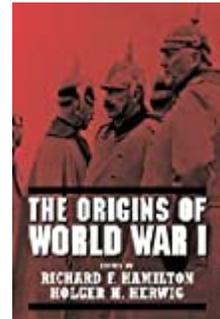




Richard F. Hamilton, Holger H. Herwig. *The Origins of World War I.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 537 S. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81735-6.



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More than Fisher

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Historians and the occasional politician have debated the origins of World War I ever since the war broke out. Even though thousands of books have already been written on the subject, Holger Herwig and Richard Hamilton have edited a volume that contributes greatly to existing scholarship on the war's origins. Moving beyond the arguments put forth by Fischer and his supporters, and sometimes refuting arguments that rely on traditionally cited overarching causes like nationalism, imperialism, alliance systems and militarism, this book looks at the motivations of all the belligerents and finally acknowledges that individuals in all of the nations pushed for war. While acknowledging the structural or big picture as important to the war's origins, Hamilton and Herwig seek to prove that individuals did indeed have an impact on the choice to go to war. Especially important are the chapters on Serbia and Japan, belligerents whose motivations are rarely closely examined.

In the very first sentence, Hamilton and Herwig pose the question, "Why another book on 1914?" (p. 1). They answer this question by asserting that key elements cru-

cial for explaining the origins of the war have been ignored by a large body of scholars, teachers, and consequently, remain unknown to the average school child. Too many people cannot identify the decision makers of 1914, who varied in title, position, power, background and experience from state to state. The authors remind us that each state had different mechanisms for declaring war; while some required cabinet or parliamentary approval, others could declare war by royal decree. Hamilton and Herwig also want to examine the matter of which pressure groups lobbied for war and the justifications for war given that were by the decision-makers. Such justifications include more than official reasons offered to the press, and extend to personal ones transmitted only via diaries and personal correspondence. These elements have been examined, sometimes ad nauseam, for some countries, but virtually ignored for others. As a consequence of the uneven treatment of such matters this book seeks to address, an incomplete picture of the origins of the war has developed. This volume also examines why each country opted for war. While nations like Japan and the United States obviously did not initiate hostilities, their motives for joining are also assessed.

In fifteen chapters, the contributors examine personalities and policies in each of thirteen states (Serbia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France, Great Britain, Japan, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and the United States). By looking at the mind-set of individuals in power, the authors have thrown open the doors on a very dark period. Painstaking examination of personal diaries and correspondence reveals the thoughts and motivations behind each leader's actions. Each contributor also makes clear which individuals were responsible for making the key decisions, sometimes pointing out that prestigious titles did not correspond with the actual power to decide. For example, I. L. Goremykin was head of Nicholas II's Council of Ministers, but played almost no role in the decision to go to war. Similarly, despite his titles, French Premier and Foreign Minister Viviane was also excluded from decision-making power.

Even the chapter on Germany, written by Holger Herwig, tackles the war's origins in a fresh light. Germany's reason for war is one of the most debated topics in modern history. Arguing against what he calls "[t]he all-too-clever argument that vast but indirect social movement and serious class, political, and regional antagonisms limited the freedom of German decision makers" (p. 156), Herwig contends that the decision to go to war lay in the hands of a small cadre of decision-makers, in which Wilhelm II was included. While this argument draws on the Fischer thesis, Herwig draws on the ideas of several other scholars to explain the assumptions that affected these leaders's decisions, including Wolfgang J. Mommsen's "topos of war," James Joll's argument that leaders relied on past experience, traditions and instinct during crisis, and Dennis Showalter's thesis that the General Staff was so wedded to the idea of operational timetables that they were unwilling to scrap the Schlieffen Plan in favor of possible diplomacy and bluff. Later in the chapter, Herwig argues against Fischer's assertion that German industry pushed for war. While some industries did climb quickly on the bandwagon, numerous others argued strenuously against it. His argument that few ties connected the coterie of decision-makers and various Wilhelmian pressure groups, including the industrialists, successfully makes this question moot. But Herwig's chapter is not just a rehashing of old debates. In a close examination of the Schlieffen plan that challenges Terence Zuber's research, Herwig adds a new dimension to discussions of this question by analyzing the personalities that fielded its modified version. Additionally, Herwig emphasizes the open-eyed quality of Ger-

man decision-making; much like Soviet and American decision-makers during the Cold War, the Germans were well aware that what they were doing could (and probably would) spell disaster and did it anyway. Finally, Herwig examines the confusion of the General Staff at the end of July, 1914. Bethmann-Hollweg was, according to this essay, paradoxically unwilling either to provoke the war or to negotiate diplomatically to stem the crisis.

In addition to the discussion of Germany, several other chapters are important and revealing. Richard D. Hall's chapter on Serbia offers a good summary on the tensions between Austria-Hungary and Serbians as well presenting a useful discussion of the two Balkan Wars. This background is indispensable for understanding why Austria-Hungary and Serbia squared off in 1914. Graydon A. Tunstall's chapter on Austria-Hungary dispels any notion of a "slide into war." His analysis shows that the leaders of Austria-Hungary were deliberate in their resolve to go to war and certainly not pushed into this decision by the Germany (even if Wilhelm II enthusiastically encouraged the resolution of the Serbian problem). Chapters on France, Russia, Italy, and the Balkan States are equally revealing. In Russia, although all of the policy-makers were in agreement about the war, a remarkable absence of communication characterized the relationship between the government and the military that was to plan for it. France's lack of action and the reason for this motionlessness (which was to make sure that Russia knew it could count on France) demonstrates an amazing willingness to relinquish state power. Italy, cut out of the decision-making process by its allies in 1914, was content to entertain offers from both the Central Powers and the Entente until its territorial demands were satisfied. The Balkan states of Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece each harbored nationalist aspirations and tried unsuccessfully to use the war to achieve them. The usually forgotten Japanese entry is also thoughtfully treated, particularly with its emphasis on Japan's willingness to declare war on the Central Powers despite the absence of belligerent acts against Japan by members of that alliance. Finally a chapter by Jon Milton Cooper Jr., treating the United States, examines how America came to break with a tradition of avoiding European entanglements that had persisted for almost one and a half centuries. Cooper argues that after the 1917 sinking of the Lusitania, Woodrow Wilson took virtual control over foreign affairs. It was he, more than any other factor, who marched America towards war.

Taken together, the essays in this volume make obvious that an important traditional consideration in the de-

cision about whether to go to war, that of calculated risk, was thrown out the window in the weeks leading up to the war and that panic, fear, and emotion ruled among the leadership of the belligerents (p. 11). This excellent work goes beyond the broader picture of the origins of the war to elucidate the ways in which personalities and policies moved the world toward war. Even scholars who wholeheartedly subscribe to Sidney B. Fay's assertion that none of the Great Powers wanted war will be forced to reconsider and possibly modify their views, since the essays in the volume show persuasively that the nations involved did not slither uncontrollably over the brink, but instead marched together toward strife, driven by fear, doubt, and passion. The book also addresses one of the traditional complaints about Fischer's thesis, the charge that it is inaccurate to say that only Germany actively pushed and planned for this war. Many historians have claimed that if all the belligerents's papers were analyzed, documents would reveal a calculated push toward war on the part of all of the belligerents, in opposition to the traditional claim that the war was forced upon them. The essays in Hamilton and Herwig's volume prove this

refutation of Fischer definitively.

Each chapter could, with a few modifications, stand alone. In addition to the scholarly value of the impression created by the essays as taken together, this stand-alone format would allow the book to be easily used as a textbook if it were not so expensive. It would be appropriate for a graduate level class or if it comes out in paperback, an advanced undergraduate course in World War I. The inclusion of maps greatly aids the reader in understanding key territorial changes that occurred in the first years of the twentieth century. Both for its fresh approach and general utility, then, this is a book that belongs on the bookshelf of every historian concerned with World War I or the twentieth-century world.

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