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REVIEW ESSAY

History, Security Studies, and the July Crisis

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Christopher Clark, **The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914**. *London: HarperCollins Books*, 2013. \$29.99, HB, ISBN 978-0-06-114665-7.

Max Hastings, **Catastrophe: 1914: Europe Goes to War**. *New York: Alfred A. Knopf*, 2013. \$35, HB. ISBN 978-0-307-59705-2.

Margaret MacMillan **The War that Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War**. *London: Profile Books*, 2013. \$35, HB. ISBN 978-1-846-68272-8.

Sean McMeekin, **July 1914: Countdown to War**. *New York: Basic Books*, 2013. \$29.99, HB. ISBN 978-0-465-03145-0.

Most theories of war and peace in the modern world, whether they acknowledge it or not, emerge from three historical questions. Why did the First World War break out? Was Hitler's Germany – and its murderous campaign of domination and destruction – unique? And how do nuclear weapons affect international relations? Coming first and producing a seemingly inexhaustible inheritance that vexes geopolitics to this day (think Syria), no international relations scholar can avoid wrestling with the causes of what was once called the Great War.

Consider how many important ideas about war, peace, and strategy have their roots in particular understandings of this conflict: alliance dynamics, mobilization pressures, the security dilemma, offense vs. defense, civil-military relations, the role of nationalism, preventive

war, misperception, rising powers, the continental commitment, to name just a few. Many of the key concepts and contentious debates over US nuclear strategy during the Cold War, for example, implicitly or explicitly emerged from understandings of how the 1914 war began. President John F. Kennedy was deeply influenced by Barbara Tuchman's popular book on the war's origins during his deliberations in the Cuban Missile Crisis. He purportedly told his brother Bobby, 'I am not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a book about this time [and call it] "The Missiles of October."' ¹ Today, World War I serves as a Rorschach test for strategists today: tell me what you think about the dynamics of rising and falling powers before World War I, and I can tell you how you think about the future of the US-China rivalry; share your insights on Serbia's behavior in the decade before 1914 and I can make a pretty good guess on your views of contemporary Pakistan.

Needless to say, the existing social science on war and peace depends on an accurate rendering of what happened in the past and why. But what do we do when this history is unsettled, even disputed? If it turns out Great Britain was not a declining power or was not committed to Mahan's command of the sea doctrine, that France, not Germany, issued a "blank cheque", that public opinion did not welcome the war nor did Europe's elite expect it to be short and easy, it would have a rather large influence on our stock of theories in security studies. Furthermore, many of these theories and historical analogies inform current policy debates. The intellectual stakes of historical revisionism on the origins of the First World War are high indeed.

And where is the historiography? After all this time and the relentless focus of some of the greatest international historians, producing millions of pages of scholarship, is there an accepted account of the causes, dynamics, and blame for the war? A century after the July crisis and August clash is a perfect time to take stock, and the anniversary has produced an extraordinary treasure trove of histories by some of our leading scholars of the conflict. Four large studies are particularly worthy of note: Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*; Max Hastings' *Catastrophe: 1914: Europe Goes to War*; Margaret MacMillan's *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914*; and Sean McMeekin's, *July 1914: Countdown to War*. Each is exemplary; well-written and organized, building upon a massive international historiography and plumbing every available archive.

¹Robert Zaretsky, 'Struggling with destiny: Barbara Tuchman's legacy as an historian'. *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 Feb. 2012.

Collectively, they reflect international diplomatic and military history at its very best.²

There is just one problem: on the major questions of the causes of the war, they do not even come close to agreeing. Looking at many of the same primary materials, in conversation with the same secondary literature, working hard to acknowledge and sanitize any potential bias, each author focuses on divergent causes, different actors, varying timelines, and even offer distinct views on the inevitability of the conflict. While some of the more extreme explanations of the war can now be discounted, historical consensus on the causes of the First World War appears no closer than it was 50 or 75 years ago, nor does it appear a shared view will ever be achieved.

It is beyond the talents of this reviewer to conclusively arbitrate these disagreements, although like everyone else interested in war and peace, I have my preferences. Instead, the wide divergence provides an opportunity to reflect upon the historical enterprise itself, and in particular, its relation to and differences with the international relations literature that seeks to offer generalizations and theories about war and peace. Lurking behind these historiographical disputes is a disconcerting question: if agreement on the causes of the First World War, arguably the most important and most studied issue in international politics, is forever elusive, how much certainty can we have about any number of less important, and less studied events and phenomena in international relations? And how should we think about our stock of theories built upon this contested history?

Just the Facts, Ma'am

While the *why* and *how* is contested, the *what* is well-known. On 28 June 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, and his wife Sophie were assassinated by Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Princip and his accomplices were part of a secret, pan-Serb organization that sought to expand Serbia's territory and pry Bosnia away from Austria-Hungary. Almost immediately, there were indications of knowledge of and complicity in the plot by high-ranking members of the Serbian government, especially its notorious head of intelligence, Dragutin Dimitrijević, otherwise known as Apis.

²Not reviewed here – since it is not a general account of the war's origins – but well worth reading is Nicholas Lambert's *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2012). Lambert offers a sharp and quite radical challenge to the conventional wisdom surrounding British naval strategy and plans before the war. See review essay in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36/3 (June 2013), 454–79.

Some in the Austria-Hungarian government, led by the military Chief of the General Staff Field Marshal Count Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, believed the appropriate response was to crush Serbia once and for all. Serbia's territory, and many thought its irredentist ambitions, had increased after winning Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913. Others, particularly the prime minister of Hungary, Count Istvan Tisza, wanted to avoid a war. In the end, after a drawn out debate (over three weeks) but with strong backing from Germany assured, the Dual Monarchy issued a harsh ultimatum to Serbia that would be difficult if not impossible for any sovereign state to comply with.

Throughout July, each of the major European powers engaged in intense deliberations, diplomacy, and signaling within their governments, among their allies, and with their adversaries. Austria-Hungary would not move without the support of Germany, which it received, and both hoped to keep the crisis localized to the Balkans. Russia, however, saw itself as the protector of Slav interests and was wary of Habsburg designs in the region. Still stung by Austria-Hungary's 1908 annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia refused to stand by and allow its client, Serbia, to be humiliated. Russia understood, however, that a clash with Austria-Hungary likely meant a war with Germany. France, never forgetting the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine lost to Germany in the 1870–71 war and long concerned with its neighbor's increasing economic, military, and demographic power, offered Russia its support. Germany's leaders swung between hyperbolic and aggressive rhetoric to fatalism and gloom at the prospect of a European conflagration. Great Britain dithered in the background, wanting peace, enamored with none of the other powers, worried about German intentions but uncertain of its obligations to France and Russia, but committed to the territorial integrity of Belgium.

Sorting out the shorter and longer-term factors that led to war – and how these forces interacted – has always been a challenge. For example, what are we to make of the fact that each of the great powers faced difficult domestic issues that both preoccupied policymakers from the emerging crisis and perhaps provided an incentive to distract its unhappy citizens? France was riveted by the scandal surrounding the trial of Henriette Cailaux, the wife of the French Minister of Finance who had shot the journalist Gaston Calmette. Germany and Russia both faced labor strife; Russia was only nine years after a revolution that nearly crippled the Tsar. Like Russia, Austria-Hungary was vulnerable to class and ethnic tensions, and its dysfunctional state was barely able to govern over its hodge-podge of nationalities, religions, and languages. Even – especially? Great Britain faced domestic strife – woman's suffrage, labor questions and a near civil war over home rule in Ireland prevented most of the country from truly focusing on

what was happening in the Balkans until too late.³ One does not have to embrace an *Innenpolitik* approach to the war to recognize that domestic politics was, for each power, distracting at best.⁴ Add to this that each country had problematic civil-military relations and poor intra and inter-governmental coordination, making alliances that relied on rapid, massive, irreversible mobilization and offensive military strategies especially dangerous.

And there were longer-term issues as well. The scramble for colonies in Africa and Asia, for example, had left deep scars, intermittently threatening to spark conflict. Only a decade earlier, Great Britain had been geopolitically isolated and looked at Russia and even France as a greater threat than Germany. An ill-advised naval arms race by Germany helped change that, driving England from its splendid isolation. The continental powers engaged in intense arms competition as well. The balance of power, or at least how it was perceived, was also in flux: Germany appeared to be rising, but some thought Russia was too. The long decline by the Ottoman Empire sparked rivalry and instability in the Balkans. And while Austria-Hungary was not in the same sorry state as the Ottoman Empire, as a second sick man in Europe – we now know its economy was growing at a nice clip and its major cities showplaces of technology, culture and intellect – there is little doubt that the rise of nationalism both within the empire and among its Slav neighbors posed a grave threat. The global movement of trade, technology finance, people, and ideas had intensified, increasing interdependence within Europe but exposing deep economic, cultural, and national divisions within and among the great powers. The *mentalitie* of the continent was a strange brew of Whig-ish confidence in unending progress and the social Darwinist belief in bitter competition and struggle. The great powers had weathered over a decade of crises without sparking a European war, perhaps generating overconfidence that brinkmanship followed by diplomacy would always succeed.

Which of the four books reviewed here best gets at these vexing questions? Which should you read, if you can only read one? All four are lively, deeply researched, and well-written. If it were simply the *facts* one was after, it would be hard to go wrong with any of them; there is

³This is a theme of all the books reviewed here, but Great Britain's chaotic domestic politics before the war was first and most elegantly spelled out in George Dangerfield's 1935 classic, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*.

⁴*Innenpolitik* refers to the school in German historiography, exemplified by Eckart Kehr, that emphasizes the primacy of domestic factors in the making of foreign policy. For a summary that focuses on its relevance among American international relations theorists, see Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', *World Politics* 51/1 (Oct. 1998), 144–72.

almost no disagreement among the authors on *what* happened. But where do they stand on the key question of why the war broke out, and who or what was the cause? All the authors make it clear there was plenty of blame – both individual and more systemic – to go around. At the risk of oversimplifying four massive tomes, however, each identifies a villain more culpable than others.

Two groups in particular will gravitate towards Max Hastings' book: unreconstructed 'Fischer-ites' and, relatedly, those who chafe at the argument, made most eloquently by Niall Ferguson, that entering the war was a terrible mistake for the British.⁵ *Catastrophe* unreservedly blames Wilhelmine Germany, tagging it as a ruthless empire bent on domination of the European continent.⁶ For him, England's intervention was both noble and necessary. Hastings' prose is lively, and unlike the other books, he smartly carries the tale past July and August to the end of 1914. Hastings' portrayal of German motives and ambitions, however, are over the top, and while it is right to recognize the extraordinary skill of the British in helping to defeat the Schlieffen Plan during the first Battle of the Marne in September 1914, he is unconvincing in his efforts to demonstrate British grand strategic wisdom.

Margaret MacMillan, on the other hand, moves away from simply blaming the policies of Germany, or any one country in particular. Her book is the likeliest successor to Tuchman's *Guns of August*, for both better and worse; well-written, gripping, but lacking a convincing or even consistent argument. Her novelistic account examines a Europe that appeared to have solved the problem of great power war, only to have this peace upended either by a few powerful, misguided individuals or by large-scale shifts in cultural values. MacMillan places very little emphasis on the traditional questions of alliance dynamics, shifts

⁵Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books 1999).

⁶In 1961, the German historian Fritz Fischer published his controversial book, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, that claimed Germany's leaders had expansionist war aims and had decided in a crucial meeting in Dec. 1912 for an eventual war of conquest. His 1969 book, *Krieg der Illusionen*, furthered pushed the idea of an expansionist Germany but also highlighted the desire of German leaders to distract dissatisfied citizens and deflect their demands for increasing democracy into war. The argument caused an uproar in 1960s West Germany, as it made explicit links between Wilhelmine Germany's ambitions before and behavior during World War I and the behavior of Hitler's Germany. Fischer's works were translated into English and his arguments were quite popular in the 1970s and 1980s, but the with the exception of Hastings, the works reviewed here reflect a rather steep discounting of his thesis. In some ways, Fischer's arguments and the reaction reflected academic sensibilities and the politics of their time, especially in a Federal Republic of Germany struggling to make sense of German history and find its place in the world.

in power balances, and the role of military strategy, and as such, will likely hold less interest for international relations scholars.

Of the four, however, McMeekin's is the best for details about the July crisis, while Clark is the best for the decade before the war. Sean McMeekin is best known for an earlier book *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, which might be thought of as a Fischer thesis for Russia. Tsarist Russia, according to McMeekin, had sought for decades to expand throughout Eurasia, with a particular (and destabilizing) aim at taking territory from the weakening Ottoman Empire. Like Fischer's Germany, McMeekin's Russia was simply looking for a pretext to pursue its territorial expansion. McMeekin has pulled in his horns a bit in *July 1914: Countdown to War*, a tightly drawn, compelling blow-by-blow account of the crisis from the assassination to the launch of war. While McMeekin's earlier blame of Russia is as over the top as Hastings for Germany, *July 1914* does convincingly show that Russia was no innocent in July, and deserves a good deal more blame than it typically receives for the war. Drawing on an excellent new work by the German historian, Stefan Schmidt, McMeekin shows French President Raymond Poincaré providing his own 'blank cheque' to Russia.⁷

Christopher Clark, in contrast, goes to Olympian efforts to avoid the 'blame game', without falling into the Tuchman trap of discounting individual agency. No one wanted world war, the conflict was not inevitable, yet war came, not because of some nameless force or structure but the cumulative acts of key statesman and leaders over years that led to it. Still, even as he tries to weave his way between contingency and structure, a clear scapegoat emerges despite Clark's best efforts: Serbia, the irresponsible rogue state and sponsor of terrorism abroad who time and again unsettled the politics of the Balkans.

Taking together, what do we understand now that we did not before?⁸ Without systematically weighing each argument, the collective thrust of these books and other recent scholarship leaves deep impressions. The notion that there was a strong desire for war, both among elites and the larger public, has been discounted. So too has the idea that political and military leaders assumed a war would be easy and over quickly. Nor was war embraced as inevitable, as many in 1914 believed Europe was

⁷For an excellent review of Schmidt's work, see Marc Trachtenberg, 'French Foreign Policy in the July Crisis, 1914: A Review Article,' a discussion of Stefan Schmidt, *Frankreichs Aussenpolitik in der Julikrise 1914: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Ausbruchs des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2009), <www.h-net.org/~dipl/ISSF/PDF/3-Trachtenberg.pdf>.

⁸For an extraordinary, in-depth review of recent historiography before the recent slate of books, see Samuel R. Williamson Jr and Ernest R. May, 'An Identity of Opinion: Historians and July 1914,' *The Journal of Modern History* 79 (June 2007), 335–387.

moving towards a general détente. Less measurable factors, like concepts of nationalism and the concept of honor, take an even larger place in explanations of the war's origins than before. Hastings aside, Germany appears more boorish and incompetent than sinister, simultaneously boasting and saying irresponsible things while wary of war. Germany and Austria-Hungary, for being such close allies, misunderstood and mistrusted the other; communication and coordination among the Triple Entente was hardly better. While not absolving Germany, Russia and France probably deserve more blame than they have received in the past. Great Britain appears even more feckless than we have previously understood, unsure of actual events and its own positions until dangerously late in the game. Serbia really was an unstable, irresponsible state.

It seems hard to argue, as Barbara Tuchman and A. J. P. Taylor did over fifty years ago, that the war was a result of forces beyond the control of leading political and military figures, or an accidental war. This is not to say there were not deep levels of miscommunication or misperception, nor that any state was *seeking* a global war. Instead, these accounts portray the leaders of Europe as facing decision after decision as poor gamblers, aware of and acknowledging the risk that things could go wrong but hoping against hope that their bets would play out right. European diplomacy, it is clear, was dangerously under-institutionalized, as the old system of ambassadorial communication and the lack of any international organization to provide a place for adversaries and allies to meet and discuss, if not arbitrate, their disputes, was keenly felt. Even among allies and within governments, there was very little coordination, and the lack of any National Security Council types of organizations left leaders overwhelmed and without the capacity to assess and deal with rapid political and military changes.

At the other extreme, it is hard to take seriously the idea of conflict being a consciously planned preventive war, especially by Germany. There is no doubt that the Kaiser and his chief military official, Helmuth von Moltke, often engaged in bombastic, boastful language, reflecting both their own and their nation's insecurity and ambitions. But if one were going to launch a preventive war, it would be hard to go about it in a worse way: waiting weeks while a smoldering crisis provoked by your bumbling, tone-deaf ally unfolded in a manner that allowed everyone to politically and militarily prepare, even allowing your main adversary time to begin mobilization without replying in kind. These books do not convey a German leadership in the least bit enthusiastic or optimistic about what was to come. In the end, the causes of the war seemed neither an accident nor sought after, but existing in some liminal space in between.

Historians and Social Scientists, Unite

While this new historiography *deepens* our understanding of the conflict's origins and allows us to eliminate certain explanations, none of these books offers a conclusive explanation for *why* the July Crisis exploded into war. This is not to say we should just throw up our hands in existential despair. In fact, perhaps the best way to move forward is to combine the powerful and often complementary tools that both historians and social scientists possess, to both augment our understanding and counterbalance excesses of both disciplines.

This rich history can offer a corrective to some of the excesses of previous social scientific treatments of the July crisis. Though they tire of hearing it, political scientists need to be reminded that parsimonious explanations of such a complex event can be more harmful than helpful. One does not have to accept John Lewis Gaddis's admonition that there is no such thing as an independent variable to recognize the war's complex and interconnected short and long-term causes.⁹ Theorists of war and peace understandably focus on the military side of the equation, but war is a political act, and military plans and mobilization schedules are not always a very accurate reflection of political intentions. Just because a state has an offensive, aggressive military strategy does not mean the state in question wants to implement it. Finally, the past *is* another country, with its own unique language, assumptions, and ways of looking at the world. People in 1914 even looked at such seemingly fixed concepts as *space* and *time* differently than we do today. Historians are far more sensitized to the *mentalities* that make forces like nationalism and honor crucial to our understanding of the war.

And what can the social scientist offer on this front? First, the historical scholarship on the origins of the war has been deeply politicized since the beginning.¹⁰ It is very hard to gain insight, or even have a meaningful debate, when the question of national or individual blame casts such a long shadow. Social science is both no means without its own moral and political assumptions, but it does try its best to drain away such distracting and even poisonous considerations.¹¹ Second and

⁹John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: OUP 2002).

¹⁰Consider how the Fischer thesis was largely *ignored* by French historians, where might think it would be appealing, because of the decades long political rivalries among key French historians. See J.F.V Keiger, 'The Fischer Controversy, the War Origins Debate and France: A Non-History', *Journal of Contemporary History* 48/2 (2013), 363–75.

¹¹For this point, see Robert Jervis, 'International Politics and Diplomatic History: Fruitful Differences,' *H-Diplo ISSF* (March 2010), <www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-InaguralAddress.pdf>.

relatedly, the ahistorical nature of the social sciences may at times be an advantage to doing what historians are always preaching: taking the past seriously on its own terms. It is very hard to simply analyze and assess the July Crisis without thinking about the horrendous future that was to come – the senseless slaughter of trench warfare, brutal revolutions, economic dislocation and depression, another world war, and genocide. If the Third Balkan War had unfolded more like the First and Second – relatively short and localized – we would not spend much time thinking about it, nor get as angry at the states and leaders involved. Leaders at the time, however, hoped it *would be* a Third Balkan War, and however foolishly mistaken, acted upon those assumptions. The social scientist is perhaps better able to isolate and bound the events of that time, to separate it from the horrors that were to come, and understand how leaders could have been so wrong about the consequences of their actions. This sense of balance may also allow the strategist to have a better sense of what lessons of the past might be applicable today.¹²

Third, social science is far better at being explicit about identifying causes and agents in their explanations. MacMillan at times focuses on individual responsibility for the war, at other times lingers on the nature of the states in question, and in other cases implies structural insecurities when explaining the war. Which is it, and how do they relate? I found myself, to my great surprise, yearning for a Waltzian ‘levels of analysis’ approach that made it clear when the leaders, the countries, or the international system were at the heart of the matter.¹³ She also writes quite a bit about the sexual peccadillos of many of the key participants: while fascinating, it was not clear to me whether this mattered or not (I suspect not). Historians by instinct and habit correctly focus on details, but after 2,500 pages of reading, I appreciated more than ever the style pithy, transparent, clearly argued paper on the ‘cult of the offensive’ that one might find in the pages of this or other

¹²Margaret MacMillan wrote an essay arguing that there are many similarities in the international political situation of 1914 and 2014. Margaret MacMillan, ‘The Rhyme of History: Lessons of the Great War’, *The Brookings Essay*, 16 Dec. 2013, <www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/rhyme-of-history>. For an excellent caution against drawing such easy lessons from a century ago, see Mira Rapp-Hooper, ‘Rhyme and Reason: Why 2014 Doesn’t Have to be 1914’, *The Diplomat*, 2 Jan. 2014, <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/rhyme-and-reason-why-2014-doesnt-have-to-be-1914/>>. See also Paul Kennedy, ‘The Great Powers, Then and Now,’ *New York Times*, 13 Aug. 2013, <www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/opinion/global/the-great-powers-then-and-now.html?_r=0>.

¹³Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia UP 1959).

like minded strategy journals like *International Security*, even (especially?) when I disagree with the arguments.¹⁴

Combined, the two communities can make important if slow progress. The sharp analytical razor of the social scientist might combine with the historical skills to build upon this exemplary if deadlocked scholarship to identify smaller but researchable and unanswered questions that might shed greater light on the war's origins. To give just a few that came to this reviewer's mind: did the Russians know about the plot to assassinate the Archduke? How much of Russia's 'pre-mobilization' of 25 July actually saw Germany, in addition to Austria-Hungary, as the target? Did Poincaré and the French issue Russia a 'blank check', and if so, did the Russians cash it? Why did not the Austria-Hungarians have a quick-strike military plan, something that would have allowed them to act quickly (by say, seizing Belgrade) before anyone else had time to react? (It is clear to me, that instead of events moving too quickly, as we once thought, the crisis moving so slowly increased the chance of war). Did civilian leaders in each country possess the complete details of and fully understand the political consequences of their military's plans? How close was Great Britain to sitting the conflict out? Were the various diplomatic and mediation proposals offered in late July sincere and promising or simply political gambits? If the Germans were so keen on keeping Great Britain out of the war, why did they not have a feasible military plan that avoided invading Belgium? And if they really were thinking in terms of preventive war and conquest, why would the Germans wait for a slow, simmering crisis – especially one they had little control over – to attack? Would it not have made more sense to launch when no one expected anything? And how should we understand the *Septemberprogramm*, a controversial document purporting to lay out Germany's ambitious war aims? There are many other focused, concise research questions that, if answered, might allow us to keep chipping away at the historiography's lack of consensus.

And might it be time to move our attention beyond the July crisis, and ask why the war continued for as long as it did? We know a lot about why wars start, and far less about the equally important (and contemporaneously relevant) question of why they are so hard to get out of once they begin. A key part of the bargaining theory of war tells us that conflict is often the result of misunderstanding the capabilities and resolve of one's enemies: such misunderstanding, abundant in July 1914, was surely gone by October 1914. For me, one of the great puzzles of the conflict is why, after the Battle of the Marne made it

¹⁴For the best examples of this kind of work, see the excellent collection edited by Steven E. Miller, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Stephen Van Evera, *Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War*, revised and expanded edition (Princeton UP 1991).

abundantly clear that the war would not be short or easily one, there was not a move to end the conflict. Why would Great Britain, deeply ambivalent in the days leading up to the war, double down its commitments weeks later when it was clear the only way to change a deadlocked battlefield would be to pursue a gruesome strategy of attrition?¹⁵ Why would not Germany, after the defeat of the Schlieffen Plan, work harder to find a way out of an unwinnable war?

It is unlikely we will ever achieve a consensus of the causes of the First World War. The forces that generated the conflict were too complex, too contested, too interrelated, and given the bitter harvest of the war, too politicized to ever allow for a widely accepted, parsimonious answer. This means we must be both cautious and humble when generalizing about war and peace or making policy recommendations based on our understanding of the conflict. As the books reviewed here and other scholarship shows, however, meaningful progress, though incremental, is possible. They also demonstrate that the best way forward may be to combine the unique and complementary tools of the historian and the strategist.

Note on Contributor

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¹⁵The only outcome worse than a complete German victory for the British was an overwhelming victory by the French and Russians. One can imagine that, despite the public rhetoric of Germany's September Program, German officials might have been tempted to rein in their horns and offer Great Britain enormous concessions if it left the war, or even simply promised not to build up its continental commitment. For the bargaining model of war, see Dan Reiter, 'Exploring the Bargaining Model of War', *Perspectives on Politics* 1/1 (March 2003), 27–43.

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