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## Organizational Routines and the Causes of War

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This study identifies the theoretical linkages by which rigid organizational routines of the military may contribute to the outbreak of war, and examines the analytical problems involved in making such inferences. It is argued that military routines have an impact on the outbreak of war only in combination with other systemic, organizational, bureaucratic, and psychological variables. The failure to recognize the independent role of other variables in inducing rigid adherence to existing military plans, as well as the danger of spurious inferences, results in incomplete explanations and the attribution of excessive causal weight to organizational routines themselves. Systemic variables determining 'military necessity' are particularly important. The greater the extent to which military necessity influences both the development of contingency plans and their rigid implementation in a crisis, the less the causal weight that can be attributed to the nature of the plans themselves. The less rigid the plans really are in terms of military necessity, the greater their causal importance and that of other variables. Military routines and interests can also contribute to the outbreak of war through their role in the development of military doctrine and war plans. These theoretical linkages are illustrated by an analysis of the military mobilization and war plans for World War I.

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One of the central concepts in the organizational process or cybernetic model of foreign policy decisionmaking is standard operating procedures or SOPs (Allison, 1971; Steinbruner, 1974). Although it is commonly believed that the model in general and SOPs in particular have more explanatory power in non-crisis as opposed to crisis decisions, and although most case studies dealing with the subject have focused on non-crisis issues, organizational processes and routines may also be important for the question of the causes of war. In fact, many historians argue that military mobilization plans were an important factor contributing to the outbreak of World War I (Fay, 1928; Tuchman, 1962; Turner, 1970; Ritter, 1973) and some even assert that it was the single most important cause of the war (Albertini, 1957: 2/581, 3/253; Taylor, 1969: 120). Allison's (1971) study of the Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrates the potential importance of the organizational process model for crisis decisionmaking in the nuclear age, and there has

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recently been some interest in organizational constraints on the command and control of nuclear forces in a superpower crisis (Bracken, 1983; George, 1984; Sagan, 1985).

In spite of the importance of the question of how organizational processes might contribute to the outbreak of war, it has never been studied systematically, either in the case of World War I or more generally.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this study is to identify the specific theoretical linkages by which organizational processes in general and military routines in particular may lead to the outbreak of war under certain conditions, and in doing so discuss the analytical problems involved in making such causal inferences. My argument is that the theoretical linkages between military routines and the outbreak of war are logically incomplete without the inclusion of other systemic, institutional, and psychological variables. Military routines can never 'cause' war by themselves, but they can contribute to the outbreak of war under certain conditions and in conjunction with certain other variables. I illustrate the causal relationships through an examination of the World War I mobilization plans, and then briefly consider their relevance in the nuclear age.<sup>2</sup>

There are other organizational variables that might also be examined with respect to the causes of war. I have chosen to focus on standard operating procedures because of their central role in organizational theory, and because of their alleged importance in the World War I case and potentially in other cases as well. Other organizational variables will be included to the extent that they affect the rigidity of military routines. There are also numerous organizations whose routinized behavior might be examined, but I have chosen to focus on the military. Although all organizations operate according to some standardized routines, the military (and perhaps also the intelligence agencies that serve them) are generally more geared to routines than their civilian counterparts. Thus Betts (1977: 157) argues that 'political goals and trade-offs cannot be programmed like tactical operations or weapons procurement. The latter functions are clear, tangible, quantifiable, and verifiable, while the former are more inchoate, ambiguous, inconstant, and uncertain.' Military planners, he argues, prefer 'formulaic solutions that reduce problems to manageable terms, clarify responsibilities and calculations of capabilities vis-à-vis objectives, and maximize certainty and efficiency'. In addition, though it would be possible to identify several theoretical linkages leading from organizational routines to war, the concern here is with those linkages which are most direct and which carry the greatest causal impact. This is particularly true of military routines involved in the implementation of political decisions involving the threat or use of force.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The mobilization plans of 1914 have been studied extensively by historians, but more theoretically oriented efforts to generalize about their connection with the outbreak of war are rare. Political scientists occasionally generalize from the 1914 case, but usually only on the basis of superficial evidence, although Snyder (1984a,b) and Van Evera (1984a) are exceptions here. There have been some attempts to apply organizational concepts to questions involving the *conduct* of war (Jenkins, 1970; Gallucci, 1975), but the causal linkages are often different from those involved in the outbreak of war.

<sup>2</sup> It should be emphasized that my focus is more theoretical than empirical, and that the World War I case should be regarded as illustrative rather than as evidentiary. No attempt will be made to evaluate empirically the causal importance of military routines relative to that of other variables in the 1914 case; that would require a sophisticated research design and extensive historical investigation. A theoretical analysis of the causal mechanisms by which military routines *could* lead to war is a prerequisite for any empirical analysis of whether they do in a particular case or the frequency with which this occurs.

<sup>3</sup> Organizational routines and bureaucratic policies undoubtedly contribute to arms races through their impact on defense spending (Allison, 1977; Ostrom, 1977), and arms races, in turn, may lead to war. The organizational routines in question, however, occur at points far removed from war and their causal impact is confounded with that of numerous other variables, and thus they will not be examined here.

**Military Routines and the Outbreak of War: The Conventional Argument**

It is necessary to make several qualifications before we begin. An examination of the theoretical linkages by which military routines can, under certain conditions, contribute to the outbreak of war does not imply that they always make war more likely. Indeed, well-designed military routines may actually have the opposite effect and contribute to peace, by enhancing military efficiency and power and thereby reinforcing deterrence, by reducing the need for preemptive action, and by minimizing the confusion and error that increase the dangers of policymakers inadvertently stumbling into war. Similarly, the absence of military routines<sup>4</sup> may under some conditions contribute to war and under other conditions contribute to peace. Without pre-planned routines policymakers may simply do nothing; this might avoid war, but it might also contribute to war by undermining deterrence. Alternatively, policymakers may improvise or implement a plan designed for other contingencies, which could increase the chances of failure or of overreaction contributing to war or the escalation of war.<sup>5</sup> The more interesting cases and those receiving most attention in the literature and most in need of careful analysis, however, are those in which there is too much—as opposed to too little—planning, and where these rigid routines contribute to war.

*‘Mobilization Means War’*

Probably the most common explanation of how military routines contribute to the outbreak of war focuses on the momentum generated by the mobilization plans themselves. Each action in this process of incremental escalation leads logically to the next, locking in current policy and contributing to a mechanistic and practically irreversible process of escalation to war. Let us examine the common argument that in 1914 the military preparations of the great powers acquired a momentum of their own, that because of rigid military plans each step led inevitably to the next, that the serious threat of mobilization of one great power essentially forces certain other powers to mobilize, and that mobilization itself led inevitably to war.<sup>6</sup>

The World War I mobilization plans were based on the assumption that the advantage lay with the offense (Hart, 1932: 72; Taylor, 1969: 15; Levy, 1984: 233; Snyder, 1984a, b; Van Evera, 1984a, b) and that speed was of the essence. European leaders believed that a one- to three-day lead in mobilization would be militarily significant for the course of the war, leaving those who delayed vulnerable against their better-prepared adversaries (Van Evera, 1984a: 72–74). These perceptions created enormous incentives to strike first (Van Evera, 1984a: 71–79; Snyder, 1985a), which

<sup>4</sup> For example, the United States had no mobilization plans on the eve of World War I, because President Wilson had forbidden them for political reasons (Betts, 1977: 154).

<sup>5</sup> For example, the US had no contingency plans for the direct defense of South Korea in 1950 (Paige, 1968: 69, 98, 128), and the consequences were nearly disastrous.

<sup>6</sup> It would be useful at this point to recall the chronological sequence of mobilizations and war declarations in 1914:

July 28	Austrian declaration of war against Serbia	Aug. 1	French mobilization (3:55 p.m.) German mobilization (4:00 p.m.)
July 29	German ‘Halt in Belgrade’ proposal Russian partial mobilization against Austria	Aug. 2	German declaration of war against Russia (7:00 p.m.) German invasion of Luxemburg
July 30	German proposal for British neutrality	Aug. 3	German declaration of war against France German invasion of Belgium
July 31	Russian general mobilization German ultimatum to Russia Austrian general mobilization	Aug. 4	British declaration of war against Germany
		Aug. 6	Austrian declaration of war against Russia

placed a premium on rapid mobilization plans, and which in turn required detailed advance planning. The entire process would be conducted by rail, and general staffs had been working for years to perfect their timetables. Thus, the railroad timetables became exceedingly complex and left little margin for error. In Tuchman's (1962: 94–95) words:

Once the mobilization button was pushed, the whole vast machinery for calling up, equipping, and transporting two million men began turning automatically. Reservists went to their designated depots, were issued uniforms, equipment, and arms, formed into companies and companies into battalions, were joined by cavalry, cyclists, artillery, medical units, cook wagons, blacksmith wagons, even postal wagons, moved according to prepared railway timetables to concentration points near the frontier where they would be formed into divisions, divisions into corps, and corps into armies ready to advance and fight . . . From the moment the order was given, everything was to move at fixed times according to a schedule precise down to the number of train axles that would pass over a given bridge within a given time.

Planning was so complete that Deputy Chief of Staff General Walderssee was confident enough of the system that he had not even bothered to return to Berlin at the beginning of the crisis, writing to Foreign Secretary Jagow: 'I shall remain here ready to jump; we are all prepared at the General Staff; in the meantime, there is nothing for us to do' (Tuchman, 1962: 95).<sup>7</sup>

The mechanistic and deterministic character of the mobilization plans is made strikingly clear by Sergei Dobrorolski, Chief of the Mobilization Section of the Russian General Staff (Fay, 1928: 2/481):

The whole plan of mobilization is worked out ahead to its end in all its details. When the moment has been chosen, one only has to press the button, and the whole state begins to function automatically with the precision of a clock's mechanism. . . . The choice of the moment is influenced by a complex of varied political causes. But once the moment has been fixed, everything is settled; there is no going back; it determines mechanically the beginning of war.

Dobrorolski's quote is indicative, not only of the rigid and mechanistic nature of the plans, but also of the perception by all military men and many statesmen in 1914 that mobilization made war inevitable. As Fay (1928: 2/479) argues: "'Mobilization means war' . . . was a political maxim which for years had been widely accepted by military men on the continent everywhere'. This was recognized by the French and Russian Chiefs of Staff, and accepted by the Tsar, as far back as 1892. French military Chief of Staff Boisdeffre said, in 1892, 'Mobilization is the declaration of war', to which the Tsar replied, 'That is exactly the way I understand it'. Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov was informed of this by German Ambassador Pourtales during the July crisis (Fay, 1928: 2/479–480). On July 30, Bethmann stated to the Prussian Council of Ministers: 'The declaration of "Threatening Danger of War" meant mobilization, and this under our conditions, mobilization toward both sides—meant war' (Fay, 1928: 2/524). Liddell Hart states that, after the Russian and Austrian mobilization, 'The

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, General Lukomskii, who was in charge of Russian rail transport planning, was convinced that preparations for mobilization were so well organized after 1912 that there was little left for him to do, and applied for a command in the field (Snyder, 1984b: 185).

“statesmen” may continue to send telegrams, but they are merely waste paper. The military machine has completely taken charge’ (Turner, 1970: 109–110). The perception that mobilization meant war was critical, for it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The direct link between mobilization and war was particularly compelling in the German case. The German Schlieffen Plan, devised in response to the threat of a two-front war, called for a holding action against Russia in the East while the bulk of German forces were directed against France in the West. It was based on the assumptions that the numerical inferiority of the Austro-German forces could be overcome by the presumed advantages of internal lines of communication, that Russia could not be defeated quickly because of her size, and that the slowness of Russian mobilization made it feasible to defeat France first.<sup>8</sup> This had to be done quickly, however, so the German armies could be shifted to the East in time to meet the Russian onslaught. Chief of Staff von Schlieffen, recognizing the strength of the French forces along the Alsace–Lorraine frontier and entranced by Hannibal’s double envelopment of the Romans at Cannae (Albertini, 1957: 3/237; Turner, 1979: 202–203), concluded that the French could be quickly defeated only by an enveloping movement through Belgium. But any advance into Belgium required the seizure of Liège, an absolutely vital railway junction. As Chief of Staff Moltke wrote, before the war, ‘the possession of Liège is the *sine qua non* of our advance’ (Turner, 1979: 212). But the seizure of Liège had to be quick and surgical, so as not to destroy its vital tunnels and bridges. This would require ‘meticulous preparation and surprise’ and had to be accomplished before Liège could be reinforced, and thus immediately after a declaration of war if not before. Complicating this was the fact that the railway lines required that four German armies, over 840 000 men, had to be routed through a single junction at Aachen. To allow them to pile up at the frontier and wait for a declaration of war would permit the reinforcement of Liège, make its surgical seizure much more problematical, and delay the completion of mobilization. The defense of Liège would prevent the rapid defeat of France and thus potentially ruin the entire German war effort (Van Evera, 1984a: 74). Thus the Schlieffen Plan required an advance into neutral Belgium as an integral part of mobilization itself. Thus Taylor (1969: 25) argues that, for Germany, ‘there is no breathing space between mobilization and war’; Albertini (1957: 2/480) argues that, for Germany, ‘mobilization . . . was identical with going to war’; Churchill concludes that ‘Mobilization therefore spelt war’ (Turner, 1970: 63).

A German advance into Belgium would not only initiate hostilities but it would also undoubtedly bring Britain into the war (Albertini, 1957: 2/508; Taylor, 1969: 104).<sup>9</sup> It would also lead inevitably to an expansion of the war in the East, for because of the alliance systems and Russia’s commitment to France, Russia would have to mobilize rapidly and invade Germany to relieve pressure on France, while Austria would have to aid her German ally by moving against Russia (Turner, 1970: 77). In this way, German mobilization itself made a general war virtually inevitable.

Taylor (1974: 445) argues that, for the other states, there was ‘a margin, though a thin one, between mobilization and war’. This is only partially correct. It is true that a

<sup>8</sup> Forty days were required for full Russian mobilization, as compared to only two weeks for Germany or France (Snyder, 1984b: 107). The buildup of Russian strategic railways, however, was rapidly rendering this assumption obsolete (Stone, 1975: 41–42).

<sup>9</sup> This was true because of domestic political as well as strategic considerations for Britain (Steiner, 1977: 236–238).

Russian mobilization would not automatically lead to a *Russian* decision for war (Albertini, 1957: 2/579–580; Taylor, 1969: 24), but this ignores the critical interdependence of mobilization decisions. As Pourtales reminded Sazonov on July 29, ‘the danger of all military measures lies in the countermeasures of the other side’ (Albertini, 1957: 2/549). There is no doubt that a general Russian mobilization would invariably lead to a German mobilization and thereby to a German invasion of Belgium and a general war. As Taylor (1979: 120) concludes, ‘The Germans declared war on Russia simply because Russia had mobilized’. But even a partial Russian mobilization against Austria would almost certainly have led to German mobilization and war, as Albertini (1957: 2/292–293, 485n), Turner (1979: 266), Snyder (1984a: 88), and Kennedy (1979: 16–17) argue. Albertini (1957: 2/485n), for example, states that ‘the logic of the case presented by Conrad and Moltke would have forced Germany to demand that (a partial Russian mobilization) be cancelled, or, in case of a refusal, mobilize in her turn in order to go to the help of Austria. In short, partial mobilization would have led to war no less surely than general mobilization’.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Austrian mobilization plans did not necessarily in themselves mean war. But by threatening Russia directly or even just threatening Russia’s Serbian ally in the Balkans, an Austrian mobilization would make some Russian mobilization inevitable, which in turn would necessarily lead to a German mobilization and war (Albertini, 1957: 2/488–489). For France, her mobilized armies could wait at the frontier for the signal to attack, but any such mobilization would almost certainly lead to a counter-mobilization by Germany. Thus Taylor (1969: 25) concludes that ‘French mobilization was very near to war, but not quite war’.

#### *The Difficulty of Improvising or Switching Plans*

Because mobilization was a tightly coupled system in which many discrete elements had to mesh with perfect timing, no change or improvisation was perceived as possible during mobilization. Any deviation from the plan would bring only chaos, for given the interdependence of the elements of the system, a change in one of them would necessarily affect all the rest. As Taylor (1974: 444) argues, ‘The time-tables were rigid and could not be altered without months of preparation’. It is true that while Germany and France each had only one plan for mobilization, Russia and Austria each had multiple plans. Russia could initiate a general mobilization against both Germany and Austria-Hungary, or a partial mobilization against Austria-Hungary alone. Austria-Hungary could mobilize against either Serbia, Italy, or Russia. But these options were exclusive. The initiation of one of these plans ‘would make the switch to an alternative plan impossible. The time-tables could not be changed overnight’ (Taylor, 1974: 444). The fact that the mobilization plans had never been rehearsed only added to their

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<sup>10</sup> It might be argued that a partial Russian mobilization would have led to war only if the Germans perceived this as the first step towards full mobilization. Even if this conditional argument were correct, the evidence of misperceptions, overreactions, and internal bureaucratic pressures is such that Germany would almost certainly have perceived a partial Russian mobilization in a hostile light. Consider the impact on Germany of preliminary Russian precautions undertaken even before mobilization, in the ‘Period Preparatory to War’ (beginning July 26). This greatly increased the Kaiser’s fear and his urge to mobilize (Albertini, 1957: 2/560; 3/2–3; Turner, 1979: 262–263); induced Moltke to increase his pressure on both Bethmann and on Vienna for mobilization; and led Bethmann to instruct Pourtales to warn Sazonov (July 26) that ‘Preparatory military measures by Russia will force us to countermeasures which must consist in mobilizing the army. But mobilization means war’ (Albertini, 1957: 3/220).

rigidity, for the general staffs had no experience improvising plans during their implementation (Taylor, 1969: 16; 1974: 444; Holsti, 1972: 157). A closer examination of last-minute attempts to alter or modify the plan (Germany and Austria) or switch from one plan to another (Russia) in a desperate effort to maintain the peace will illustrate the practical impossibility of improvisation.

As the crisis escalated, the Kaiser became increasingly fearful of the prospect of a two-front war, and on July 29 Bethmann sent a telegram to London requesting their neutrality. Immediately after the Kaiser's order for general mobilization on August 1, Berlin received a telegram from Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador in London, reporting that if Germany refrained from attacking France, 'England would remain neutral and guarantee the passivity of France' (Albertini, 1957: 3/380). The German Chancellor, Foreign Minister, and Kaiser were elated by this opportunity to localize the war in the East. The Kaiser summoned Moltke and announced, 'Now we can go to war against Russia only. We simply march the whole of our army to the East' (Tuchman, 1962: 98).

Moltke refused. He had been planning this moment for a decade, and the thought of having his precision-tuned mobilization plans involving a million men wrenched into reverse was more than Moltke could bear. In Tuchman's words (1962: 99):

He saw a vision of the deployment crumbling apart in confusion, supplies here, soldiers there, ammunition lost in the middle, companies without officers, divisions without staffs, and those 11000 trains, each exquisitely scheduled to click over specified tracks at specified intervals of ten minutes, tangled in a grotesque ruin of the most perfectly planned military movement in history.

Moltke responded to the Kaiser:

Your Majesty, it cannot be done. The deployment of millions cannot be improvised. If Your Majesty insists on leading the whole army to the East it will not be an army ready for battle but a disorganized mob of armed men with no arrangements for supply. Those arrangements took a whole year of intricate labor to complete, and once settled, it cannot be altered (Tuchman, 1962: 100–101).

The Kaiser agreed not to reverse the plans but sought to delay their implementation by stopping the trains from crossing into Luxembourg. But the railways of Luxembourg were essential to the offensive through Belgium into France, and Moltke refused to sign the order countermanding the advance into Luxembourg. Before the issue could be resolved, however, a telegram arrived saying that the earlier suggestion of English neutrality had been based on a 'misunderstanding' and was not possible (Albertini, 1957: 3/381–386). The point here, however, is that in the eyes of Moltke and others the prospect of English neutrality was not enough to alter the plans (Albertini, 1957: 3/381–386; Tuchman, 1962: 97–103; Stoessinger, 1978: 33–25).<sup>11</sup>

The German experience in 1914 demonstrates the practical difficulty of altering an existing plan. It also illustrates the complications introduced if an existing plan or plans provide policymakers with no limited military options between inaction and full mobilization. That may leave them with no means of preserving vital interests without a

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<sup>11</sup> A comparable example of the difficulty of implementing even small changes in a mobilization plan can be found in the opposition of the French military to Premier Viviani's order for a 'ten kilometer withdrawal' of forces from the German frontier (Fay, 1928: 2/482–492; Albertini, 1957: 2/627–632).



major war, no way of demonstrating resolve without automatically escalating the war, no possibility for a strategy of coercive diplomacy employing limited threats in pursuit of limited interests. The rigidity of the preferred plan, in conjunction with the non-availability of existing alternatives, may preclude policymakers from adopting certain alternatives which might conceivably be sufficient to head off an impending war. Given the costs of inaction and the tendency toward worst-case analysis among the military (Betts, 1977: 160–162; Van Evera, 1984b: ch. 7), there is a strong tendency toward overreaction. Thus, the Kaiser perceived that he had no means of deterring Russian intervention against Austria in the Balkans without taking action that risked bringing Britain into the war and escalation to a general European war. Because of the importance of his only great power ally and the magnitude of the Russian threat, and denied the means of supporting a serious effort to gain British neutrality, the Kaiser chose to implement the Schlieffen Plan rather than stand idle.<sup>12</sup>

The ‘Halt in Belgrade’ proposal provides another example of the constraints imposed by the rigidity of an existing plan in conjunction with the absence of an available alternative compatible with more moderate foreign policy behavior. Late August 28, after the Austrian declaration of war against Serbia, Germany submitted to all the great powers a proposal which they believed would localize the war. This called upon Austria to occupy Belgrade and hold the city as hostage for the satisfactory settlement of her demands, but go no further, and Russia and France would then suspend further military preparations (Renouvin, 1928: 191). This was designed to allow Vienna to maintain its own prestige without seriously damaging Russia. Taylor (1974: 445) states that ‘The Austrians would occupy Belgrade and thus vindicate their military prowess . . . There would be a compromise, very much at Serbia’s expense, but she would remain an independent country, and hence the prestige of Russia, Serbia’s patron, would be vindicated also.’ The British presented a similar proposal (Renouvin, 1928: 191; Albertini, 1957: 2/503), and Taylor (1969: 121) argues that all the great powers would have agreed to the plan.

Austria-Hungary rejected the ‘Halt in Belgrade’ plan, however, and one important reason is because she had no contingency plans for that operation (Taylor, 1974: 445). As Renouvin (1928: 193) notes, ‘the Austrian General Staff had not been planning to attack Serbia on the Danube front, but rather on the Save front. Its troops were therefore not in a position to seize the “hostage”. . .’. Moreover, an Austrian mobilization against Serbia (plan B-Staffel) would seriously interfere with a later mobilization against Russia (plan A-Staffel), so Vienna could not mobilize against Serbia unless first assured of Russia’s neutrality (Taylor, 1974: 445; Stone, 1979: 225–226, 233).<sup>13</sup>

The Austrian case illustrates not only the problem of improvising on an existing military contingency plan, but also the technical difficulties impeding the switch from one plan to an alternative contingency plan. This problem can be illustrated in more detail in the Russian case. As the crisis escalated in 1914, Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov argued for a partial mobilization involving only the four military districts facing Austria-Hungary. He believed that this would have some deterrent threat against Austria without threatening Germany, and therefore would not lead to a German

<sup>12</sup> Although some have argued that Germany did have some viable strategic alternatives to the Schlieffen Plan (Snyder, 1984b: 116–122), what is critical here is that the Kaiser and other German decisionmakers *perceived* no better option (Turner, 1979: 214; Snyder, 1984b: 155).

<sup>13</sup> Ironically, Serbia had decided not to defend Belgrade, so that occupation would not have involved a major effort by Austria (Taylor, 1974: 445).

mobilization (Turner, 1970: 92). Sazonov was reinforced in this belief by German Foreign Minister Jagow, who erroneously told him that Germany would mobilize only if Russian mobilized in the north, not if she mobilized in the south. The Russian General Staff, however, argued forcefully that a partial mobilization was impossible for technical military reasons relating to the mobilization plans. The institution of a general mobilization while a partial mobilization was under way would have caused great difficulty with railroad transport (Wegerer, 1928: 206) and delayed for months a systematic general mobilization against Germany. This would leave Russia dangerously exposed and also unable to come immediately to the aid of her French ally.<sup>14</sup> Thus Sukhomlinov, the Russian Minister of War, informed the Tsar: 'mobilization is not a mechanical process which one can arrest at will . . . and then set in motion again'. After a partial mobilization, 'much time would be necessary in which to reestablish the normal conditions for any further mobilization in the four districts affected' (Schilling, 1925: 117). Similarly, General Danilov writes: 'Any partial mobilization was, thus, nothing more than an improvisation. As such it could only introduce germs of hesitation and disorder in a domain in which everything ought to be based on the most accurate calculations made in advance' (Albertini, 1957: 2/543). Danilov also suggests that the military, given a choice, might have preferred no mobilization to partial mobilization: 'The danger of the decision, lightly taken, to mobilize only four districts was so serious in the eyes of those who really understood the problem that they even arrived at the idea that it would perhaps be preferable to abstain for the time being from all mobilization rather than upset the calculations of general mobilization' (Albertini, 1957: 2/543). Thus Albertini (1957: 2/293) concludes that the Russian General Staff:

. . . had no plan ready for mobilization against Austria alone and could not in the space of a few hours carry out the detailed work necessitated by such a proposal. This meant that no partial mobilization was feasible. Either Russia must not mobilize at all or she must mobilize against both Austria and Germany.

These constraints were absolutely critical, for it is widely argued that the Russian general mobilization was the 'decisive calamity' that made World War I inevitable (Turner, 1968: 65; Vyvyan, 1968: 165; Kennedy, 1979: 15). Deprived of military options that would allow them to stand firm against Vienna without threatening Berlin, and convinced that inaction would result in humiliating loss of prestige and damage to their national interest, Russian decisionmakers felt they had no choice but to mobilize for war with Germany on July 30.

#### *The Timing of Mobilization*

Military routines may also contribute to the outbreak of war by affecting the timing of mobilization, although this causal link is not generally given as much attention as the others. Plans which require a lengthy period of mobilization may contribute to war by inducing an early mobilization, intensifying the conflict spiral before all diplomatic

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<sup>14</sup> Russia's administrative procedures for mobilization added further to the dilemma of partial mobilization. The Warsaw military district straddled two fronts. Its mobilization would involve mobilization against both Germany and Austria, but the failure to mobilize would leave Russia very vulnerable to an Austrian attack (Snyder, 1985b; Albertini, 1957: 2/293). Note that these administrative procedures provide another reason why a Russian partial mobilization would invariably lead to a German mobilization.

means of reaching a settlement have been exhausted.<sup>15</sup> The slowness of the Russian mobilization in 1914 is a classic example. Because of its size and uneven population density, Russia did not have a mobilization plan in which each of its military districts recruited exclusively from within its own area (Fay, 1928: 2/450–451). The resulting delays in her mobilization plans generated enormous pressures for early mobilization, which helped bring on the war (Albertini, 1957: 2/543).<sup>16</sup> The slow rate of the Russian mobilization also led Germany to believe that she had time to conduct an offensive against France in the West and hence contributed to the expansion of the war.

The nature of mobilization plans can also work to delay rather than speed up their implementation. While under most circumstances this would decrease the likelihood of war, under some conditions it might actually make war more likely. It has been argued, for example, that Austria-Hungary's two-week delay in her ultimatum to Serbia and subsequent mobilization after the 'blank check' from Germany on July 6 actually contributed to a general European war (Schmitt, 1930: 1/393; Williamson, 1979: 151). Taylor (1954: 522–523) asserts that 'The one chance of success for Austria-Hungary [to localize the war] would have been rapid action', for a *fait accompli* in immediate response to the assassination would have been perceived as having some legitimacy in the eyes of Europe, though whether this would have been sufficient to avert a general war is unclear. Williamson (1979: 152–154) explains the delay in terms of organizational routines involving the military. Because of the importance of harvests for the economy, Conrad, the Chief of the Austrian General Staff, had agreed to agrarian demands and instituted a policy of regular and routinized harvest leaves, allowing troops on active duty to return home to help with the harvests and then rejoin their units for the usual summer maneuvers. On July 6, Conrad learned that half of the corps manpower at Agram, Innsbruck, Kaschau, Temesvar, Budapest, Pressburg, and Graz were away on harvest leave and scheduled to return between July 19 and 25. Conrad and Foreign Minister Berchtold had planned to act quickly against Serbia after receiving the German go-ahead, but to do that would have required them to recall the troops on harvest leave. This would not only disrupt the harvests and possibly confuse the mobilization, but it would also destroy any chance of a diplomatic or military surprise. Instead of recalling the troops, Vienna simply cancelled the remaining leaves and delayed the ultimatum to Serbia, ignorant at the time of the risks that this postponement would entail.<sup>17</sup>

Because of the perception that 'mobilization meant war', because of the absence of alternatives between partial mobilization and full mobilization and the difficulties of switching from the former to the latter, and because of the difficulty of modifying an existing plan, World War I is often cited as the classic case of rigid organizational routines leading to war. The preceding analysis suggests strongly that organizational routines played an important role, but the reader will have noticed that other explanatory variables have implicitly been introduced into the analysis. The question of the causal impact of military routines on the outbreak of war cannot avoid some

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<sup>15</sup> Time-consuming mobilization plans will generate the greatest pressure for early mobilization when it is believed that mobilization can be conducted secretly (Van Evera, 1984b: 50).

<sup>16</sup> Austrian mobilization plans of 1866 had similar consequences on the eve of the Austro-Prussian War (see Friedjung, 1966: 103, 126–128, 135–140).

<sup>17</sup> There are, of course, other possible explanations for Vienna's delay. These center on Hungarian Premier Tisza's opposition to a military showdown and Vienna's need for a prolonged crisis to mobilize political support in Hungary, and on Vienna's domestic as well as diplomatic need to establish Serbian complicity in the assassination. These alternative explanations are rejected by Williamson (1979: 152).

interesting analytical problems and interaction effects involving other variables. These have been given inadequate attention in the literature and need to be examined.

### Analytical Problems and the Role of Other Variables

Analyses of the mobilization plans of 1914 have convincingly demonstrated that the rigid adherence to existing plans contributed to the outbreak of war. They have not convincingly determined the relative importance of this causal effect compared to that of other variables, but that is a different question and one which will not be examined here. More important for our purposes, they have not dealt with the critical question of *what explains the rigid adherence to existing plans*. The inherent rigidity of the plans themselves is just one of several variables which can lead to their rigid implementation, and one which rarely acts alone; other organizational, bureaucratic-political, psychological, and systemic variables may also be involved. The theoretical linkages involving routines, rigidity, and war are logically incomplete without the inclusion of these other variables,<sup>18</sup> and an understanding of their interrelationships is necessary in order to assess the importance of the military routines themselves.

Before considering the substantive effects involving these other variables, it would be useful to identify several analytically distinct ways in which they might combine with military routines in the processes leading to rigidity and war. Consider any three variables  $X$ ,  $Y$ , and  $Z$ . If  $X$  and  $Y$  independently affect  $Z$  ( $Z = aX + bY$ ), the relationship is *additive*. If  $X$  and  $Y$  affect  $Z$  only by acting together, so that the magnitude of the impact of each variable is a function of the value of the other variable ( $Z = cXY$ ), the relationship is *multiplicative*, reflecting an *interaction effect* in the proper sense of the term. If  $X$  is the cause not only of  $Z$  but also of  $Y$  ( $Y \leftarrow X \rightarrow Z$ ), then the relationship between  $Y$  and  $Z$  is spurious. If  $X$  causes  $Y$ , which in turn causes  $Z$  ( $X \rightarrow Y \rightarrow Z$ ), we have a *causal chain* or *developmental sequence*. Finally, if  $X$  causes  $Y$  and  $Y$  also causes  $X$  ( $X \rightleftarrows Y$ ), we have *reciprocal causation*. Variables may interact in more complex ways, of course, involving more than one of the above relationships (Blalock, 1961).<sup>19</sup>

Although organizational routines clearly impose constraints on decisionmakers, and although the deviation from an existing plan undoubtedly involves costs, so does the adherence to an existing routine. In many cases, perhaps including 1914, the costs of implementing an existing military routine appear to outweigh the costs of adopting some alternative. The question in these cases is why decisionmakers still choose to adhere to an existing military contingency plan rather than adopt an alternative plan or devise a new plan. This choice cannot be fully explained in the absence of an understanding of why the preferred plan was initially developed (though other factors must also be included).

#### 'Military Necessity' and the Problem of Spurious Inference

Let us assume for the moment that the primary determinant of a military contingency plan is 'military necessity', as determined by a rational strategic calculus involving a state's relative military power, diplomatic alignments, geographical constraints, existing logistical and technological capabilities, and other relevant external variables.

<sup>18</sup> The incompleteness of a purely organizational model is recognized by many theorists (Allison and Halperin, 1972; Steinbruner, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Note that in our case other variables may also contribute to war independently through causal sequences not involving the rigid implementation of routines.

If the strategic situation in which the plans are implemented is the same as that for which the contingency plans were initially developed, then the same considerations of military necessity would apply. If political decisionmakers adhere to the original plan for those reasons, then the explanation for the rigid adherence to the original plan lies with military necessity, rather than with the nature of the routines themselves. The imputation of a causal relationship between military routines and the outbreak of war would then involve a spurious inference.<sup>20</sup>

One particularly important systemic-level phenomenon contributing to military necessity and illustrating the problem of causal inference is the 'security dilemma', a situation structured in such a way that a state can increase its security only at the expense of another's security (Jervis, 1978). This problem is particularly acute if military technology creates an incentive to strike first. Even states with no aggressive intentions and a genuine commitment to peace may feel compelled by the logic of the situation to take actions which they recognize may contribute to war.<sup>21</sup>

The July crisis posed an intense security dilemma for many of the European powers, and many factors contributed to the perceived incentive to strike first.<sup>22</sup> These include: the perception that existing military technology favored the offense, 'the "offensive" character of the war plans of all of the great powers' (Snyder, 1984b; Van Evera, 1984a); the belief that the early stages of mobilization could be conducted secretly (Van Evera, 1984a: 75–79); the expectation that even short delays in mobilization could be disastrous (Van Evera, 1984a: 72–74);<sup>23</sup> mobilization systems which permitted full mobilization in two weeks (Van Evera, 1984a: 79); and the traditional proclivity of the military toward worst-case analysis, their perception (in July 1914 and for at least the previous year) that war was inevitable (Lebow, 1981: 254–257), and their tendency to place greater importance on winning such a war than on deterring its occurrence. Any delay in German mobilization might jeopardize the rapid defeat of France that was perceived to be essential in a two-front war, and thus many have argued that it would have been too risky for Germany to abandon the Schlieffen Plan and turn to the east (Wegerer, 1928). If decisionmakers acted on these grounds, then it was not the mobilization plans themselves, but instead perceived military necessity and the security

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<sup>20</sup> Since in this case the nature of the military plan helps describe the process by which military necessity causes the rigid implementation of that plan, military routines provide an 'interpretation' of the causal relationship. An interpretative relationship exists when a variable has no independent causal effect (i.e., it does not increase the amount of variance explained) but instead merely describes *how* another antecedent variable causes the dependent variable to change (Blalock, 1961: 84–87). If, however, perceptions of military necessity are themselves determined by military routines and interests, a more complex causal chain would be involved. It is possible, of course, for both military necessity and organizational rigidity to combine in an additive fashion to increase the likelihood of implementing an existing plan.

<sup>21</sup> This use of the security dilemma concept is accepted in most of the literature. One exception is Wagner (1983: 339), who defines it to include the incentive to strike first. The compellingness of the security dilemma from the perspective of a key decisionmaker is illustrated by Sazonov. In his efforts to persuade the Tsar to reverse his position and order a general mobilization, Sazonov argued that was inevitable and that they must prepare to fight it under the most favorable conditions. 'It is better without fear to call forth a war by our preparations for it, and to continue these preparations for it, and to continue these preparations carefully, rather than out of fear to give an inducement for war and be taken unawares' (Schilling, 1925: 65; Fay, 1928: 1/472).

<sup>22</sup> On the assumptions of the security dilemma, see Wagner (1983). Here I am dealing with the actors' perceptions of the situation rather than with the 'objective' situation itself. This is more comparable to Snyder's (1985a) concept of a 'perceptual security dilemma' than a structural security dilemma.

<sup>23</sup> Joffre, for example, calculated that each day of delay in mobilization would cost France 10–12 miles of territory, and other European military leaders shared similar views (Van Evera, 1984a: 72–73).

dilemma that determined the critical decision that led to war. If it is true, as Albertini (1957: 2/543) argues, that Russia really had no choice but to adopt a general mobilization against both Germany and Austria-Hungary unless she was willing to put herself at a very serious military disadvantage, then it was the security dilemma and the conditions contributing to it that have the primary causal impact. Similarly, if it is true that even a Russian partial mobilization against Austria-Hungary would have led to a German mobilization and war, then any inference that the rigidity of the Russian plans themselves helped cause war would be spurious (Snyder, 1984a: 88).

This discussion leads us to the critical question of whether decisionmakers *perceive* that they are acting on the basis of military necessity. Since regardless of motivations routines are likely to be publicly justified in terms of military necessity, the problem is the methodological one of distinguishing true motivation from public rationalization. This leads us to evaluate whether the *process* of decisionmaking appears to conform to a rational strategic calculus. Is there a deliberate effort to consider alternative plans, and to make subjective probability judgments as to their feasibility, and to compare their costs and benefits with those of existing plans with respect to the attainment of well-defined foreign policy objectives? If there is a reasonable search process for the time available, and if alternative plans or improvisations seem to be rejected on their merits, then it can be concluded that military necessity is the determining factor. Any inference that rigid military plans caused war would then be spurious. But if existing contingency plans and their underlying assumptions are blindly accepted in a crisis, with no attempt to evaluate the merits of possible alternatives, then it could be concluded that the inherent rigidity of the plans was a contributing cause of the war.

With respect to World War I, some have argued that strategically sound alternatives to the Schlieffen Plan did exist, and that Germany could have directed her offensive to the east in a Russo-German war if such action were warranted by political conditions (Snyder, 1984b: 116). This is documented by General Hermann von Staab, Chief of the Railway Division of the General Staff, in a book he wrote after the war. Although the General Staff had been committed to the Schlieffen Plan and the concept of a two-front war since 1905, they had prepared and revised annually an alternative plan for a campaign against Russia. Germany could have deployed four of the seven armies on the Eastern front within two weeks, leaving the remaining three to defend against a French attack (Tuchman, 1962: 100). In fact, the actual course of the war in 1915 appeared to confirm the viability of such a strategy (Snyder, 1984a: 117), and Moltke himself admitted that 'the larger part of our army should have first been sent to the East to smash the Russian steamroller' (Lebow, 1981: 236).

Although the debate about the viability of the Schlieffen Plan and its various alternatives (Ritter, 1958, 1973; Turner, 1979: 212–217; Snyder, 1984b: 116–122) will perhaps never be resolved, this is not really important here. The critical question is how Moltke and others on the General Staff *perceived* military necessity in 1914. Though Moltke did have reservations about the political advisability and operational feasibility of the Schlieffen Plan (Ritter, 1973: 2/216–219; Snyder, 1984b: 116, 147–157), he believed that all of the alternatives were worse (Snyder, 1984b: 112–116). There is no evidence, however, that an eastern offensive was ever given serious consideration in 1914. Von Staab was never consulted regarding its feasibility (Lebow, 1981: 236), and it is not at all clear that the relative advantages and disadvantages of various alternatives were carefully weighed (Snyder, 1984b: ch. 6). This does not appear to be consistent with a rational decision process (Steinbruner, 1974: ch. 2). Thus the rigid implementation of existing routines in 1914 cannot be explained solely by a rational strategic

calculus, and we can conclude that the routines themselves, in conjunction with other variables, had an important causal effect.<sup>24</sup>

The same logic regarding spuriousness can be generalized to other variables. Overall foreign policy objectives could logically determine both the original development of the plans and their rigid implementation in a crisis, and thus generate the spurious inference that the routines themselves are the source of inflexibility. Thus Kennedy (1979: 18–19) argues that each of the war plans of 1914 reflected certain assumptions about the national interest and also a widespread mood of fatalism, and concludes that any analysis of war planning in 1914 ‘must in the end concentrate not so much upon the military technicalities as upon the political and ideological assumptions of which they were an expression’. Similarly, aggressive national policies, assuming they remain unchanged, might generate both offensive military doctrines and the implementation of those plans. In a related argument, Van Evera (1984a: 85) suggests that a ‘cult of the offensive’ determined both the offensive doctrines and war plans *and* their implementation in 1914, and appears to acknowledge the problem of attributing causality to the plans themselves. Alliance commitments can also generate certain military plans and require their rigid implementation in a crisis. Finally, as we demonstrate later, bureaucratic politics could be the primary determinant of both the routines themselves and their implementation, so that the rigidity of the military SOPs themselves would not have an independent impact on war.

If the character of the military plans and the rigid implementation are not both the product of antecedent variables, the question is then what other variables might interact with military routines to produce their rigid implementation. These factors include: (1) systemic variables such as prestige and alliance commitments; (2) organizational and bureaucratic variables such as organizational autonomy, factored problems, parochial interests, and military–civilian and intra-military conflict; and (3) the psychology of individual decisionmakers and small-group dynamics. These variables are generally given inadequate attention in the literature, resulting in an incomplete explanation for rigid adherence to existing organizational routines during a crisis and the attribution of excessive causal significance to the nature of the routines themselves.

#### *Systemic Variables*

One systemic variable which may independently inhibit any modification of existing military contingency plans is prestige (or reputational interests). This may be particularly true of any proposed interruption or reversal of plans which is already in the early stages of implementation, for decisionmakers may fear that any interruption might be perceived as weakness by the adversary.<sup>25</sup> This effect may be intensified by the multiplicative interaction of reputational considerations and alliances. If specific military plans are designed to help support an ally, the importance for one’s reputation of fulfilling an alliance commitment may lead to the rigid implementation of military plans, even if the strategic objectives for which the alliance was formed are no longer

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<sup>24</sup> This conclusion is tentative. My primary concern here is not to provide a definitive answer to the historical question, but to suggest that kind of evidence that would be relevant to resolve the theoretical question of causality. A complete analysis of this question would have to include the role of future expectations in the strategic calculations of 1914. This would involve the question of the impact of the German military’s pressure for preventive war (Levy, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> As the Prussian Minister of War, von Roon, stated on the eve of the Austro-Prussian War: ‘When armaments are once in train, the outward thrust will either be followed by the beginning of a fight or, what is worse, by being ridiculed, if the sharpened sword is returned to the sheath without results’ (Vagts, 1959: 338).

threatened. Thus Russia moved to a general mobilization in part because of the pressure from her French ally (Turner, 1968).<sup>26</sup> Thus, the alliance/reputation effect would add to that of the routines themselves.

*Other Organizational and Bureaucratic Variables*

There are other dimensions of organizational behavior which interact (multiplicatively) with military doctrine and routines to make them more rigid and unresponsive to changing political circumstances, and which may also have an independent and hence additive effect on rigidity. Posen (1984: 54–57) suggests several organizational factors which tend to impede innovation in military doctrine, and by implication changes in military plans deriving from that doctrine. The organization as a whole and individuals within it develop vested interests in existing organizational goals and routines, so any changes that would inevitably affect the existing status quo tend to be resisted. The inherent organizational tendency to minimize uncertainty (Allison, 1971: 76–77) also generates inhibitions against change from familiar routines to untested alternatives. The pattern of doctrinal stagnation persists in spite of technological change because of the tendency for new technologies to be assimilated into old doctrine, rather than stimulate change to a new one, and also because of the tendency not to learn about the operational implications of new technologies from the wars of others (Katzenbach, 1971; Posen, 1984: 55). Resistance to change is further enhanced by the inherent difficulties in achieving an integration of political ends and military means. One problem here is the priority given to autonomy by any organization and its interest in achieving total operational control over the means necessary to perform a given task (Halperin, 1974: 51–54). This is particularly true of the military, given the different professional socialization, skills, and roles of military and civilians (Huntington, 1957: ch. 3; Posen, 1984: 52).<sup>27</sup> In order to maintain their autonomy military organizations are also often unwilling to provide civilian policymakers with information, particularly information regarding doctrine and operational tactics, and this only increases policymakers' unfamiliarity with military issues.<sup>28</sup>

Related to organizational autonomy is the tendency toward factored problems—the division of complex problems and their delegation to various sub-units within the organization (Allison, 1971: 71–72). There is little coordination among these distinct organizational sub-units, and solutions to the factored problems are generated independently and may be mutually contradictory. This may leave top decisionmakers unaware of the details of particular organizational routines and unaware of the extent to which these repertoires may constrain their behavior, and make it difficult for them to integrate these independent solutions into coherent national policy. Political leaders may devise policies without realizing the full extent to which existing military contingency plans either preclude the implementation of those policies or actually require other policies. This is particularly serious given the military tendency to

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<sup>26</sup> If, on the other hand, helping her French ally were necessary to secure those Russian strategic interests for which the alliance was initially formed, then the interaction of strategic interests and alliances would explain both the formation of military plans and their rigid implementation, so that the routine-war linkage would be spurious.

<sup>27</sup> Thus the elder Moltke (Chief of the Prussian General Staff from 1857 to 1888, the job inherited by his nephew) once declared: 'The politician should fall silent the moment mobilization begins' (Brodie, 1973: 11).

<sup>28</sup> In fact, the complexity of military plans might in some cases be deliberately intended by the military as a means of limiting politicians' understanding of and hence influence over military matters (see Sagan, 1985: 138).



elevate narrow operational requirements above the needs of state policy (Posen, 1984: 53). Numerous aspects of the July 1914 crisis fit this pattern of organizational behavior.

First of all, the military plans, particularly in Germany, were constructed without consultation with political decisionmakers and with total disregard for political considerations.<sup>29</sup> The war plans were regarded as the autonomous sphere of the military. As Holstein, a leading official in the German Foreign Office, remarked (in 1900), 'if the Chief of Staff, especially a strategic authority such as Schlieffen, believes such a measure [the Schlieffen Plan] to be necessary, then it is the obligation of diplomacy to adjust to it and prepare for it in every possible way' (Ritter, 1958: 91). Whereas in France all operational plans had to be submitted to the government's supreme war council for the consideration and approval of top political decisionmakers (Kennedy, 1979: 7; Keiger, 1983), and whereas in Britain also civilian decisionmakers had the upper hand (Steiner, 1977: 220), the military were ascendant in Berlin. In contrast to the French civilians' rejection of the military's pressures for the violation of Belgian neutrality, Schlieffen's technical military plan was promptly accepted by the top political leadership in Germany without any real discussion of the grave countervailing political arguments. Foreign Secretary Jagow's request in 1912 that the need to violate Belgian territory be re-evaluated was rejected by Moltke (Snyder, 1984b: 121). Until 1913, at least, there was not even an inquiry into the feasibility of alternative operational plans that might hold fewer political dangers (Ritter, 1973: 2/205). As Snyder (1984b: 121) concludes: 'Civilians had . . . little if any impact on the shape of German war plans'.

As a result, European war plans in general and those of Germany in particular were based exclusively on military considerations (Ritter, 1958, 1973: vol. 2, ch. 9; Turner, 1979: 205).<sup>30</sup> They reflected the traditional military priority placed on winning any war that might occur, rather than deterring its occurrence. They were not particularly concerned with the specific political conditions that might make a war necessary or with how the mobilization plans themselves might make war more likely. More generally, the military plans were devised without regard for the specific national political interests that might be at stake in various conflicts. As Taylor (1969: 19) argues:

Politically the plans for mobilization were all made in the void. They 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 from any particular plan. There was little consultation between military planners and civilian statesmen. The statesmen assumed that the general staffs were doing their best to insure that they would win a war if one came and there was no speculation how policy could be seconded by military action. The dogma of the great Clausewitz . . . had lost its hold.

The development of German military plans without regard for political considerations had enormous consequences. By preventing her from mobilizing without going to war, it precluded a strategy of coercive diplomacy based on demonstrations of force and the control of risks through the fine-tuning of threats. In addition, the Schlieffen Plan

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<sup>29</sup> Fischer (1961: 1975) argues that there was considerable cooperation between German military and political leaders in 1914, but this debate has been extensively discussed elsewhere (e.g., Koch, 1972).

<sup>30</sup> Even military considerations were defined rather narrowly. Snyder (1984b: 197) generalizes from the Russian case that 'military decisionmakers are swayed less by their view of the comparative military balance, which is difficult to calculate, than by their own absolute level of organizational or administrative preparedness'. On the autonomy of the military in Russia see Lieven (1983: ch. 3).

made it inevitable that any war would be a two-front war and that England would intervene against her, so that a single spark would trigger a general war. Moreover, in demanding an early and rapid invasion and an early military offensive, the plan would force Germany to incur the diplomatic and moral costs of striking first, which no doubt contributed to the neutrality of Italy and Romania. Thus Ritter (1958: 90) argues that 'The 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 (1957: 3/253) concludes that the primary reason why Germany was led to '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 horse-sense which is the main cause of European disorders and upheavals'.

It was not just the apolitical nature of the military plans that had such serious consequences, but also the ignorance of those plans by top political decisionmakers until it was too late. Whereas the military tended to perceive mobilization as a means of preparing for a certain and immediate war, political leaders tended to perceive it as an instrument of deterrence or coercive diplomacy. They had little conception of how few options they had, of the extent to which their room to maneuver was limited, of the mismatch between their foreign policy objectives and the military instruments available to support them. They did not realize that certain actions which they took in all sincerity to avoid war only made war more likely, or that coercive actions, the risks of which they believed to be limited or at least manageable, would only push them beyond the point of no return. Adequate knowledge of the rigidity of the military plans might have been enough to preclude them from taking the risks that led to a general war that none of the statesmen really wanted.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Albertini (1957: 2/479) writes:

One of the decisive factors in the crisis of July 1914 was the absence of all understanding of military matters on the part of the responsible statesmen who had to make the decisions on war or peace, decisions which were closely connected with military problems, in particular with those of mobilization. They had no knowledge of what mobilization actually was, what demands it made on the country, what consequences it brought with it, to what risks it exposed the peace of Europe. They looked on it as a measure costly, it is true, but to which recourse might be had without necessarily implying that war would follow. They thought that as long as armies remained within their own frontiers, diplomacy could still continue to work for peace not only while mobilization was in progress but even after it was completed.

The German plans for the seizure of Liège, for example, were absolutely critical but, because of the secrecy surrounding them, key German policymakers—including Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, Foreign Secretary Jagow, Admiral Tirpitz, and probably even the Kaiser—were unaware of them (Albertini, 1957: 2/581, 3/195; Ritter, 1973: 2/266; Van Evera, 1984a: 93).<sup>32</sup> In Britain, Foreign Secretary Grey was unaware that German mobilization meant war, which reduced his incentive to persuade

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<sup>31</sup> I'm accepting for now the arguments of Fay (1928: 2/ch. XII), Albertini (1957: 3/252–253), Ritter (1973: 2/275), and others, that none of the major European powers in 1914 wanted a general war and that each of them, perhaps excepting Austria, took sincere steps to avoid one. The major argument to the contrary is presented by Fischer (1961, 1975) and his followers.

<sup>32</sup> Bethmann Hollweg was not informed of this until July 31, after the German ultimatum to Russia and just one day before German mobilization (Turner, 1979: 213).

his Russian ally not to mobilize (Albertini, 1957: 2/480). Sazonov encouraged the Tsar to order a partial mobilization against Austria as a means of compelling Germany to negotiate without realizing that this would compel Austria-Hungary to order a general mobilization, thus invoking the Austro-German alliance and initiating German mobilization and war. Had Sazonov known that any Russian mobilization would lead to a German mobilization and war, he certainly would have acted differently (Albertini, 1957: 2/480–482, 541; Turner, 1968: 71). Sazonov was encouraged in his view by German Foreign Secretary Jagow's erroneous assurance that a partial Russian mobilization against Austria-Hungary would not require a German mobilization. Sazonov also failed to realize that mobilization orders would be posted publicly, and erroneously believed that there would be some delay before German knowledge of Russian mobilization—a belief that may have increased Sazonov's inclination to push for mobilization (Albertini, 1957: 2/624; Van Evera, 1984a: 76). The same pattern can be found in Austria. The question of the likelihood of Russian intervention was critical for an Austrian decision on partial or full mobilization, but there was little coordination between civilians and the military. Foreign Minister Berchtold and other civilians had little knowledge of military strategy or of mobilization, and Berchtold failed to realize that he could not attack Serbia without first mobilizing (Albertini, 1957: 2/479–480). The General Staff, on the other hand, received little information from the Foreign Ministry on the likelihood of Russian intervention. Conrad was basically left to make up his own mind, and apparently acted on the basis of the highly questionable assumption that Russia would abandon Serbia (Stone, 1979: 234, 239–240).<sup>33</sup>

The problem of civilian lack of understanding of military matters is compounded if the military are unaware of this ignorance. Admiral Tirpitz tells of how 'horror-stricken' he and Moltke were to discover (at an 11 p.m. meeting on August 1) that political authorities had been unaware of the plan to seize Liège, and observed that the 'political leadership had completely lost its head' (Albertini, 1957: 3/195). Thus, the separation of military planning from political leadership, and the politicians' ignorance of the mobilization plans and their political requirements led to actions designed to maintain the peace, but which in actuality only accelerated the descent into war.

Another set of variables which interact (multiplicatively) with military routines, leading to their inflexible implementation and possibly to war, is bureaucratic politics.<sup>34</sup> Organizational routines play a critical role in the political bargaining process by setting the terms of the political debate (Barnet, 1972: 79–80). The policy preferences of the leading actors and their definition of the situation may be greatly influenced by the information and options provided by lower-level bureaucracies. The ignorance of military routines by political decisionmakers is one example of this. In addition, advocates of an existing military contingency plan have an advantage in persuading or bargaining with rival actors who lack such a plan (Betts, 1977: 155). The burden of proof is placed on those who propose to depart from an existing routine, particularly in a

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<sup>33</sup> The military plans of all the great powers were apolitical in another important sense: there was very little coordination of the war plans among the various allies. As Taylor (1969: 23) concludes: 'There were thus half a dozen separate plans for mobilization, none designed to fit in with any other. . .'. Grey stated later that he knew nothing about the Anglo-French military plans for cooperation in northern France (Fay, 1928: 1/41). Nor was there any real military cooperation between Germany and Austria-Hungary. Each had promised the other that at the outbreak of hostilities they would undertake major offensives against Russia, but neither had any intention of following through and their mobilization and war plans concentrated instead on more immediate objectives in France and Serbia, respectively (Stone, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> Bureaucratic politics may also affect the likelihood of war through other causal sequences.

crisis where time constraints are severe. Gaining acceptance for an alternative plan is all the more difficult if the military is united behind a single plan, for any alternative lacking the expertise and political support of the military lacks credibility. Thus, political decisionmakers preparing to alter the mobilization plans in a last-ditch effort to maintain the peace in 1914 lacked not only a systemic plan to implement their policies; they also lacked the bargaining advantages that such a plan would provide and which were necessary to overcome the expertise and influence of the military. A related political advantage of existing contingency plans is that they create the illusion of precision and success, for most military contingency plans are accompanied by exceedingly optimistic forecasts (Barnet, 1972: 80).

Not only do existing routines help structure the political debate, but the key actors in the decisionmaking process can themselves use or manipulate the routines to advance their own policy preferences. All organizations have parochial interests which shape their perceptions of the national interest (Halperin, 1974: ch. 3). The organizational parochialism of the military is particularly distinctive (Huntington, 1957; Vagts, 1959). Military influence on crisis decisionmaking derives from its perceived legitimacy with respect to national security issues, the size of the resources which it controls in society, its ability to mobilize public support for its preferred policies, and the dependence of civilians upon the information which it controls. Military influence also depends greatly on the receptivity of key political decisionmakers, and this may vary. Bethmann-Hollweg admits in his memoirs, for example, that he deferred to military advice whenever questions of German security were being considered (Craig, 1955: 291). The military may exaggerate the rigidity of existing contingency plans or otherwise use their monopoly over critical information to exaggerate the feasibility of one plan or downgrade the prospects of another. Betts (1977: 155), for example, argues that Moltke exaggerated the rigidity of the Schlieffen Plan in order to prevent the shift in strategy to the East.<sup>35</sup> Kennedy (1979: 17) argues that in both Vienna and St Petersburg 'the soldiers were using false arguments' to influence political authorities. As we have seen, the military can also refuse to implement a decision by political authorities,<sup>36</sup> and whether the politicians back down or attempt to override the military is itself an interesting question in bureaucratic politics and psychology. There are other ploys at the military's disposal. For example, Russian Chief of Staff Ianushkevich told the Foreign Minister that he wanted to be informed as soon as the Tsar had been persuaded to change his mind and order the general mobilization he had cancelled on July 29. The Chief of Staff said that he would immediately take action and then 'retire from sight, smash my telephone, and generally take all measures so that I cannot be found to give any contrary orders for a new postponement of general mobilization'. After the Tsar had reversed his decision, Sasonov notified Ianushkevich and said, 'Now you can smash the telephone. Give your orders, General, and then—disappear for the rest of the day' (Schilling, 1925: 64–66; Fay, 1928: 2/470, 472).

Thus although the inherent rigidity of military plans might by itself have very little influence on decisions regarding war and peace, in conjunction with the political influence of the military it can have an important impact. Statesmen may also use the rigidity of their military plans as bargaining leverage with an ally, in an attempt to influence their ally's military policy. Conrad, for example, informed the Germans on

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<sup>35</sup> I have found little in Fay, Albertini, or Ritter to support this. Moltke was psychologically committed to the plan, as is argued in the next section.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the question of faithful implementation and resistance, see Halperin (1974: ch. 13).

numerous occasions that his mobilization against Serbia would necessarily delay a major effort against Russia. Stone (1979: 235–242) concludes, however, that this was a deliberate exaggeration designed to serve his own primary interests of completely destroying Serbia before aiding Germany in the east, and that Conrad had ‘pleaded technical difficulties for a decision already determined by his political views’. In this case the basic determinant of policy is Conrad’s predetermined preferences, and the link between routines and their rigid implementation would be spurious.

#### *Psychological Variables*

A more complete explanation for the rigid adherence to existing military routines can be constructed by incorporating psychological as well as organizational and bureaucratic variables. There is extensive psychological literature suggesting that years of work in developing, revising, and perfecting a plan or policy generates a psychological commitment to it. This commitment has what Kurt Lewin (1964) calls a ‘freezing effect’: persons who are committed to a plan or a decision tend to be highly resistant to pressures for change (Kiesler, 1971; Lebow, 1981: 236). Cognitive theory suggests that individuals are more responsive to new information which supports their preexisting beliefs than to information which contradicts it (Jervis, 1976: 143–154), and consequently there is a tendency to discount warnings that existing military plans are inadequate. This ‘irrational consistency’ also leads policymakers to fail to recognize the existence of conflicting objectives and the need to make value trade offs among them (Jervis, 1976: 128–141), resulting in a tendency to inflate both the value of the objectives a policy aims to achieve and the probability of its success. At the same time both the likelihood of negative outcomes and their costs are minimized. There is also a tendency for policymakers to become convinced not only that their plan is on balance superior to alternatives, but that it is preferable in every possible respect (Jervis, 1976: 130–132; Lebow, 1981: 106). This is perhaps one explanation for German insensitivity in 1914 to the likelihood and cost of British intervention, given the perceived necessity of the rapid defeat of France through an invasion of Belgium. Even more important in reinforcing commitment to existing plans is the cognitive phenomenon of post-decision rationalization or bolstering, which Festinger (1957) attempts to explain his theory of cognitive dissonance. To satisfy a cognitive need to justify their actions, individuals tend subsequently to modify their perceptions and beliefs and ‘spread apart’ the earlier alternatives—upgrading the perceived benefits and diminishing the perceived costs of the alternative they have chosen, while doing the opposite for those they rejected. This increases the threshold of new information required to trigger a change in preference and hence increases the resistance to policy change (Jervis, 1976: ch. 11; Lebow, 1981: 106–107). These tendencies undoubtedly solidified the rigid commitments to the Schlieffen Plan and other military plans in 1914.

This problem is particularly serious because the degree of dissonance and the strength of efforts to reduce it may be the greatest under conditions where there is the greatest need for change. Experimental research indicates that the psychological need for post-decision rationalization is positively related to the importance of the initial decision, the attractiveness of alternative options, and the costs (political as well as economic) involved in making and implementing that decision (Jervis, 1976: 392–406; Lebow, 1981: 107). As Dixon (1976: 66) notes, ‘an inability to admit one has been in the wrong will be greater the more wrong one has been, and the more wrong one has been, the more bizarre will be subsequent attempts to justify the unjustifiable’. Moreover, any new information that the initial decision might have been wrong might, under certain

conditions, make the individuals involved even *more* resistant to any reversal of that decision. As Jervis (1976: 404) argues, 'If contradictory evidence arouses sufficient discomfort to trigger dissonance reduction but is not convincing enough to change the person's mind, he may end up holding his views even more strongly than before'. This is the basis for Snyder's (1984b: 200) argument that the motivated biases of decision-makers are greatest when their core beliefs are threatened, so that they tend to see the 'necessary' as possible. Thus Snyder (1984b: 139) asserts that Schlieffen defended his central beliefs with an a priori reasoning that was virtually impervious to evidence, while freely adjusting views on peripheral issues in a way consistent with the concept of unconflicted change. Similarly, Snyder (1984b: 153) argues that 'Moltke's General Staff confronted operational difficulties in a forthright manner only insofar as such problems did not directly challenge the essential features of the preferred strategy'.

These decisionmaking pathologies deriving from the need to maintain cognitive consistency are all reinforced by the theoretical and empirical findings of affective psychology, which emphasizes individuals' needs to minimize psychological stress deriving from feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, uncertainty, and value conflicts.<sup>37</sup> The resulting tendencies toward wishful thinking, procrastination, bolstering, 'unconflicted inertia', and other affective responses to stress only increase resistance to change in policy, as individuals seek security in more familiar modes of action (Holsti and George, 1975; Jervis, 1976: ch. 10; Janis and Mann, 1977; Lebow, 1981: 107–119). Even if policymakers recognize the need for change, there is a tendency toward 'unconflicted change' (Janis and Mann, 1977: 73). This refers to incremental change which is psychologically satisfying for the individual but objectively inadequate. Moltke's modifications of the original Schlieffen Plan by weakening the enveloping right wing and strengthening the defensive left wing, and later shifting two army corps from the right wing to the east (Snyder, 1984b: 111), might be interpreted in this way.

The inability of decisionmakers to cope with extremely high levels of stress in a crisis may lead to extreme anxiety reactions involving dysfunctional physiological responses as well as additional defense mechanisms such as projection and denial. This generally reduces the willingness and capacity of individuals to perform tasks related to the source of anxiety, and may result in indecision, paralysis, and a freezing effect on policy (Lebow, 1981: 115–119), as individuals seek the familiarity, certainty, and security of known routines. Although considerable evidence would be necessary to demonstrate the existence of this behavior, it is interesting to hypothesize about the behavior of Moltke and others in this regard, for there is no doubt that decisionmakers were under extreme stress in July 1914. Moltke had little confidence in his own abilities and had told Bulow, 'I lack the power of rapid decision; I am too reflective, too scrupulous' (Turner, 1979: 210). Lebow (1981: 237) refers to evidence of Moltke's feelings of inadequacy and physical and mental exhaustion. When the Kaiser told Moltke 'Your uncle would have given me a different answer' in response to Moltke's insistence that the trains could not be shifted to the east, Moltke later said that it had 'wounded me deeply. I never pretended to be the equal of the old Field Marshal' (Tuchman, 1962: 100). Moltke states in his memoirs that when the Kaiser called to cancel the movement of the trains into Luxembourg, 'I thought my heart would break' and 'burst into bitter tears of abject despair'. Handed the written order, Moltke 'threw my pen down on the table and refused to sign'. The hope of English neutrality was soon dashed, however, and the

<sup>37</sup> For an excellent summary of the differences between cognitive and affective psychology, see Lebow (1981: 102–119). For suggestions as to how they might be integrated, see Fiske (1981). With regard to stress, it is generally agreed that moderate levels of stress tend to improve performance (Holsti and George, 1975).

trains moved to the west. But the entire episode had a major impact on Moltke, who later wrote: 'I never recovered from the shock of this incident. Something in me broke and I was never the same thereafter . . .' (Tuchman, 1962: 101–102; Albertini, 1957: 3/178). Moltke's behavior seems far more consistent with the psychological hypotheses suggested above than with Betts' (1977: 155) characterization of cool and deliberate political calculation.<sup>38</sup>

This tendency for acute stress to increase perpetual rigidity in individuals may be reinforced by similar mechanisms operating at other levels of analysis. At the small-group level, stress-induced in-group pressures can under certain conditions generate 'groupthink' (Janis, 1972), a concurrence-seeking tendency which can increase resistance to policy change through illusions of unanimity and invulnerability, moral certainty, self-censorship, and collective rationalization. At the organizational level, although crisis stress can improve performance,<sup>39</sup> under certain conditions it can lead decisionmakers to perceive that their own already limited options are narrowing, while those of the adversary are both larger in number and expanding (Holsti, 1972: ch. 6). There is also a tendency for decisionmakers to perceive the policymaking processes of other states as more centralized than they actually are (Jervis, 1976: ch. 8), and thus to assume that an adversary's policies are freely chosen to achieve certain goals rather than forced by bureaucratic or domestic pressures. This tendency is reinforced by a parallel psychological tendency for individuals to perceive that the actions of others are intentional rather than constrained, and to perceive that one's own actions are limited and forced by circumstances, as emphasized by attribution psychology (Kelley, 1972). These factors, acting independently and also interactively with military routines, further impede the likelihood of change.

Organizational routines may also interact with psychological variables to generate misperceptions, which may in turn lead to war (Levy, 1983). An adversary's rigid adherence to existing plans or policies may easily be perceived as an indicator of hostile intent, rather than rigid organizational constraints. At the same time, decisionmakers will misjudge the impact of their own behavior by failing to recognize that the adversary may perceive their actions as reflecting hostile intent, rather than as rigid organizational constraints.<sup>40</sup> In this way, organizational and psychological variables interact with the security dilemma to escalate the conflict spiral (Jervis, 1976: ch. 3). There is some evidence that in 1914 decisionmakers attributed to the adversary a flexibility which they knew they did not possess themselves (Holsti, 1972: ch. 6; Taylor, 1974: 444). Alternatively, rigid organizational routines may generate actions which are perceived as conciliatory, rather than hostile. While under certain conditions this perception may generate reciprocity, it may sometimes be taken as a sign of weakness or lack of commitment and thereby lead to war by undermining deterrence (Levy, 1983).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> It is true, however, that organizational variables are critical in explaining Moltke's motivated biases and some of the psychological pressure on him (Snyder, 1985b).

<sup>39</sup> Current organizational theory emphasizes that stress is often functional for most decisionmaking tasks (Holsti and George, 1975: 288–300).

<sup>40</sup> This is one aspect of the more general phenomenon of misperception induced by a misunderstanding of another's decisionmaking process (Jervis, 1976; Levy, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> The British announcement of the withdrawal of the *HMS Endurance* from the South Atlantic in 1981 provides an example. The decision can be explained by budgetary constraints, factored problems, and the outcome of a bureaucratic struggle between the Defense Minister and Foreign Secretary. It was perceived by the Argentines as a deliberate strategic decision and interpreted as an indication of British unwillingness to use force to defend the Falklands/Malvinas. This was a critical misperception contributing to the outbreak of war (Franks, 1983: para. 44, 114–116).

*Organizational Determinants of Military Doctrine and Plans*

The preceding analysis has been based on the assumption that military contingency plans are formulated primarily on the basis of military necessity, as determined by a rational strategic calculus. The aim has been to identify those variables which interact with military routines to help explain why these plans are often so rigidly implemented even when they may no longer be appropriate. Having examined how several variables combine to produce the inflexible implementation of established military plans in a way that may contribute to war, let us now analyze how organizational interests and routines can affect the outbreak of war indirectly through their impact on the formation of the initial military plans and the military doctrine from which they derive.

One important set of causal linkages here is for organizational interests and routines to help generate 'offensive' doctrines and war plans,<sup>42</sup> which increase the likelihood of war in several ways.<sup>43</sup> They usually increase the incentives to strike first and seize the initiative,<sup>44</sup> which is perhaps the single most destabilizing factor in any crisis (Jervis, 1978; Wagner, 1983). This increases the need for secrecy, which increases mistrust, fuels the conflict spiral, and also increases the incentives to preempt. Offensive strategies, since their general character is usually known, increase the threat perceived by other states, which increases mistrust and misperceptions and intensifies the conflict spiral and arms races, which in turn may contribute to war. Offensive doctrines may also encourage the adoption of more aggressive policies, brinkmanship, *fait accompli* and perhaps even the notion of preventive war (Van Evera, 1984a: 63–65). Because they increase the costs of delay, offensive doctrines also increase the need for reliable allies who are willing and able to respond immediately after the outbreak of war. This need may generate incentives for permanent alliances in peacetime (Osgood and Tucker, 1967: 78–88), as opposed to ad hoc alliances secured during periods of escalating tensions which often results in fairly rigid systems of opposing alliances which themselves are destabilizing (Fay, 1928: 1/34–38; Levy, 1981: 582–583). Offensive doctrines also encourage alliances for which the *causis belli* is unconditional, rather than an unprovoked attack, which reduces some incentives for caution. Finally, offensive doctrines generally require rapid mobilization and detailed advanced planning, which increase the costs of improvisation and hence the rigidity of military plans (Van Evera, 1984a: 86).

There is no doubt that the military doctrines of 1914 were offensive in character or that they had some of the hypothesized effects. Thus Snyder (1984a: 108) argues that the war plans of 1914 and the offensive doctrines behind them 'were in themselves an important and perhaps decisive cause of the war', and Van Evera (1984a: 58) argues that 'the cult of the offensive was a principal cause of the First World War'. If these offensive doctrines are generated from a rational strategic calculus, however, then the causal impact of military routines in the processes leading to war would be relatively

<sup>42</sup> The distinction between offensive and defensive doctrines and strategies is often not explicitly defined in the literature, and this has generated considerable confusion. By offensive strategies I mean those emphasizing attack and territorial penetration rather than the static defense of existing positions. They usually involve seizing the initiative and striking first, but this is not always the case. Offensive strategies are analytically distinct from the offensive/defensive balance (real or perceived) of military technology (Levy, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> The following analysis borrows from Van Evera (1984a: 63–66, 70–79; 1984b: ch. 3). His otherwise excellent discussion is marred by his occasional confusion between offensive strategies and a military technology favoring the offense, though he does in principle recognize the difference.

<sup>44</sup> A policy of not striking first and a strategy of 'active' defense and territorial penetration (or counter-offensive) in the event that war breaks out (Levy, 1984: 229), however, would *not* increase the likelihood of war.



small, though this varies with the particular causal path from offensive doctrine. For most of the sequences described above (e.g., doctrine → policy → war), the linkage between the routines and war is spurious, for military plans and war are independently determined by doctrine. If, however, offensive doctrines generate rigid mobilization plans, which in turn contribute to war through various paths discussed above (e.g., by preventing last-minute compromises), then doctrine and routines form a causal chain contributing to war, and both variables have some causal effect.

It is not clear, however, that the offensive military doctrines and war plans of 1914 were based on a rational strategic calculus. It is generally agreed that military technology itself favored the defense in 1914, and, more important for our purposes, that this should have been recognized (Hart, 1932: 72; Fuller, 1961: chs. 8–9; Howard, 1976: 103, 105; Snyder, 1984b: ch. 1; Levy, 1984: 232). Moreover, both Snyder (1984b: 15–17) and Lebow (1985a: 67–69) argue persuasively that the character of the war plans cannot be explained with reference to aggressive national policies of the great powers, though perhaps the German case is debatable. Van Evera (1984a: 58–63) argues that a transnational ‘cult of the offensive’ shaped the war plans of all of the great powers in 1892–1913. This is hard to reconcile, however, with the fact that as late as 1910 France and particularly Russia had defensive war plans (Snyder, 1984b: p. 10, ch. 3,7). A more persuasive explanation for the offensive doctrines and war plans of 1914 is provided by Snyder (1984a,b) who argues that the offensive plans of the continental powers were adopted because they served the institutional interests of military organizations.<sup>45</sup>

One can derive from organizational theory several reasons why military organizations might prefer offensive doctrines and war plans.<sup>46</sup> Offensive doctrines and plans facilitate—or at least provide the illusion of facilitating—seizing the initiative, structuring the battle, and allowing one to fight the war on one’s own terms, which serve a central organizational goal of uncertainty avoidance. Offensive plans also serve to increase organizational size and wealth, since offensive operations require greater manpower and larger budgets than more static defenses. Furthermore, the organizational autonomy of the military is greatest when its operational goal is to disarm the adversary quickly and decisively by offensive means (Snyder, 1984b: 25). The prospect of dramatic victory also enhances military prestige and morale. These institutional interests and internal organizational needs are reinforced by perceptual biases which result in the tendency to ‘see the necessary as the possible’, and by the tendency toward doctrinal simplification and dogmatism (Snyder, 1984b: 24–32, 200–201). Biased evaluations of the ‘lessons of history’, and the tendency for current doctrine to determine the lessons rather than the reverse (Jervis, 1976: ch. 6), are particularly important, as is militarism and the infusion into society of the values, myths, and perceptions of the military.<sup>47</sup> These perceptual biases are most extreme and most unhinged from strategic reality whenever strategic doctrine can be used as a rationalization to protect a military organization from threats to its institutional interests. The

<sup>45</sup> Van Evera (1984b) does emphasize the institutional sources of offensive doctrines in his dissertation.

<sup>46</sup> This discussion borrows from Posen (1984: 47–58), Van Evera (1984b), and Snyder (1984b). Note, however, that Posen (1984) concludes from his study of British, French, and German doctrine between the two world wars that rational strategic calculation in the form of balance of power theory provides a better explanation of the sources of military doctrine.

<sup>47</sup> Van Evera (1984b: ch. 7) argues that the military infuses society with a world view that contributes to war, not because military organizations prefer war, but rather because their institutional interests are served by these values and perceptions.

more serious the threat and the more vital the institutional interests being threatened, and the greater the extent to which institutional interests deviate from objective strategic reality, the greater the motivated and doctrinal bias (Snyder, 1984a: 132; 1984b: 25).

This discussion of the relationship between organizational interests and needs, offensive doctrines and war plans, and the outbreak of war has revealed several implicit causal models (Snyder, 1985b). In one, organizational interests and needs generate offensive doctrines and plans, which contribute to war; in another, the causal relationship may be reversed: offensive doctrines and plans generate rigid routines, which contribute to war; or, there may be a more complex chain involving reciprocal causation: military organizations generate offensive doctrines and plans, which become routinized and in turn reinforce offensive tendency and increase the likelihood of war.<sup>48</sup>

Many of these considerations applied in 1914. In the case of France (Snyder, 1984b: ch. 3), the military adopted an organizational ideology emphasizing the need for offensive operations carried out by a standing army. This was motivated primarily by the concern to protect the parochial interests and 'organizational essence' of the military from the threat posed by the left-leaning Third Republic after the Dreyfus affair. The terms of conscription had been reduced and greater use was to be made of reservists at the expense of the standing army, and some Radicals called for further civilian intervention in military affairs. The adoption of an offensive doctrine provided the military with a rationalization for resisting reservists and demanding a large standing army, since offensive operations could only be carried out by a standing army at a high degree of readiness. Thus the doctrine served generally to increase the autonomy and size of the army and preserve its traditional values. This organizational explanation is reinforced by a cognitive one. Snyder (1984b: 65) documents some of the 'motivated biases' of the French military and argues that 'doctrine ruled history, not vice versa'.<sup>49</sup>

In the German case, Snyder (1984b: chs. 4–5) argues that the Schlieffen Plan was the product of several organizational and cognitive variables. The German military shared the common preference of military organizations for offensive doctrines to enhance autonomy and facilitate precision in planning. They also had a narrow and dogmatic organizational ideology which emphasized the zero-sum nature of international politics; the belief that war was natural and in fact inevitable; and the belief that war was beneficial only if it was short and decisive. In addition, motivational biases, bolstering, and the need for doctrinal simplification led to distorted evaluations of military options and the failure to consider plausible alternatives. Snyder (1984b: 156) argues that the German military leadership 'saw what they had to see if what they felt they had to do stood any chance to work'. The problem was exacerbated by a pathological civil–military relationship which permitted the formulation of doctrine without civilian input. I would conclude that although the original Schlieffen Plan may have been a reasonable response to strategic realities, these organizational and cognitive variables help explain

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<sup>48</sup> It appears that Van Evera (1984a,b) implicitly adopts the reciprocal model but emphasizes the offense → organizational routine linkage (as well as the direct offense → war linkage). Snyder (1984a,b) also recognizes reciprocal causation but seems to emphasize the primacy of organizational interests and needs, as does Posen (1984: ch. 1–2) but with less emphasis on reciprocal causation. I would emphasize the routines → doctrine linkage and recognize the independent effects of each (together with other variables) on war. Needless to say, these implicit models are not easily amendable to a critical empirical test. The nature of the relationship *between* these variables is probably less important, however, than the relative magnitude of their *combined* impact on war, compared to that of other variables.

<sup>49</sup> For an alternative interpretation of the French army and military doctrine prior to 1914, see Porch (1981).

the Germans' lack of receptivity to new information, unwillingness to consider seriously any alternative contingency plans, and inflexible implementation of the plan under conditions in which it was no longer optimal.

The Russian case was somewhat different. As Snyder (1984a: 133–137; 1984b: chs. 6–7) points out, the Russian war plan of 1914 involved offensives against both Germany and Austria that entailed insufficient forces to permit either to succeed. The explanation for this can be traced to bureaucratic conflict and compromise. General Danilov and the General Staff in St Petersburg wanted to use the bulk of Russia's forces to conduct an offensive against Germany while maintaining a defensive shield against Austria. General Alekseev and the military district commanders, who would have to implement any plans and who were more concerned with operational tactics than grand strategy, preferred the opposite.<sup>50</sup> In the absence of strong civilian control, the result was a bureaucratic compromise involving dual offensives. The problem was that the outcome of this bureaucratic logrolling was that neither operation had sufficient forces to succeed. Snyder (1984a: 136–137) explains this suboptimal outcome in terms of organizational and cognitive variables and their multiplicative interaction effects. He generalizes that bureaucratic logrolling is likely to exacerbate the normal offensive bias for the military, and that military decisionmakers tend to overestimate the feasibility of an operational plan if a realistic assessment would conflict with fundamental beliefs or an organizational ideology.

### Summary and Conclusions

This study has attempted to identify the theoretical linkages by which the organizational routines of the military may contribute to the outbreak of war. The key intervening variable between military plans and the outbreak of war is the inflexible implementation of an existing plan (under conditions where it is no longer optimal). This can increase the likelihood of war by requiring an early mobilization, which generates a momentum of its own and triggers a nearly irreversible action–reaction cycle. The absence of flexible options may deprive political authorities of the flexibility they need to demonstrate their resolve without unnecessarily threatening the adversary, to manage the escalating crisis without sacrificing vital national interests. This limited availability of options combines with the tendency toward worst-case analysis to generate the more escalatory option. In this way rigidity may preclude certain compromise solutions that might otherwise be acceptable.

The key question is how to explain this rigid implementation of the existing plan. I have argued that these organizational routines rarely act alone, but only in complex combinations with other systemic, organizational, bureaucratic, and psychological variables. There is often a failure to recognize the independent role of other variables in contributing to the rigid implementation of an existing military plan, which results in the exaggeration of the causal importance of the inherent rigidity of the plans themselves. There is also the danger of spurious inferences deriving from the failure to recognize that another variable determines both the nature of the military plan and its rigid implementation in a crisis. The greater the extent to which systemic variables

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<sup>50</sup> Snyder (1984b: 134–137) argues, however, that the preferences of Danilov and Alekseev were determined more by intellectual differences than by bureaucratic role. Different views regarding the feasibility of expansion in the Balkans and in Asia and of the extent of the German danger, reinforced by certain motivational biases, were particularly important.

determine—through a rational strategic calculus and ‘military necessity’—both the original military mobilization plans and the rigid adherence to those plans in a crisis, the less the causal impact of the plans themselves.

Often, however, the rigid adherence to preexisting plans cannot be explained by a rational strategic calculus. In these situations the rigid implementation of existing plans can be explained by complex interaction, in multiplicative relationships and in causal chains, of several variables: the inherent characteristics of the routines themselves, the organizational needs and interests of the military, cognitive and affective psychological constraints on rational decisionmaking, and bureaucratic political variables which explain why the preferences of the military may prevail in the political process. The organizational interests and routines of the military may also contribute to the outbreak of war through their effect on the formation of offensive military doctrines and war plans. These can contribute to war by increasing the incentives for preemption, by intensifying the perceived threat and exacerbating a conflict spiral, and by further crystallizing the rigidity of the routines.

The importance of this question of the relationship between military routines and the causes of war is not restricted to the classic case of World War I or to historical conditions in which a certain set of military or transport technologies prevailed.<sup>51</sup> Nor is it restricted to the theorist interested in decisionmaking and the causes of war. It also has enormous importance for national policy and crisis stability in the contemporary age. There has been increasing attention to the question of crisis management. Alexander George suggests, in addition to the limitation of one’s political objectives, several behavioral norms that facilitate effective crisis management: presidential control of military options, pauses in military operations, availability of discriminating military options, coordination of military movements with political-diplomatic actions and with limited objectives, selection of military options that avoid motivating the opponent to escalate, avoidance of the impression of the intention to escalate to large-scale warfare, and provision of a non-humiliating way out of the crisis for the adversary (George, 1984: 226). The reader will recognize that the organizational routines of the military in 1914, in conjunction with other factors discussed above, violated every one of these basic requirements for effective crisis management.<sup>52</sup>

Rigid organizational routines may also affect crisis management in the contemporary age through their impact on the command and control of nuclear forces, as some recent literature emphasizes. Bracken (1983) argues that the institutions and procedures for the command and control of US nuclear forces share much in common with the rigid institutional arrangements of 1914. He points to the absence of tight central control over nuclear arsenals and decisionmaking procedures by political leaders in the US, and the gradual evolution from direct political control to more military control of nuclear arsenals in both the US and USSR since the 1960s; to the devolution of important intelligence and warning systems and decisionmaking authority to the military in a crisis; to the tightly coupled nature of complex command and control systems, in which a series of compound, highly correlated events can reverberate throughout the system and produce an unpredictable sequence of individual, bureaucratic, and technical

<sup>51</sup> We might expect, however, that this question is less relevant for periods before the late 19th century, for that was the first time that states in peacetime developed war plans in any systematic way (Kennedy, 1979: 1; Osgood and Tucker, 1967: 53–56).

<sup>52</sup> The parallels between contemporary Soviet military doctrine for the European theater and the German Schlieffen Plan, especially their offensive character (Lebow, 1985b), are particularly disturbing in light of several of George’s requirements for crisis management.

reactions; to the limited capacity of highly centralized and tightly coupled systems to respond to unanticipated events; to various ways in which the readiness and alerting procedures work to impede a progression of finely tuned and tightly directed political actions; and to the concept of alert instability, and the implication that moderately high levels of nuclear alerts may generate dynamics similar to those of World War I mobilization plans (Bracken, 1983: 8, 23–29, 53–54, 73, 222–223, 243). Similarly, George (1984: 227–228) argues that ‘the ability of top level political authority to maintain’ control over military moves . . . is jeopardized by the exceedingly large number and complexity of standing orders comprising the rules of engagement that will come into effect at the onset of a crisis and as it intensifies’. He notes, along with Sagan (1985), that because military rules of engagement and delegations of authority must be pre-planned, they often do not fit the specific diplomatic and strategic needs of a particular crisis, and cannot be quickly reconsidered and revised. The problem is compounded by the fact that important changes in authorized rules of engagement may automatically go into effect as higher levels of alert are declared, and that these processes may be poorly understood by political leaders (George, 1984: 228). Many political leaders are insufficiently aware of the extent to which alert authority rests in the hands of individual military commanders, allowing them—in the absence of specific orders to the contrary—to place their forces on a higher state of alert if necessary to deal with an increased threat (George, 1984: 227; Sagan, 1985: 132–133).<sup>53</sup> Sagan (1985: 135) concludes that ‘any policymaker’s belief that he can “fine-tune” alerts, intricately controlling the level of American responses to increases in Soviet commend readiness . . . [is] quite naive’.<sup>54</sup>

Although there are important limitations on the validity of the 1914 analogy for the contemporary era, unsettling parallels do exist (Kahler, 1979/80). These are all the more disturbing because one undeniable difference between 1914 and the contemporary age is that the potential consequences for mankind are far greater today.

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<sup>53</sup> Defense Secretary Gates, for example, was unaware that his order for ‘a quiet increase in command readiness’ in May 1960 would lead to a Defcon 3 alert (Sagan, 1985: 102–106).

<sup>54</sup> This problem is compounded by the tendency of political leaders to believe—often erroneously, as Sagan demonstrates—that a military alert can be conducted secretly, leaving them unprepared for serious domestic effects that could conceivably generate enormous pressures for escalation or deescalation (Sagan, 1985: 137).

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