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**Annika Mombauer.** *Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xvi + 325 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-79101-4.

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One of the enduring historical discussions on World War I focuses upon the leadership, or lack thereof, provided by Helmuth von Moltke, the Chief of the German General Staff, in the years immediately preceding the war, and the first critical month of the war. The "Schlieffen myth," named after Alfred von Schlieffen (Moltke's predecessor as Chief of the General Staff) by his supporters after the war, contends that Moltke was not assertive or warlike enough during his early years in office. His failures ensured that the German Army would not be ready to fight the war in 1914. Nor was Moltke supposedly decisive enough later, during the July Crisis and the first month of the war, to allow Germany the victory it seemed destined to gain. Most damning of all, Moltke changed the troop dispositions of the vaunted Schlieffen Plan, dooming it, so Schlieffen's supporters argue, to failure.

In *Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War*, Annika Mombauer, lecturer in European history at the Open University, sets out to show that Moltke, contrary to popular opinion, was not a weak-willed soldier of little talent, responsible for dooming Germany to failure at the start of the First World War. Mombauer's goal is not to rehabilitate Moltke, but rather to free the analysis of his career from the vilification heaped upon it by writers of the Schlieffen school. Her analysis of Moltke's career takes place in a political, rather than a military, context. After a brief discussion of the historiography of Moltke's influence on the immediate prewar years and the opening campaigns of the war, Mombauer analyzes the military decision-making apparatus in Imperial Germany. She then looks at Schlieffen and Moltke in an effort to shed new light on Moltke's career and his influence on the critical events leading up to the war. Two of the five chapters of the book concentrate on international crises, from the Balkan Crisis of 1908 to the outbreak of the war, and the influence Helmuth von Moltke, as Chief of the General Staff, had upon them. Mombauer then discusses Moltke's decision-making during the opening phases of the war, the failure of the Schlieffen-Moltke Plan, Moltke's replacement by Erich von Falkenhayn, and Moltke's final days.

One of the key arguments raised by Moltke's detractors is that he was the wrong man to replace Schlieffen, and that he had replaced his predecessor at the wrong time. Furthermore, the argument runs, had Schlieffen been allowed to remain in office, he would have continued to provide more effective leadership than Moltke. Mombauer demonstrates clearly that this was not the case. In 1905, shortly before Moltke replaced Schlieffen as Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen, then nearly seventy-five years old and in failing health, wrote: "It is high time that I take my leave and I have good reason to believe that my repeated request for retirement will be granted this year" (p. 46). Schlieffen, then, had apparently accepted the necessity of moving on, something his supporters overlooked after the war.

Even if it were necessary for Schlieffen to leave office, his supporters argue that Moltke was the wrong man to replace him. Mombauer refutes this claim as well. Moltke had a much closer relationship with the Kaiser than Schlieffen had. Moltke was a close personal friend of the Kaiser and had had almost daily contact with the monarch since 1891, a relationship Schlieffen never shared. Chiefs of the General Staff in Imperial Germany traditionally held the right of immediate personal access to the Kaiser. Schlieffen, however, was rarely alone with

Wilhelm. Typically, when he and the Kaiser met, the Minister of War, the Chief of the Military Cabinet, and/or the commander of the Kaiser's headquarters attended as well. Moltke and Alfred von Waldersee, Schlieffen's predecessor as Chief of the General Staff, were both personal friends of the Kaiser and often met privately with the monarch. Thus, "the personality occupying a position was more important than the position itself" in Wilhelmine Germany (p. 32).

As far as Moltke's supposed lack of ability to do the job for which he was chosen, Mombauer again shows that Moltke's critics were off the mark. It was Moltke, not Schlieffen, who made the annual autumn military maneuvers more realistic, by forbidding the Kaiser to participate and to "win" on the final day, by personally leading a grand, if hopelessly anachronistic, cavalry charge. It was also under Moltke's supervision that the mania for secrecy in the General Staff reached new heights. Security became such a concern that it often became counterproductive: diplomatic overtures that might have secured passage of German troops through Belgium could not be made because the Foreign Office was not given access to Germany's war plans; the Kaiser, who was notoriously loose-lipped, was likewise kept in the dark about his army's war plans, leaving no room for diplomatic maneuver in the critical final stages of the July Crisis; and Germany's Austro-Hungarian allies were not entrusted with more than broad generalities about Germany's intentions in the war. Moreover, Moltke's General Staff maintained a higher level of secrecy than it had under previous chiefs.

While Mombauer's intention is to discredit the "Schlieffen Myth," she does not set out to rehabilitate Moltke in the process. In many instances, like the mania for secrecy, he appears in a negative light. There is perhaps no more negative aspect to Moltke's career than his desire to lead Germany into a preemptive war. As the political situation in Europe changed between 1908 and 1914, Moltke became ever more certain that in order to ensure a German victory, especially over Russia, war had to come sooner not later. This was the essential logic behind Moltke's demand for army increases in the years immediately preceding the war. Once Russia completed her own army increases, it would be impossible for Germany to defeat her. Therefore, in 1913 Moltke called for a cessation in the General Staff's production of alternative plans for a war with Russia. The approach laid out in the Schlieffen Plan (i.e. fighting France and Russia) would be the one the German Army took, should hostilities with Russia begin. As the July Crisis heightened, Moltke saw it as the chance for a preemptive war he had longed for and was determined not to miss the opportunity. His public statements became more and more bellicose. Privately he was more cautious, but Mombauer clearly shows Moltke's desperation when, at the critical moment, it appeared that the Kaiser might successfully avert the looming war.

Perhaps the most damning criticism Moltke's detractors bring up is Moltke's revision of the vaunted Schlieffen Plan. Much of this criticism stems from the idea that the Schlieffen Plan, in its unadulterated form, led by a man who fully believed in it (Schlieffen died in 1913), guaranteed a German victory in 1914. This, as Mombauer and others point out, is spurious reasoning to begin with. However, the fact that Moltke did tinker with the plan and Germany did not win the war is enough justification for some. By 1914, however, the Schlieffen Plan had been Germany's official war plan for over ten years. As the political climate in Germany changed, "it was Moltke's right, even his duty, to adapt the war plan to changing circumstances" (p. 98). The changes Moltke made before the war show that, although Moltke was a supporter of the plan, he viewed the coming war differently than Schlieffen had. The decision not to invade Holland shows that Moltke was not taken in by the short war illusion and believed that Dutch neutrality would be crucial to German success in a long war. Strengthening the left wing of the German forces at the expense of right wing reflected a change in the size, disposition, and attitude of the French Army. The changes made during the first month of the war, especially pulling a significant number of soldiers from the right wing to support the Eighth Army, then fighting off a Russian invasion in the east, make perfect military sense. Finally, the retreat from the Marne demonstrates a problem in command and control, not one of commitment to the plan. Anyway, by that time the Schlieffen Plan had already failed to carry out its objective.

*Helmuth von Moltke and the Origins of the First World War* is a valuable and highly recommended addition to the literature on Germany's role in the outbreak of World War I. The book utilizes sources that have been released to the German archives since the fall of the Soviet Union. However, this is not a book for the casual reader. The discussions of the international crises from 1908 to the outbreak of the war focus on Moltke's reaction to the crises and his role in bringing Germany ever closer to the war he believed was necessary for national survival. There is little information, however, on the crises themselves. Likewise, in the discussion of the opening stages of the

war, the focus is on Moltke's actions, but there is little discussion of the events to which he was reacting. While I found it refreshing not to plow through these familiar events in detail, and I imagine many for whom this is well-known territory will feel the same, this must surely be confusing for readers who are not well-versed in the origins of the First World War.

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