declares war on Germany.
  - 6 Austria-Hungary declares war on Russia.  
British cabinet agrees to send army to France.
  - 12 Austria-Hungary invades Serbia.

## NOTES

1. More complete documentation and references in support of the arguments made in this paper can be found in my 1988 paper (same title) for the American Political Science Association.
2. See Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Dell, 1962); Miles Kahler, "Rumors of War: The 1914 Analogy," *Foreign Affairs* 58 (Winter 1979/1980):374-96; Richard Ned Lebow, *Nuclear Crisis Management* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), chs. 2-4; Paul Bracken, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 2-3, 65, 222-23. For a critique see Marc Trachtenberg, "The Meaning of Mobilization in 1914," *International Security* 15, 3 (Winter 1990/91):120-50.
3. Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1961/1967); Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911-1914*, trans. by Marian Jackson (New York: Norton, 1975); Fischer, *World Power or Decline* (New York: Norton, 1974). On the debate see H. W. Koch, *The Origins of the First World War: Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims* (London: Macmillan, 1972); John A. Moses, *The Politics of Illusion: The Fischer Controversy in German Historiography* (London: George Prior, 1975); David E. Kaiser, "Germany and the Origins of the First World War," *Journal of Modern History* 55 (September 1983):442-74.
4. If the crisis is structured as a single-play prisoners' dilemma, for example, decision makers prefer peace but feel compelled by circumstances to take actions which lead to war.
5. This is implicit in George's emphasis on the political as well as operational criteria for successful crisis management. These ideas are developed more fully in my 1988 APSA paper. I use the concept of *preferences* in the formal decision-theoretic sense of preferences over possible *outcomes* of the crisis, not preferences over alternative *strategies* to achieve those outcomes. On the theoretical importance of both system structure and state preferences see James D. Morrow, "Social Choice and System Structure in World Politics," *World Politics* 41 (October 1988): 75-97.

6. I will also note significant differences in preferences among key factions within each country.
7. On the psychology of decision making in 1914 see Ole R. Holsti, *Crisis, Escalation, War* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972) and other studies associated with the "1914 Project" directed by Robert North; Peter Lowenberg, "Arno Mayer's 'Internal Causes and Purposes of War in Europe, 1870-1956,'" *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970): 628-36; Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).
8. For good analytically organized summaries of the underlying causes of World War I see Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 1:32-59; James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (London: Longman, 1984), chs. 3-9. Interpretations of the July 1914 crisis in terms of structural theories can be found in Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Onset of Systemic War* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Charles F. Doran, "Systemic Disequilibrium, Foreign Policy Role, and the Power Cycle," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33 (September 1989):371-401; and Paul W. Schroeder, "World War I as Galloping Gertie," *Journal of Modern History* 44 (1972):319-45.
9. In fact, an examination of the preference structures of the various actors will go a long way in assessing the extent to which the most important causes of the war can be found in the underlying forces which shape these preferences rather than in the mismanagement of the July crisis by political leaders.
10. Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 51, 66; Joll, p. 9; Herbert Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey in July 1914," *Historical Studies* 5 (1965):7-8.
11. Fay, *Origins of the World War*, 2:286-91; Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, 3 vols., trans. by Isabella M. Massey (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 2: ch. VII; Bernadotte E. Schmitt, *The Coming of the War, 1914*, 2 vols. (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 1: ch. X.
12. On the interlocking alliance systems see Joll, *Origins of First World War*, ch. 3; Scott D. Sagan, "1914 Revisited," *International Security* 11 (Fall 1986):151-75.
13. It would be possible to identify additional outcomes, such as an unconditional Serbian acceptance of all the terms of the Austrian ultimatum, a limited Austro-Hungarian invasion of Serbia based on the Halt in Belgrade Plan, or an earlier punitive strike. For the sake of simplicity and parsimony such complications would be better saved for a subsequent and more thorough analysis of the World War I case.
14. L. L. Farrar, Jr., "The limits of choice: July 1914 reconsidered," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 16 (March 1972):10.
15. On the general decline of Austria-Hungary see Oscar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 215-19; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 92-94. On the importance of Austrian prestige see Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 51-52, 59. On pressure for preventive war in Austria see Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter*, 4 vols., trans. by Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1969-73), 2:227-39; Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 33; Fischer, *Illusions*, p. 398; V. R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973), pp. 171-72, 193-94; Fay, *Origins of the World War*, 1:43, 390, 466-67; 2:9, 13-14; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 87; Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 2:217-18; also Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* 40 (October 1987): 82-107.
16. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2: 168-69; Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 64; D.C.B. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), p. 147. British Foreign Secretary Grey described the ultimatum as "the most formidable document

I had ever seen addressed by one State to another. . . ." In G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, vol. XI (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1926), No. 91, p. 73. On Austria's dilemma in formulating the ultimatum, see Farrar, "Limits," p. 14, and for the text of the ultimatum see Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:286-89.

17. Norman Stone, "Moltke and Conrad: Relations between the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs, 1909-1914." In Paul M. Kennedy, ed., *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1979).

18. Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., "The Origins of World War I," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18 (Spring 1988):610; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 10-11; Geiss, "Outbreak," p. 86.

19. Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 52, 56; Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, 2:236; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 527. An intriguing hypothesis is that Tisza feared that a victorious foreign war would increase the power of Vienna within the monarchy and enable Austrian leaders to restructure the monarchy, and perhaps even concede some power to the Slavs at the expense of the Hungarians.

20. This proposition is more problematic after the Austrian declaration of war on July 28. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:162. A German veto would have been even more compelling in conjunction with four-power agreement on some variation of the Halt in Belgrade Plan. Imanuel Geiss, "The Outbreak of the First World War and German War Aims," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966):86; Kaiser, "Germany," p. 471; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:466-527, 651-73; 3:232-36. Williamson ("Origins," p. 807) suggests that without German support Vienna might have taken some limited military action short of war.

21. Williamson, "Origins," p. 811, 813n; Lieven, *Russia*, p. 147. It has been argued that Russian promises of support led the Serbian cabinet to adopt a less compromising response to the Austrian ultimatum than they otherwise would have done (Albertini, *War of 1914*, 3:352-62; Lieven, *Russia*, p. 114), but this has been questioned by Williamson, "Origins," pp. 811-13.

22. Serbia held out only on the demand that Austro-Hungarian officials participate in the Serbian inquiry into the assassination plot. The kaiser believed that the Serbian reply was sufficiently conciliatory that "on the whole the wishes of the Danube Monarchy have been acceded to. . . . Every cause for war falls to the ground." Karl Kautsky, *Outbreak of the World War: German Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), no. 293, p. 273. He insisted, however, on a "temporary occupation of Belgrade" to ensure Serbian compliance and perhaps to appease his own military. Geiss, "Outbreak," pp. 82-83.

23. With regard to other outcomes, Serbia preferred a continental war with Russian support (and therefore also a world war with British intervention) to a localized war with Austria-Hungary, but her role in the expansion of the war in negligible.

24. Taylor, *Mastery*, p. 517; Kaiser, "Germany," p. 471; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:403-5; Imanuel Geiss, ed., *July 1914, The Outbreak of the First World War: Selected Documents* (New York: Scribner's, 1967), pp. 230-31, 241-42, 303-34; Geiss, "Outbreak," pp. 82, 87; Farrar, "Limits," p. 14. Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 102-6. The Russian elites' incentive for diversionary action was modified by the fear that war could lead to revolution. Lieven, *Russia*, pp. 122, 153; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 105.

25. In Lieven, *Russia*, pp. 141-47. Also Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 55.

26. Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey," (p. 7) quotes Grey as saying that "if [Austria-Hungary] could make war on Serbia and at the same time satisfy Russia, well and good." See also Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 66. Note that Grey's threat of intervention in his July 29 warning to Lichnowsky was conditional upon French involvement in the war.

27. The kaiser made a similar proposal the previous day.

28. Zara S. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), chs. 7-10; Taylor, *Mastery*, pp. 525-26; Arno J. Mayer, "Domestic Causes of the First World War," in Leonard Krieger and Fritz Stern, eds., *The Responsibility of Power* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 298-300; K. M. Wilson, "The British Cabinet's Decision for War. 2 August 1914" *British Journal of International Studies* 1 (1975):148-59; Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 136-39; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 97-98.

29. Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 99. It was also necessary for France to maintain the good will of Britain, and therefore it could not behave too provocatively.

30. John F. V. Keiger, *France and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), ch. 7. The absence of Poincaré and Viviani also resulted in a somewhat greater role for Maurice Paleologue, the revanchist French ambassador to Russia.

31. Fay, *Origins of the World War*, vol. 2; Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Genesis of the World War* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

32. What most differentiates Fischer from others is his argument that German political leaders actually preferred a continental war to a local war in the Balkans. See fn. 44.

33. Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 53-64, 69; Konrad H. Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War: Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg's Calculated Risk, July 1914," *Central European History* 2 (March 1969):56; Taylor, *Mastery*, p. 522; Farrar, "Limits," p. 13; John Rohl, ed., *1914: Delusion or Design* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973).

34. Jagow to Lichnowsky, July 18, in Geiss, *July 1914*, pp. 122-24. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:159-64; Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 1:321; Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9 (Summer 1984):83.

35. Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 60.

36. Jarausch, "Limited War," p. 58. Both Jarausch and Bethmann-Hollweg expected that a local war would split the Entente, but neither explains why. Bethmann may have assumed that France would support Russia if and only if Russia were directly threatened by Germany (as stipulated by the terms of the Franco-Russian alliance), and that the absence of French support would not only prevent Russia from coming to Serbia's aid but also lead it to drop France as an unreliable ally. But I have argued that although France preferred to stay out of a local war, and might try to convince Russia that it was in its interests to do the same, France would follow Russia if necessary and give whatever support it needed.

37. Jarausch, "Limited War," pp. 61, 75. See also Berghahn, *Approach of War*, pp. 192, 196.

38. Fischer, *War Aims*, ch. 2; Geiss, "Outbreak," pp. 84, 88; Jarausch, "Limited War," pp. 58, 75; Berghahn, *Approach of War*, p. 196; Michael R. Gordon, "Domestic Conflict and the Origins of the First World War: The British and the German Cases," *Journal of Modern History* 46 (June 1974): 194-95; Stephen Van Evera, "Why Cooperation Failed in 1914," *World Politics* 38 (October 1985): 100, and "Cult," p. 83; Sagan, "1914 Revisited," p. 168; Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Detente and Deterrence: Anglo-German Relations, 1911-1914," *International Security* 11 (Fall 1986): 142-43; Tuchman, *Guns of August*, p. 95.

39. Although this is a standard interpretation of Fischer, he is not perfectly consistent on this point. See *War Aims*, p. 60 and *Illusions*, pp. 480, 515. Geiss ("Outbreak," pp. 79, 86) states explicitly that Germany preferred a continental war even to a local war which succeeded in splitting the Entente.

40. Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 49; Fischer, *Illusions*, pp. 377-79, 402, 427; Geiss, "Outbreak," pp. 77-78; Berghahn, *Approach of War*, chs. 6-10; Schmitt, *Coming of War*, pp. 321-25; Kaiser, "Germany," p. 469; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 114; Jarausch, "Limited War," p. 48; Farrar, "Limits," p. 12; Evera, "Cult," pp. 79-85; Paul M. Kennedy,

"The First World War and the International Power System," *International Security* 9 (Summer 1984): 28.

41. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "The Debate on German War Aims," in Walter Lacqueur and George Mosse, eds., 1914: *The Coming of the First World War* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 60.

42. Fischer, *Illusions*; Berghahn, *Approach of War*, ch. 6-9; Gordon, "Domestic Conflict," pp. 191-226; Mayer, "Domestic Causes"; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy before 1914," *Central European History* 6 (March 1973):3-43; Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1989), pp. 259-88.

43. Bethmann-Hollweg feared the revolutionary consequences of a major war, particularly if Germany were to lose. Mommsen, "Domestic Factors," p. 33; Mayer, "Domestic Causes," p. 293.

44. The primary differences among Fischer, the "inadvertent-war" school (Fay, Tuchman, etc.), and myself can be summarized by our respective views of German preference orderings:

Fischer	CW	>	LW	>	NP	>	WW
inadvertent war	NP	>	LW	>	CW	>	WW
Levy	LW	>	CW	>	NP	>	WW

Note that some in the inadvertent-war school concede that Germany may have actually preferred a local war, so that  $LW > NP$ . Van Evera ("Cooperation," p. 100) and Jarausch ("Limited War," p. 75) each shares my characterization of German preferences but not my overall interpretation of the causes of the war.

45. Thus the attempt to model the 1914 case as a  $2 \times 2$  game in normal form (e.g., Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977], ch. 2) is flawed on several counts: the situation cannot be reduced to two coalitions because preferences were not congruent within each alliance, to two strategic options for each actor, to dichotomous outcomes of either war or peace, or to a single choice in a one-play game.

46. It will be useful to distinguish between the decisions to issue the ultimatum, declare war, and begin the invasion.

47. I recognize that one must be careful in using post-1945 concepts like deterrence and crisis management to describe and explain the perceptions, motivations, and behaviors of earlier states and state officials. Although statesmen had no concept of "deterrence" in 1914, German leaders hoped that the threat to intervene against Russia would be sufficient to keep Russia from moving against Austria, and in this sense they attempted to deter Russia.

48. Tuchman, *Guns of August*, p. 143; Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 63; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:517; Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, p. 132. Steiner, *Britain* (p. 126) emphasizes that Bethmann and Jagow both wavered between optimism and pessimism on this issue.

49. Jagow agreed, and told French Ambassador Cambon on July 26 that "We are sure of English neutrality." Bethmann had earlier (December 1912) expressed confidence that Britain would stand aside "If the provocation appeared to come directly from Russia and France." Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:429, 520; Bethmann to William II, July 23, in Jarausch, "Limited War," p. 62. Lichnowsky to Jagow, received July 29, 9:12 P.M., in Geiss, *Outbreak*, pp. 130-31; Albertini 2:508-27; Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 31, 63, 78-82; Fischer, "The Miscalculation of English Neutrality: An Aspect of German Foreign Policy on the Eve of World War I," in Solomon Wank, et al., *The Mirror of History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1988), pp. 369-93. Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 2:159-61; Lebow, *Peace and War*, pp. 133-34. Mommsen ("Domestic Factors," p. 38n) disagrees.

50. Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan* (New York: Praeger, 1958); Tuchman, *Guns of August*, pp. 41, 144-45; Fisher, *War Aims*, p. 49. The main exception was Tirpitz. Lebow, *Peace and War*, p. 130n.

Bethmann's view was probably the following: Britain might intervene, but only if France were on the verge of being crushed by Germany, and such intervention could be avoided by Germany's guarantees that it sought no territorial annexations from France. Thus in spite of some disagreements among German civilian and military leaders about the likelihood of British neutrality in the abstract (let me call this the "strong neutrality assumption"), there was consensus that Britain would not intervene early in the war (the "weak neutrality assumption"). It is clear that Bethmann would not risk a continental war if he doubted the validity of this weaker assumption. Thus my earlier proposition that the German assumption of British neutrality was a necessary condition for war of any kind should be interpreted in terms of the weak neutrality assumption. See my "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914," *International Security* 15, 3 (Winter 1990-91): 165n.

51. Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, pp. 71, 161-62; Van Evera, "Cult," p. 92; Lynn-Jones, "Detente," p. 144; L. L. Farrar, Jr., *The Short-War Illusion* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 1973); Steiner, *Britain*, p. 125; Kaiser, "Germany," p. 469; Geiss, "Outbreak," p. 84; Trachtenberg, "Meaning of Mobilization," pp. 137-43. Moltke wavered on this point, and on August 2 said that "England's neutrality is of such importance to us that a promise of moderation in case of a victory over France . . . could be made unconditionally." Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 33, 85; Geiss, *July 1914*, pp. 350-51.

52. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:502-8, 514-20 (quote). This assumption is also critical for Fischer and his associates. Fischer, *War Aims*, ch. 2, *Illusions*, p. 496; Geiss, "Outbreak." Also Lebow, *Peace and War*, p. 133; Lynn-Jones, "Detente," pp. 143-44. The German bid for neutrality, which goes back to the Haldane mission of 1912, failed because it insisted that German involvement in war be sufficient for British neutrality, whereas Britain insisted that it could offer neutrality only in the event of an unprovoked attack on Germany. Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 27.

53. Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 70-76, 80-81, 85, *Illusions*, pp. 162, 495; Geiss, "Outbreak," p. 86; *July 14*, pp. 269, 350; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 20, 26-29, 116; Jarausch, "Limited War," pp. 63-68; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:502.

54. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:431-45; Lebow, *Peace and War*, pp. 131-2, 140-1.

55. Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 78; Bethmann-Hollweg to Tschirschky, 2:55 A.M., 3:00 A.M. 30 July 1914, in Geiss, *July 1914*, pp. 91-93; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:504, 520-25; Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 78-82; Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 2:161-72; Jarausch, "Limited War," pp. 65-68; Lynn-Jones "Detente," pp. 143-44. The critical impact of British intentions is also demonstrated by the German response to Lichnowsky's August 1 report of Grey's offer that if Germany "were not to attack France, England would remain neutral and guarantee the passivity of France." Albertini, *War of 1914*, 3:380-81. The kaiser, chancellor and others were elated, and the kaiser announced "Now we can go to war against Russia only. We simply march the whole of our army to the East." Tuchman, *Guns of August*, p. 98. Moltke objected strenuously on grounds of the rigidity of the mobilization and war plans, but he was overruled, and German acceptance of what they thought was the British proposal was sent to England. It was soon revealed that the offer of neutrality did not represent British policy, and German plans for the invasion of France through Belgium continued. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 3:380-86; Jack S. Levy, "Organizational Routines and the Causes of War," *International Studies Quarterly* 30 (June 1986):199; Tuchman, *Guns of August*, p. 98.

56. Fischer, and to a lesser extent Geiss, argue that Bethmann's policy shift on July 29-30 was temporary, and that "peace moves" later that day were simply tactical expedients to deceive Britain and ensure that the blame for the conflict which Germany still sought could

be shifted onto Russia. Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 79–82; Geiss, "Outbreak," p. 84; July 1914, p. 269. Lebow (*Peace and War*, pp. 135–39) emphasizes the importance of psychological stress, emotional turmoil, exaggerated confidence and pessimistic fatalism, and hypervigilant coping behavior in Bethmann's shifts in policy on July 29–31. See my letter to the editor, *International Security* 16 (Summer 1991).

Trachtenberg ("Meaning of Mobilization," pp. 134–36) argues that Bethmann shifted course on July 29–30 because of the Russian partial mobilization rather than the warning from Grey. Although the evidence for the importance of British neutrality for German leaders goes far beyond the events of the evening of July 29–30, my review of the sequence, timing, and content of Bethmann's telegrams to Vienna that night suggests that Lichnowsky's message from London had a greater impact on Bethmann than did news from Russia.

57. Lebow, *Peace and War*, p. 136. This argument is buttressed by psychological evidence which suggests that the reluctance to reopen a decision is proportionate to the difficulty of making it in the first place. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 383–406.

58. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:514, 3:643; Lynn-Jones, "Detente," pp. 139, 144; Kaiser, "Germany," p. 471.

59. Lebow, *Peace and War*, pp. 136–47.

60. A German threat that was combined with certain face-saving compromises for Austria (such as the Halt in Belgrade Plan) would have been even more likely to succeed.

61. Tuchman, *Guns of August*, p. 144. Also Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), ch. 1; Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *Great Britain and the War of 1914–1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 19–20.

62. See Lebow, *Peace and War*, pp. 130–31.

63. Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 2: 52–53; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:425, 429, 687–88; Lynn-Jones, "Detente," p. 142; Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 572–80.

64. French Chief of Staff Joseph Joffre was so uncertain of British intervention that he did not include that assumption in the formation of the French army's war plan, and Sazonov warned the Russian Council of Ministers on July 24 that any escalation of war would be dangerous "since it is not known what attitude Great Britain would take in the matter." Samuel R. Williamson, "Joffre Shapes French Strategy, 1911–1913," in Kennedy, *War Plans*, p. 146; Lieven, *Russia*, p. 142; Sagan, "1914 Revisited," pp. 169–70; Lynn-Jones, "Detente," p. 141; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 19, 26.

65. Wilson, *Faces of War*, pp. 149–50; Sagan, "1914 Revisited," p. 170.

66. *British Documents*, XI, no. 283, p. 180; Wilson, *Faces of War*, p. 150. Here I am using the "third party" criterion to assess the extent to which misperceptions are determined by the inherent uncertainty of the situation as opposed to the motivated biases of decision makers. See Jervis, *Perception*, p. 7; Lebow, *Peace and War*, p. 91; Sagan, "1914 Revisited," p. 170; Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence," in Philip E. Tetlock, et al., eds., *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 287–88.

67. Grey's attempted balancing act in a combined "alliance dilemma" and "adversary dilemma" has been described as a "straddle strategy" by Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36 (July 1984):461–95. See also Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 20; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:515; Farrar, *Illusion*, p. 15; Woodward, *Great Britain*, p. 21. This strategy was based on the idea that "If both sides do not know what we shall do, both will be less willing to run risks" (Joll, p. 20), which makes the debatable assumption that both Russian and German decision makers were risk-averse and would act more cautiously when faced with uncertainty.

68. Lynn-Jones, "Detente," pp. 125–40; Steiner, *Britain*, pp. 145–215. On the naval rivalry see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1860–1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), ch. 22.

69. Michael Eckstein, "Sir Edward Grey and Imperial Germany in 1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6 (1971):121–31.

70. Steiner, *Britain*, ch. 9; Wilson, *Faces of War*, pp. 148–59; Lynn-Jones, "Detente," p. 139. Grey's aims were not only to prevent a continental war if at all possible, and not only to bring Britain into such a war if it did occur, but also to ensure that his divided country be brought into the war united. The risk of an early warning to Germany was that the cabinet and perhaps Parliament might react so strongly as to undercut both the second and third objectives.

71. Wilson, *Faces of War*, pp. 149–50; Steiner, *Britain*, p. 233; Michael G. Eckstein and Zara Steiner, "The Sarajevo Crisis," in F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 404; *British Documents*, XI, no. 426, p. 253; Woodward, *Great Britain*, pp. 21–22.

72. Quoted in Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:515.

73. Samuel J. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969) argues that Britain would have intervened in the absence of a German invasion of Belgium.

74. The Schlieffen Plan was based on the assumptions that any continental war would be a two-front war for Germany, that its Russian and French enemies had to be dealt with one at a time, that the offensive was the dominant form of warfare, that France could be quickly defeated more easily and more rapidly than Russia but only by an enveloping movement through Belgium, that any advance through Belgium required the rapid and preemptive seizure of Liège, and that consequently the move into Belgium had to come early in the mobilization process itself (the third day). Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan*; Snyder, *Ideology*, chs. 4–5; L.C.F. Turner, "The Significance of the Schlieffen Plan," in Kennedy, *War Plans*; Levy, "Routines," p. 197.

75. Steiner, *Origins*, p. 237; Wilson, *Faces of War*, p. 25; Tuchman, *Guns of August*, pp. 113, 137; Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey," p. 1; Berghahn, *Approach of War*, pp. 208–09.

76. See George, "Strategies for Crisis Management," in this volume.

77. Taylor, *Mastery*, pp. 522–23; Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, 2:236; Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., "Theories of Foreign Policy Process and Foreign Policy Outcomes," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy* (New York: Free Press, 1979), pp. 151–53. See also Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 1:393; Berghahn, *Approach of War*, p. 195; Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey," p. 11; Dwight E. Lee, *Europe's Crucial Years: The Diplomatic Background of World War I, 1902–1914* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1974), p. 382.

78. Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 53–61; Jarausch, "Limited War," pp. 60–68; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, p. 15; Lee, *Crucial Years*, p. 382; Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey," pp. 10–11.

79. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:175; Butterfield, "Sir Edward Grey," p. 10. It is not clear that Austria-Hungary planned to fulfill this promise. See Pierre Renouvin, *The Immediate Origins of the War*, trans. by Theodore C. Hume (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), pp. 128–29; Williamson, "Origins," p. 810.

80. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:455.

81. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:175; Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 1:345–57; Norman Stone, "Hungary and the Crisis of July 1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966):147–64. Minor frontier adjustments were permitted.

82. Williamson, "Theories," pp. 152–53; and "Origins," p. 808; Levy, "Routines," p. 202.

83. Tschirschky to Bethmann-Hollweg, 14 July, in Geiss, *July 1914*, pp. 114–15.

84. Although the Russian "period preparatory to war" beginning on July 26 generated concern in Germany, it was the partial mobilization on July 30 and particularly the general mobilization the following day that triggered a German response.

85. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:455–56; Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 14–15. Domestic public opinion and the press had also become increasingly belligerent. Albertini, 2:453–58.

86. This may not be a significant change, however, for Berchtold's preference for an unconditional capitulation over war was ever so slight, and he was unwilling to make any further compromises to gain a one-sided diplomatic victory without war.

87. It is difficult to determine whether this strategy of coercive diplomacy had been adopted at the time of the ultimatum, and whether the ultimatum was designed as a justification for war or as a highly coercive instrument to secure Serbia's submission. It appears that the decision makers involved in the process each had a different conception of the purpose of the ultimatum.

88. This assumes that the combination of the ultimatum, Bethmann's rejection of Grey's proposal for a four-power conference, and Russia's early preparations for war would have been perceived by Grey as threatening enough to issue a strong warning even in the absence of an Austrian declaration of war.

89. *German Documents*, no. 293, p. 273; Grey to Goschen, July 29, *British Documents*, no. 286, p. 182; A.J.P. Taylor, *War by Time-table*. In *History of the 20th Century*, vol. 2 (New York: Purnell, 1974), p. 445.

90. Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 73; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:656–57; Schmitt, *Coming of War*, 2:217–18; Renouvin, *Immediate Origins*, p. 193. It has also been argued that Vienna was constrained by the absence of contingency plans for the occupation of Belgrade apart from a general invasion of Serbia. Holsti, *Crisis*, pp. 157, 216. But Serbia had decided not to defend Belgrade (Taylor, *Time-table*, p. 445). If Austria had possessed more timely intelligence, it could have occupied the city without interfering with any subsequent mobilization against Russia.

91. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:659, 669–73; Kaiser, "Germany," p. 471.

92. *German Documents*, no. 323, pp. 288–89; Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 72; Geiss, "Outbreak," p. 83; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:653–61. Tschirschky also delayed notifying Berlin of the Austrian declaration of war.

93. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:673–74; Turner, "Schlieffen Plan," p. 215.

94. Ulrich Trumppener, "War Premeditated? German Intelligence Operations in July 1914," *Central European History* 9 (March 1976), p. 77; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:500; Turner, "Schlieffen Plan," p. 215.

95. The military in general and Moltke in particular had not exerted much pressure on Bethmann throughout most of the July crisis, and had accepted Bethmann's efforts to restrain Vienna early on the 30th. The military's demand for a proclamation of "imminent threat of war" was accepted late on July 30 after being rejected earlier that day. Just before it was to be announced at noon on the 31st, however, Germany received news of Russian general mobilization. Berlin sent a 12-hour ultimatum to St. Petersburg demanding that all military preparations be stopped. The Russian rejection of this demand was followed by a declaration of war on August 1. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:502, 3:13, 31, 232, 236; Fischer, *War Aims*, pp. 85–86; Trachtenberg, "A Reassessment," pp. 62–63.

96. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 3:31.

97. Joll, *Origins of First World War*, pp. 21, 107, 203; Lebow, *Peace and War*, pp. 254–56.

98. Conrad's defense plan called for minimal defense forces in both Galicia (A-Staffel, thirty divisions) and in the Balkans (Minimalgruppe Balkan, ten divisions). An additional

twelve divisions (B-Staffel) could be sent either to the Balkans (where they would add sufficient strength to destroy Serbia) or to Galicia (where they would combine with A-Staffel to provide for a powerful offensive against Russia). Stone, "Moltke and Conrad," pp. 225–26, 233, 243–44.

99. This was recognized by both Conrad and Moltke. Conrad described a delayed Russian intervention as "the most difficult yet most probable case." Stone, "Moltke and Conrad," pp. 228–35; Fischer, *War Aims*, p. 74; L.C.F. Turner, *Origins of the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 92–93, and "The Russian Mobilisation in 1914," in Kennedy, *War Plans*, p. 258. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:482.

100. Turner, *Origins*, p. 92; Turner, "Russian Mobilisation," pp. 258, 266; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:482.

101. Turner, *Origins*, p. 93, "Russian Mobilisation," pp. 258, 266, Kennedy, *War Plans*, p. 15. Sazonov's original plan was to wait until Austria actually invaded Serbia before initiating partial mobilization. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:538.

102. This belief was reinforced by Russia's fear that Germany was looking for an opportunity to launch a preventive war against Russia. Van Evera, "Cult," pp. 87–88.

103. Turner, "Russian Mobilisation," pp. 261–62; Baron M. F. Schilling, *How the War Began in 1914: The Diary of the Russian Foreign Office* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), pp. 62–66; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:565–72; Snyder, *Ideology*, chs. 6–7; Van Evera, "Cult," pp. 72–78. Trachtenberg, "Meaning of Mobilization," pp. 145–47.

104. Russian General Danilov even suggests that the military, given a choice, might have preferred no mobilization to partial mobilization. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:293, 543; Turner, *Origins*, p. 92, "Russian Mobilisation" (1979); Schilling, *How War Began*, p. 117. A general mobilization had been ordered and cancelled on July 29, and a partial mobilization was ordered the next day.

105. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:292–93, 485n (for quote). Also Turner, *Origins*, pp. 92, 104; Snyder, *Ideology*, p. 88; Kennedy, *War Plans*, pp. 16–17; Van Evera, "Cult," p. 88; Levy, "Routines," p. 198.

106. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:496–503; Trachtenberg, "Meaning of Mobilization," pp. 137–39; Fischer, *Illusions*, pp. 495–96, *War Aims*, p. 85. Late on July 29 Moltke (with unanimous support from political and military leaders) instructed Conrad: "Do not declare war on Russia but wait for Russia's attack." Fischer, *Illusions*, p. 496.

107. Van Evera, "Cult," pp. 71–79; Snyder, "Dilemma," p. 177; Levy, "Routines," pp. 195–96; Turner, "Schlieffen Plan," 216.

108. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:480; Turner, *Origins*, p. 63; A.J.P. Taylor, *War by Time-table* (London: MacDonald, 1968), p. 25; Levy, "Routines," pp. 197–98. For analyses of the feasibility of a German offensive in the east while maintaining a defensive holding action in the west, see Snyder, *Ideology*, pp. 116–22; Tuchman, *Guns of August*, p. 100. The Franco-Russian alliance made it unlikely that France would stay neutral in a Russo-German war, but if Germany had fought defensively in the west and avoided Belgium, the chances of British intervention would have been much less.

109. Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*; Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, vol. 2, ch. 9; Turner, "Schlieffen Plan," p. 205; Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 195, 277; Snyder, *Ideology*, ch. 4; Kennedy, *War Plans*, p. 17; Levy, "Routines," pp. 207–9.

110. Snyder, *Ideology*, p. 121; Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, 2:205. One can also find examples of the dominance of technical military considerations in the Russian mobilization and war plans and the influential role of the military in the political decision-making process. See Lieven, *Russia*, pp. 63, 122. The military had far less influence in France and in Britain during the July crisis. Steiner, *Britain*, p. 220; Keiger, *France* ch. 7; Kennedy, *War Plans*, p. 7.

111. Taylor, *War by Time-Table* (1968), p. 19; Taylor, "Time-table" (1974), p. 444; Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, vol. 2, ch. 9, *Schlieffen Plan*, p. 90; Albertini, *War of 1914*, 3:253; Snyder, *Ideology*, chs. 4-5; Van Evera, "Cult," pp. 85-86; L.C.F. Turner, "The Significance of the Schlieffen Plan," in Kennedy, *War Plans*, p. 205; Tuchman, *Guns of August*, pp. 94-101; Levy, "Routines," pp. 198-201, 209.

112. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:479-85, 579-81; 3:195, 391; Ritter, *Sword and Scepter*, 2:266; Turner, *Origins*, pp. 92, 99, 108; "Schlieffen Plan," p. 213; Levy, "Routines," pp. 209-10.

113. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:332, 480, 3:391; Turner, *Origins*, p. 99.

114. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:480-81; Turner, "The Mobilisation" (1979), p. 260. This incentive to mobilize was reinforced by the hope that mobilization might help diffuse internal unrest. Fay, *Origins of the World War*, 2:305; Turner, "The Russian Mobilization in 1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (January 1968):65-88; Hans Rogger, "Russia in 1914," in Laqueur and Mosse, pp. 229-53. Sazonov's ignorance is explained in part by the fact that Janushkevich had been chief of staff for only five months, was not familiar with the details of mobilization, and therefore failed to warn Sazonov of the implications of partial mobilization. This tragedy is compounded further by the failure of Germany to warn Russia of the risks involved. In fact, on July 27 German Foreign Secretary Jagow erroneously assured both the British and the French ambassadors to Berlin that "if Russia only mobilized in the south, Germany would not mobilize." Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:481-82.

115. Albertini, *War of 1914*, 2:294, 480-82, 624, 3:43; Van Evera, "Cult," p. 76; Turner, "Russian Mobilisation" (1968), p. 71; Lebow, *Crisis Management*, p. 111. But see Trachtenberg, "Meaning of Mobilization," pp. 145-47.

116. Many German political leaders were also ignorant of key aspects of the mobilization plans. But because they had no choice but to mobilize in response to a general mobilization by Russia and because the mobilization process would be so difficult to reverse, their ignorance of the consequences of mobilization was probably less critical than the nature of the plans themselves. It is interesting to speculate, however, whether Bethmann would have behaved differently had he realized that his central policy goal of British neutrality would be undercut by the demands of the Schlieffen Plan. Bethmann knew of the invasion of Belgium, but did not learn until July 31, after the ultimatum to Russia, that it must begin on the third day of mobilization (Turner, *Origins*, p. 213), which would reduce the diplomatic advantages to Germany of allowing Russia to mobilize first.

117. A subsequent crisis would have been all the more serious because of the tendency for states' bargaining tactics to become increasingly coercive and intractable in successive crises with the same adversary. See Russell J. Leng, "When Will They Ever Learn? Coercive Bargaining in Recurrent Crises," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27 (September 1983):379-419; John A. Vasquez, "The Steps to War," *World Politics* 40 (October 1987):138-40.