

**FRANZ FERDINAND FOUND ALIVE
WORLD WAR I UNNECESSARY**

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To appear in Philip Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow and Geoffrey Parker, eds.

**UNMAKING THE WEST: COUNTERFACTUAL
THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS IN HISTORY**

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Revision: September 2000

Very few things happen at the right time, and others
do not happen at all.

-- Herodotus (ca. 450 B.C.E.)

As the twentieth century recedes into history it is useful to reflect upon what may have been its most significant event: World War I. That conflict was a cultural and political watershed; it marked the beginning of Europe's political and cultural decline and set in motion a chain of events that led to an even more destructive war. Without World War I we might have been spared the horrors of Soviet communist, Auschwitz and the Cold War. Many historians nevertheless contend that World War I, or something like it, would have been all but impossible to avoid. The distinguished British historian, F. H. Hinsley, insisted that "If the Sarajevo crisis had not precipitated a particular great war, some other crisis would have precipitated a great war at no distant date."¹ The historical literature on World War I is disproportionately devoted to its underlying causes; proximate causes are given short shrift and are often treated as mere catalysts. Is this emphasis warranted? Was a European War really inevitable? Could the twentieth century have unfolded differently?

Before addressing these questions, it is important to know why so many historians have lined up on the side of inevitability. One reason to consider is that they took their cue from leading actors in the July crisis, many of whom subsequently portrayed themselves as victims of earlier decisions and events with only the most limited ability to influence the course of the crisis.² Austrian chief-of-staff, Conrad von Hötzendorff, maintained that "the First World War came about inevitably and irresistibly as the result of the motive forces in the lives of states and people, like a thunderstorm which must by its nature discharge itself."³ For Conrad, who pushed for war as soon as he received news of the archduke's assassination, this view of the conflict was

patently self-serving. This is equally true of Princip's assertion that World War I would have broken out even if he had failed to shoot Franz Ferdinand.⁴

Historians have had political incentives to stress the underlying causes of World War I and how they made it all but impossible to avoid. In the 1920's and 1930's, German nationalists sought to tar France and Russia with responsibility for the war to challenge the "war guilt" clause of the Treaty of Versailles. Liberal internationalists wanted to show that the Great War had been the result of the balance of power and absence of international institutions to regulate interstate competition.⁵ In the 1960s, the publication of Fritz Fischer's Griff Nach der Weltmacht touched off a new round of debate. Fischer privileged underlying causes to establish continuity in goals between Wilhelminian and Nazi Germany.⁶ Much of his argument is based on the far-reaching war aims of the September 1914 Program and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, but they were a response to apparent victory, not a cause of war. We must be careful to distinguish between causes and effects, and not fall into the cognitive trap of believing that something that has monumental consequences must have had equally important and deep-seated causes.

Beyond these case specific motives, there is a wider bias in the scholarly community against the contingency of important historical events. Two distinct but reinforcing processes account are at work here. Historians, R. H. Tawney observed, give "an appearance of inevitableness" to an existing order by dragging into prominence the forces which have triumphed and thrusting into the background those which they have swallowed up."⁷ Or, as Charles Tilly put it, inevitability is an artifact of the "retrospective" approach that examines phenomena by working backwards from them to discover their causes. When applied to the

study of state formation it ignores the “hundreds of states that once flourished but then disappeared.” Tilly proposes the “prospective” method to combat this bias; researchers would begin at the formative stages in history and search forward for alternative paths and outcomes.⁸

Historical interpretations, no matter how well-documented or convincingly presented, rarely achieve a consensus. They provoke critiques and contending interpretations, and the resulting controversy stimulates a search for additional documents. New evidence may require historians to reformulate their interpretations but it rarely discredits them outright. As the historiography of the First World War indicates, new evidence often provides the basis for still more interpretations. Decades of controversy, or even centuries of controversy about the French Revolution or the collapse of the Roman Empire, give rise to a plethora of interpretations that attribute these developments to a wide range of intellectual, social, economic and political causes.⁹ Remove one or several putative causes and a half-dozen others remain. Historical debate encourages the belief that most major events and developments were massively “overdetermined.”¹⁰

I contend that World War I was contingent with respect to both its underlying and immediate causes. What made Europe ripe for war was not the multitude of its alleged causes, but the pattern of interactions among them. World War I is best understood as a non-linear confluence of three largely independent chains of causation. These chains produced independent but more or less simultaneous *gestalt* shifts in Vienna and Berlin, and a slightly earlier one in Russia. Had the timing of the Austrian and German shifts been off by as little as two years, Austrian leaders would not have felt so intent on destroying Serbia or German leaders would not

have been so willing to encourage them to do so. For this reason alone, World War I was overdetermined *and* highly contingent.

Theoretical explanations for war take catalysts for granted. If the right underlying conditions are present, some incident will sooner or later set armies on the march in the way the twin assassinations in Sarajevo did in 1914. But Sarajevo was not just any provocation; it met a diverse set of political and psychological requirements that were essential for Austrian and German leaders to risk war. It is possible, but extremely unlikely, that some other provocation would have met these conditions or that some other combination of great powers would have started a war for different reasons. In the absence of a catalyst, several more years of peace could have altered the strategic and domestic contexts of the great powers and made war less likely. There was a two year window when the leaders of at least two great powers thought their national or dynastic interests were better served by war than peace.

The first two stages of my inquiry make use of counterfactual thought experiments. Counterfactuals are past conditionals or, more colloquially, “what if” statements about the past.¹¹ They alter some aspect of the past (e.g., doing away with a person or event, changing a critical decision or outcome, inserting an event or development that never happened, or making it take place sooner or later than it did), to set the stage for a “what might have been” argument. I use only “minimal rewrite” counterfactuals. They entail small, plausible changes in reality that do not violate our understanding of what was technologically, culturally, temporally or otherwise possible.¹² A world in which Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife returned alive from their June 1914 visit to Sarajevo is an example. Gavrilo Princip’s accomplice missed the royals with

his bomb en route to city hall, and Princip was lamenting his failure when the touring car carrying Franz Ferdinand and his wife came to a stop in front of him to allow the cars at the head of the procession to back up because they had made a wrong turn. With only a minimal rewrite of history — the procession stays on the planned route — the assassination might have been averted. Such a rewrite does not strain our understanding of the world because most twentieth century royal processions follow their intended routes. The archduke's was a tragic exception.

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF WAR

To use counterfactual experiments to explore alternative worlds it helps to have as a starting point a generally accepted interpretation for why the world we live in has come about. Historians rarely agree about causes, but the degree of controversy surrounding the origins of World War I has been extreme. Scholars have disagreed about the causes of war, the appropriate level of analysis at which to search for them, which state or states were most responsible for the war and the reasons why their leaders acted as they did.

Fortunately, something of a dominant interpretation has emerged in recent years. Historians associated with this interpretation disagree on specific points (e.g., German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg's motives for risking war, the relative responsibility of Austria and Germany) but they agree that both powers set in motion the chain of events that led to war; Austria-Hungary exploited the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as the pretext for war with Serbia, and Germany encouraged -- even pushed -- Austria toward decisive action.¹³ Students of Austria-Hungary argue that its leaders acted for a combination of closely related foreign and domestic concerns. Since the publication of Kurt Riezler's Diaries, a near

consensus has emerged among German historians that von Bethmann-Hollweg did not seek to provoke a European war but recognized that an Austrian conflict with Serbia would be difficult to contain. He was willing to run the risk of a continental war in the belief that such a war was sooner or later inevitable and that Germany's chance of winning it diminished with every year that passed.¹⁴

Russia's role has always been recognized as critical. The Austro-Serb Balkan conflict escalated into a European war because Russian leaders decided on 24-25 July to back Serbia. Recent scholarship indicates that the Russians supported Serbia in full recognition that this was almost certain to lead to war with Austria, and possibly with Germany as well.¹⁵ The czar and his ministers nevertheless made the decision to mobilize without understanding its military consequences for Germany.¹⁶

France has received less attention as its role has been regarded as secondary. Scholarly inquiry has focused on the extent to which French leaders strengthened Russian resolve in the Balkans, before 1914 and during the July crisis.¹⁷ Britain's role in the crisis has been more controversial, and some scholars have argued that an earlier British commitment to support France might have encouraged Germany to restrain Austria.¹⁸ Recent scholarship suggests that Foreign Secretary Edward Grey went as far as he could in signaling his country's intention to back France given the domestic constraints he faced, and that a British commitment might not have had the desired effect in any case.¹⁹ Given the primary responsibility of Austria and Germany in initiating the chain of events that led to war in 1914 I will focus on their decisions, but in full recognition that this is only part of the story.

Table I identifies some of the principal causes of war advanced in the literature by their level of analysis. The spate of diaries, memoirs and documentary evidence that has emerged since 1914 has deepened our understanding of the origins of the war but has spawned more interpretations than it has ruled out. Some assertions have been discredited on the basis of this evidence (e.g., Harry Elmer Barnes contention that France and Russia secretly planned the war, Fritz Fischer's claim that German leaders opted for war at the so-called "War Council" of 1912).²⁰ Many interpretations are not falsifiable in the Popperian sense of the term.²¹ They are inadequately specified so it is unclear what evidence, if any, would call their validity into question.

TABLE 1: UNDERLYING CAUSES OF WAR

DEEP CAUSES

Industrial revolution (*war as escape from super ego constraints*)²²
 Rapid industrialization (*war as raison d'être for traditional classes and values*)²³
 Nationalism (*threatened survival of multi-national empires*)²⁴
 Democratization (*threatened traditional political elites*)²⁵

SYSTEM LEVEL

Imperialism (*German "need" to acquire more colonies*)²⁶
 International anarchy (*struggle for relative gain*)²⁷ (*arms races*)²⁸
 Alliance structure (*alliances too tight*)²⁹ (*alliances too weak*)³⁰ (*need to preserve Austro-German alliance*)³¹
 Shifts in the political balance (*encirclement of Austria*)³² (*Russian fear of losing great power status*)³³
 Shifts in the military balance (*Russia growing stronger and Austria weaker*)³⁴
 Changes in rules of the game (*imperial competition in Europe*)³⁵

IDEAS

Social Darwinism (*International politics as a struggle for survival*)³⁶

War is inevitable (*German fear of Franco-Russian intentions*)³⁷

War is beneficial (*expected to temper the nation*)³⁸

Code of honor (required war in response to certain provocations)³⁹

STATE STRUCTURE

Weak society and strong state (*domestic conflict is exported*)⁴⁰

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Conservative desires to safeguard status quo (*German conservatives sought war to crush socialism*)⁴¹ (*Austrian fear of Slavic nationalism*)⁴² (*Russian fear of revolution*)⁴³

Weak regimes (*Serbian sponsorship of Pan-Slavism*)⁴⁴

ORGANIZATION AND BUREAUCRACY

Military planning in a political vacuum (*The Schlieffen Plan*)⁴⁵ (*Russian failure to develop fully separate mobilization plans against Austria and Germany*)⁴⁶

German military pressure for preemptive war⁴⁷

Cult of the offensive (*preference for offensive over defensive strategies*)⁴⁸

The short war illusion (*victory was possible at low cost to society*)⁴⁹

Rigid organizational routines (*restricted freedom of political leaders*)⁵⁰

LEADERS

Poor German leadership after Bismarck (*led to German isolation and encirclement*)⁵¹

Poor German crisis management (*misread military balance*)⁵² (*misread responses of other actors*)⁵³ (*fear and panic interfered with judgment*)⁵⁴

Poor Austrian crisis management (*misread military balance and likely political consequences of war with Serbia*)⁵⁵ (*failed to convince Russia of Serbian complicity in the assassination*)⁵⁶ (*Conrad's purely personal motive for war*)⁵⁷

Poor Russian crisis management (*failure to recognize consequences of partial mobilization*)⁵⁸

Poor British crisis management (*belated recognition of Austro-German plans by Grey*)⁵⁹

There has been no systematic effort to determine the relative importance of these hypothesized causes of war, the extent to which one or more of them could be subsumed by others, or what combination(s) of them were necessary and sufficient for war. Historians divide into hedgehogs and foxes on the latter question.⁶⁰ Fritz Fischer and Paul Schroeder are typical of the latter and find a single most important underlying cause for war. Foxes like James Joll, Imanuel Geiss and Holger Herwig advance numerous causes for war without necessarily discriminating among them. Geiss attributes World War I to imperialism, especially Wilhelminian *Weltpolitik*; national self-determination and its revolutionary potential; the determination of the German government to uphold conservative and monarchic forces by any means against the rising tide of social democracy; the containment policy of the Entente, and Germany's refusal to be contained.⁶¹ Historical complexity is commendable; World War I is unlikely to have had a single cause. However, laundry lists do not constitute explanations.

To be fair to historians, rank-ordering of causes is difficult, and often impossible, within the confines of a single case, especially one that has important non-linear properties.⁶² Historians typically try to establish causation through process tracing. They search for links between hypothesized causes and observed outcomes. Process tracing works best at the individual level of analysis, and only when there is enough evidence to document the calculations and the motives behind them of relevant actors. Even when such evidence is available, usually in the form of memoranda and recorded conversations, it may not permit historians to determine the relative weight of contributing causes, and which, if any of them, might have produced the outcome in the absence of the others. Their uncertainty is more understandable when we

consider that actors themselves often have little idea of the relative importance of the considerations that prompted their behavior.

Comparison is another method of establishing causation. Within the single case format comparative analysis can take two forms: intra-case comparison and counterfactual analysis. The former breaks out a case into a series of similar interactions that are treated as separate and independent cases for purposes of analysis. Austria-Hungary went to the brink of war four times between December 1912 and July 1914. Many important background factors remained constant across these cases (e.g., belief systems, the military balance, most leaders), while others varied (the political balance in the Balkans, the Austrian leadership). By asking why Austria rejected war in December 1912, April-May 1913 and October 1913, but not in July 1914, we can probe the 1914 decision in a semi-controlled manner. Such comparisons must nevertheless be made with caution because the cases are unlikely to be independent; the process and outcome of each one can influence that of its successors. Intra-case comparison confers a singular advantage: it builds variation within a fundamentally similar political and cultural context, controlling better than inter-case comparison for many factors that may be important but unrecognized.

Counterfactual analysis allows researchers to mimic the kinds of controls normally only possible in a laboratory; we can add or remove causes or background conditions at will. But unlike many real experiments, we can never really know the consequences of variation we introduce; the best we can do is to make a plausible case for the inferred consequent. For this reason, counterfactual experiments can rarely falsify explanations. But they are wonderful means of exploring relationships among hypothesized explanations.

Even a superficial counterfactual examination of underlying causes of World War I reveals that many theorized causes are tightly coupled. Counterfactual experiments also help us probe contingency. The most straight-forward way to do this is would be to use minimal rewrite counterfactuals to remove putative causes of an outcome. Leaders can usually be removed by minimal rewrites, but to change ideas, institutions or the balance of power it is usually necessary to go back to a time and place where these causes were malleable or still in the process of taking shape. The fewer counterfactuals necessary to remove the causes, the more counterfactuals that can accomplish this end, and the more proximate they are to the consequent, the more contingent the consequent. Limitations of space preclude such an exercise, and I employ a different strategy to address the problem of contingency. I look at the extent to which the underlying causes of war can be understood as a confluence and use minimal rewrite counterfactuals to examine the implications of this causal metaphor for contingency.

A confluence envisages a multiple stream of independent causes that come together to produce an outcome. A house goes up in smoke. Investigation reveals that the fire spread from a lighted candle that was left unattended on a window sill. The window was not completely sealed, and a draft blew one of the curtains close enough to the flame for it to catch fire. The smoke alarm, connected to the house security system, did not function because its battery was dead, and the fire department failed to receive the timely warning that might have permitted it to save the dwelling. What caused the house to burn down? The candle was the source of the fire, but it would not have been lit or placed on the window sill if it had not been the holiday season and had its owners not been following a neighborhood custom. If the window had not been

warped, or the insulation around it had provided a better seal, the candle would not have started a fire. If the owners had been home, or if smoke alarm had a charged battery, the house would not have burned down. No single factor was responsible for this disaster; it took a combination of them interacting in a particular way.⁶³

An outcome that requires the confluence of many independent causes, but could be prevented by removing any one of them with a minimal rewrite — like the fire in the house -- is highly contingent. An equifinal outcome to which multiple pathways lead requires multiple interventions to prevent. Its contingency would depend on how many minimal rewrites were necessary to halt or deflect each possible pathway. Some outcomes might be so highly redundant as to make them all but inevitable. Sooner or later, we will all die no matter how careful our diet, how much we exercise or how many diseases modern medicine is able to prevent or cure.

World War I is probably best understood as a nonlinear confluence in which multiple, interrelated causes had unanticipated interactions and unpredictable consequences. Three causal chains were critically important. First and foremost was Germany's security dilemma, caused by the prospect of a two-front war in which the general staff worried that it would soon be impossible to defeat their adversaries sequentially. The second causal chain consisted of all the Balkan developments that threatened the external security and internal stability of Austria-Hungary, and encouraged influential opinion in Vienna to consider war with Serbia as a possible solution to these threats. The third chain centered on St. Petersburg and was itself a confluence of external setbacks (defeat in Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, humiliation in the Bosnian Annexation crisis of 1909) and internal weaknesses (the revolution of 1905, growing alienation

of the middle classes, rise of a powerful revolutionary movement). This combination of foreign and domestic concerns made Russian leaders fearful of the foreign and domestic costs of another foreign policy defeat.

Each of these three chains of causation was contingent; they were the result of decisions, bad and generally avoidable ones, that had the unintended consequence of dividing Europe into two armed and hostile camps. If Bismarck had been able to persuade Wilhelm I not to annex Alsace-Lorraine, there might have been no enduring Franco-German rivalry. If Bismarck's successors had managed relations with Russia better, St. Petersburg would have had no incentive to ally with France. If England and France had come to blows at Fashoda, if England had attacked Russia's fleet after the Dogger Bank incident, or if the French election of 1900 had not brought *la Défense Républicaine* to power, there would have been no *Entente Cordiale* or Anglo-Russian colonial understanding. The *Entente* might also have been prevented by a kaiser who knew how to keep his mouth shut and recognized the unnecessary expense and counterproductive nature of a naval race with England.

The point of no return in Austro-Serb relations was the Empire's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908. Austrian chief-of-staff Conrad von Hötzendorff had been pushing for annexation for some time and convinced Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal, who became foreign minister in 1906, to do this as part of a new, assertive policy in the Balkans. Aehrenthal's poorly conceived initiative provoked a war-threatening crisis, humiliated Russia and deeply embittered the Serbs. The annexation crisis destroyed a decade of Austro-Russian cooperation and put the two empires on a collision course. With more far-sighted foreign ministers in Vienna and St.

Petersburg, this clash could have been avoided and Austro-Russian rivalry managed more effectively. In this environment, Russia would have been more restrained and probably would not have violated the tacit agreement between the empires that neither would support dissident groups within the other's empire. If St. Petersburg had not encouraged anti-Habsburg factions in Belgrade or stoked the fires of Romanian nationalism in Transylvania, the Austrian foreign office would have been much less threatened by the likely defection of Romania from its secret alliance with Austria. In the long run, Slavic nationalism would almost certainly have asserted itself, but that threat could have been managed for some time; as late as 1914 there were relatively few voices for independence within the Habsburg empire. The division of Europe into two militarily powerful but insecure alliance systems contributed to the outbreak of war, but did not make it inevitable.

Equally important was the synergistic interaction among these chains of causation. Two features of nonlinear systems are relevant here. The first is that the effect of one variable (or cause) often depends on the state of another, which means that the consequences of either cannot be predicted or understood independently.⁶⁴ This is well illustrated by the relationship between Russian armaments and railway construction and the Schlieffen Plan, by which Germany intended to invade and defeat France before Russian forces could penetrate too deeply into eastern Prussia. The former did not cause the latter — Germany was committed to the Schlieffen Plan before these Russian programs began — but the German foreign minister's and chancellor's understanding of how these programs would render the Schlieffen plan obsolete shaped their response to Austria's request for support in its confrontation with Serbia. France, which felt very

much on the defensive vis à vis Germany after the 1905 Moroccan crisis, had given financial support to Russia in the hope of restraining Germany; French leaders reasoned that Berlin would become more cautious in proportion to its fear of the consequences of a two-front war. The French strategy of deterrence had the unintended consequence of provoking the German invasion of France it had been designed to prevent. A similar phenomenon occurred in the July crisis when Russia mobilized in the hope that it would be a form of compellence, not a casus belli. In each instance, the intensity and effects of individual, hypothesized causes were significantly influenced, and in some cases wholly determined, by the presence of other causes. In their absence, leaders might have made very different choices, and the same choices might have had different consequences.

Game theorists who model strategic interactions have long recognized the need for actors to share a common framework, or at the very least to agree on the kind of game they are playing. They assume that actors use a Bayesian process to update estimates of one another's preferences and that such learning will allow them to establish a common framework.⁶⁵ In practice, new information is commonly assimilated to existing frameworks, and actors can continue to communicate for prolonged periods of time without realizing that they are playing different “games.” “Signals” may be missed, or their intended import only grasped after it is too late to respond appropriately.⁶⁶ Frameworks also change in the course of interactions, and these changes can have profound consequences for behavior. The ability of actors to transform themselves and their understandings of their strategic interactions in the course of those interactions is a second fundamental characteristic of nonlinear, open systems central to

understanding the events of July and August 1914.

Key Austrian and German leaders underwent independent *gestalt* shifts in 1913-1914 that prompted dramatic reversals in their foreign policy preferences. In Berlin, Field Marshall Helmuth von Moltke, German chief-of-staff, and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg had been troubled by Russia's seemingly growing military and mobilization capability for some time, but only in 1914 -- and probably as a result of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand -- did the chancellor's concern reach the level where he was willing to do something he had consistently rejected in the past: risk war in the hope of achieving a diplomatic triumph that might break up the Franco-Russian Alliance. Austrian leaders worried about a Balkan League directed against them that would constitute an external threat and fan the fissiparous tendencies within their empire. Conrad wanted to exploit the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as a pretext to attack Serbia, Berchtold and Franz Josef saw no alternatives and Berlin was now willing to offer its support. Serbs and Russians knew nothing about these *gestalt* shifts, and behaved in ways that exacerbated Austro-German insecurities and helped to provoke a war that neither country wanted. Wilhelm, Bethmann-Hollweg and Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow were in turn victims of a Russian *gestalt* shift. They deluded themselves into thinking that they might repeat the success of 1909 — when Russia was forced to back down in the Bosnian annexation crisis — and this time compel Russia to remain on the sidelines of an Austro-Serb war. But that humiliation had led to a commitment not to back down again, something the Russians believed would undermine their status as a great power. This commitment was strengthened by cabinet shifts in 1914. These several *gestalt* shifts entirely changed the nature and outcome of great

power interactions.

One of the most remarkable features of 1914 was the coincidental timing of the German and Austrian security problems and *gestalt* shifts. Although Russia was a common threat, each ally's security problems had largely independent causes, and there was no particular reason why they should have become acute at the same time. Germany's security dilemma was the result of its geographic position and prior policies that had encouraged its two most powerful neighbors to ally against it. Russia's improved military and mobilization capability, the developments that so threatened Germany in 1914, was the result of Russian industrialization and access to French capital markets. German willingness to risk war was also the result of the perceived decline of Austria-Hungary, Germany's principal military ally. German political and military authorities worried that failure to support Austria in 1914 — indeed, to encourage it to take dramatic action — would only accelerate its decline and leave Germany at the mercy of Russia and France.

Austria-Hungary's insecurity was largely the result of the precipitous decline in Ottoman power. That decline had many internal causes, but it was dramatically hastened by the Italian occupation of Tripoli in September 1911 and the war this triggered with the Ottoman Empire. The war provided the opportunity for Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece to take up arms, and to almost everyone's surprise, they succeeded in all but expelling Turkey from Europe. Serbia doubled its population and territory; and backed by Russia, sought to revive the Balkan League and transform it into an anti-Austrian alliance.

German leaders did not feel so threatened before 1914; German chancellors rejected military demands for war in 1905 and 1912, and supported diplomatic resolutions to the 1912

and 1913 crises that threatened war between Austria and Serbia and Austria and Montenegro. If the Italians had not occupied Tripoli, or if the Balkan events that Austria-Hungary found so threatening had happened a few years earlier, the German kaiser and chancellor would probably not have encouraged Austria to draw its sword. Nor would they have felt so threatened if these events had occurred a few years later, an argument I will present later. Timing was everything in 1914, and that timing was fortuitous. For this reason alone, World War I was highly contingent

IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF WAR

Wars, like fires, need catalysts. Most structural theories assume an unproblematic relationship between underlying and immediate causes. If the underlying causes are present, an appropriate catalyst will come along — or be manufactured by leaders.⁶⁷ This assumption is sometimes warranted. In February 1965, in the aftermath of a Vietcong attack on the American advisors' barracks at Pleiku, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy wrote a memorandum to President Lyndon Johnson urging the sustained bombing of North Vietnam. Bundy later acknowledged that Pleikus were like “streetcars.” He could count on repeated Viet Cong attacks against South Vietnamese forces or their American advisors to provide him with the pretext he needed at the opportune moment to sell escalation to the president.⁶⁸

Pretexts do not always resemble streetcars. They may be infrequent, inappropriate or fail to materialize; and without a catalyst, the predicted or intended behavior may not occur. In a matter of months or years, underlying conditions may evolve to make war less likely even if an otherwise appropriate catalyst ultimately comes along. The window of opportunity for war may be temporally narrow or broad, depending on the nature and rate of changes in the underlying

conditions. War may require a *conjunction* of underlying pressures and appropriate catalysts.

One of the most common metaphors used to describe Europe in 1914 — and other conflicts in which war is described as all but inevitable — is that of dry kindling waiting for a spark. As sparks are frequent in acute international conflicts, this metaphor is well chosen by theorists because it emphasizes the underlying causes of war. Metaphors are no substitute for careful analysis, and historians and political scientists need to develop more precise conceptions of catalysts. We can begin by asking what about Sarajevo made it a successful catalyst, and what other provocations or events might have served the same end? Answers to these questions will provide a second perspective from which to estimate the contingency of war in 1914.

Joachim Remak insists that “Sarajevo was more than an excuse for war, it was one of its major causes.”⁶⁹ Although he does not elaborate on his claim, many reasons can be adduced in support. Arguably the most important was the assassination itself and the political challenge it constituted for Austria-Hungary. In June 1914, Berchtold, with Franz Josef’s support, began a diplomatic offensive to arrest the decline of the Empire’s position in the Balkans, and to frustrate Entente efforts to build a new Balkan League. There was no talk of war.⁷⁰ The assassination transformed the situation. Not only Conrad pushed for war, but other officials in the foreign office and military argued that failure to respond forcibly would undermine, if not destroy, the Empire’s standing as a great power and embolden its domestic and foreign enemies.⁷¹ For Franz Josef there was an additional, personal dimension to Sarajevo; he was outraged by the assassination of a member of the royal family. Kaiser Wilhelm also grieved over the loss over Franz Ferdinand, whom he considered a friend and had spent time with only two weeks before.⁷²

He wanted Austria to take action against Serbia to show that actions against legitimate rulers would not be tolerated.⁷³

Sarajevo shifted the balance of power of Vienna. Franz Ferdinand's views on defense matters were almost as important as the emperor's. His influence derived from his official status as successor to the throne (*Thronfolger*), from his interest and knowledge about military affairs and from the extensive network of contacts he had cultivated throughout the armed forces. His decidedly peaceful orientation evolved during the course of the Balkan wars.⁷⁴ The *Thronfolger* was intent on extending Austrian influence in the Balkans, but not at the risk of war with Russia. He warned that "A war between Austria and Russia would end either with the overthrow of the Romanovs or with the overthrow of the Habsburgs -- or perhaps the overthrow of both."⁷⁵ He cherished the unrealistic idea of monarchical unity in the form of some revival of the Holy Alliance, and had continually sought to cultivate good relations with Nicolas II. On a more practical level, he took Russian military capability more seriously than either the war minister or chief-of-staff, and was convinced that war against Serbia would draw in Russia. He did not believe that the Austro-Hungarian army was ready for war, worried that Italy would defect from the Triple Alliance and that Germany would find some reason to stand aloof. More fundamentally, Franz Ferdinand opposed war because it would make it impossible for him to impose fundamental changes in the structure of the empire upon his accession to the throne.⁷⁶

Samuel R. Williamson, Jr. offers an intriguing counterfactual: If Governor General of Bosnia-Herzegovina Oskar Potiorek had been killed at Sarajevo instead of Franz Ferdinand, Vienna would have responded differently.⁷⁷ Like Conrad, Potiorek was a charter member of the

war party and his death would have removed another supporter of military action from the scene. More importantly, Franz Ferdinand would have been influential in shaping Austria's response. His opposition to war, combined with that of Hungarian prime minister István Tisza the senior voice against war in June and early July 1914, would have carried considerable weight because the two men were otherwise always at odds. Tisza was the great defender of Hungary, and Franz Ferdinand made no secret of his dislike of Tisza and Hungarians more generally.⁷⁸ With Franz Ferdinand and Tisza urging moderation, Berchtold, a weak personality, would also have pursued a cautious line, and Franz Josef, cross-pressured in 1914, would probably have sided with them instead of with Conrad. There would have been no Hoyos mission to seek German support for war against Serbia; Berlin would have been consulted with a diplomatic end in mind. The channel for communication with Germany would not have been the hawks in the foreign office but Franz Ferdinand, who had close personal relations with Kaiser Wilhelm and had been used in the past to sound out Berlin's intentions in the Balkans. Merely changing the victims of the terrorist attack in Sarajevo might have been enough to alter in a fundamental way Austria-Hungary's response.

Sarajevo provided a necessary incentive and opportunity for Germany. Moltke had pushed for war almost from the moment he became chief of staff because he wanted to fight Russia and France while Germany still had a chance of victory. Although the German general staff had a low regard for the military prowess of their Austrian ally, they were horrified at the prospect of an Austrian decline because it would leave Russia free to concentrate all of its forces against Germany in East Prussia. In Berlin, the assassination was perceived to threaten Austria's

standing as a great power because it might expose Austria's lack of will to act like one. This additional consideration, when weighed in the balance along with the general concern for the deteriorating military balance, made Chancellor Bethmann-Holweg more receptive to Moltke's pleas for action later in the crisis. The assassination may well have been the catalyst for Bethmann-Holweg's *gestalt* shift described in the previous section.⁷⁹

Bethmann-Holweg was more prescient than most of his contemporaries in recognizing, as he put it, that a European war was likely to topple more thrones than it would prop up. He accordingly deemed the backing of the Social Democrats, the largest and best organized working class organization in Europe, the *sine qua non* of military action. Without it, the chancellor would not have taken his "leap into the dark." Moltke knew this, and in February 1913 had discouraged Conrad from attacking Serbia on the grounds that the German people would not support a war that Austria provoked against a seemingly conciliatory adversary.⁸⁰

Sarajevo was a tailor-made provocation for Bethmann-Hollweg. The assassination aroused considerable sympathy for Austria throughout Europe, and not the least among the German working class. Although the Austrian ultimatum was widely regarded as heavy-handed by the politically sophisticated, German opinion perceived their country as a bystander to a Balkan conflict and the innocent target of Russian aggression. The chancellor played up this interpretation and benefitted from the general fear and dislike of Russia by Social Democrats, who regarded the Czarist regime as barbaric because of its treatment of labor, dissident intellectuals and minorities. The result was the *Burgfrieden* of 4 August in which the Social Democrats voted for war credits.

Sarajevo created the necessary psychological environment for kaiser and chancellor to overcome their inhibitions about war. Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz observed that “When the Emperor did not consider the peace to be threatened he liked to give full play to his reminiscences of famous ancestors, [but] in moments which he realized to be critical he proceeded with extraordinary caution.”⁸¹ To his contemporaries, the chancellor came across as a fatalist, as a man who had a deep revulsion of war, but felt powerless to oppose the prevalent view that it was necessary. Kaiser and chancellor were caught on the horns of a dilemma: Germany’s vital interests seemed to require war, or a diplomatic triumph that would break up the *Franco-Russe*, and the latter could only be achieved at the risk of war but they were unwilling to accept responsibility for starting such a confrontation. Until July 1914, they procrastinated, a hallmark of defensive avoidance. By deferring a decision that was too difficult for them to make, kaiser and chancellor preserved their psychological equilibrium. The July crises offered them a way out of their decisional dilemma.

When Hoyos met Wilhelm and Bethmann-Hollweg on 4 July in Potsdam to secure their support, he did not confront them with a choice between peace and a European war but only with a request to back Austria *if* Russia threatened intervention in support of Serbia. Kaiser and chancellor both expected Russia to back down as it had in 1909, and this was also the view of their ambassador in St. Petersburg.⁸² They doubted that France would come to Russia’s assistance, or that Britain would intervene if it did. Their support for Austria precipitated its ultimatum and declaration of war against Serbia, Russia’s subsequent mobilization against Austria, German ultimatums to Russia and France and German mobilization, which was the

equivalent of war. When kaiser and chancellor confronted Russian mobilization, or more accurately, premature and exaggerated reports of Russian mobilization that flooded through the channels of German military intelligence, they convinced themselves that they were only reacting to Russian initiatives, and that St. Petersburg, not they, bore the brunt of responsibility for the war they were about to unleash.⁸³

To recapitulate, the Sarajevo assassinations changed the political and psychological environment in Vienna and Berlin in six important ways, all of which may have been necessary for the decisions that led to war. First, they constituted a political challenge to which Austrian leaders believed they had to respond forcefully; anything less was expected to encourage further challenges by domestic and foreign enemies. Second, they shocked and offended Franz Josef and Kaiser Wilhelm and made both emperors more receptive to calls for decisive measures. Third, they changed the policymaking context in Vienna by removing the principal spokesman for peace. Fourth, they may have been the catalyst for Bethmann-Hollweg's *gestalt* shift. Fifth, they made it possible for Bethmann-Hollweg to win the support of the socialists, without which he never would have risked war. Sixth, they created a psychological environment in which Wilhelm and Bethmann-Hollweg could proceed in incremental steps toward war, convincing themselves at the outset that their actions were unlikely to provoke a European war, and at the end, that others were responsible for war.

A striking feature of the July crisis was the tremendous psychological difficulty German leaders had in making a decision for war. Given their unwillingness to accept responsibility for starting a great power war, it is certainly difficult to imagine how kaiser, chancellor and foreign

office could have taken this step if they had been compelled to recognize their share of responsibility for it from the outset. If the archduke had not been assassinated, giving rise to this unusual opportunity, Germany might have reached the fateful year of 1917 still at peace with its neighbors. Its leaders might have discovered that their fears of a window of vulnerability were greatly exaggerated; their adversaries were constrained from attacking Germany for many of the same reasons that had prevented Germany from exploiting its military window of opportunity in the decade before 1914.

The double assassination was critical in its nature and timing, but it could easily have been avoided. Reports reached Vienna that Sarajevo was seething with discontent and a dangerous venue for a royal visit. Franz Ferdinand explored the possibility of postponing his trip and seems to have been encouraged by the emperor to do so. The High Command nevertheless decided to proceed with its great maneuvers, and the archduke, who was inspector general of the armed forces, believed that he had no choice but to attend. Duchess Sophie had come to Bosnia with dark misgivings that something dreadful was about to happen to her husband. She was aware that Dr. Josip Sunari_, one of the leaders of the *Sabor*, the Bosnian parliament, had urged General Potiorek to cancel their impending visit because of the hostility of the local population to the regime. The evening before the assassination, Karl von Rumerskirch, the archduke's chamberlain, urged him to cancel the next day's visit to Sarajevo. General Potiorek's aide-de-camp, Lt.-Col. Eric von Merizzi, interceded and convinced Franz Ferdinand to proceed because cancellation would be a rebuke to his superior. The next morning the archduke and his wife were met at the Sarajevo train station by General Potiorek and the lord mayor, and ushered into an

open touring car to go to a nearby military camp for a quick inspection before going on to the city hall. The lead car in the procession was supposed to carry six specially trained security officers, but their chief departed with three local policeman instead. On Appel Quay, a long street with houses on one side and an embankment on the other, a young man in a black coat asked a policeman which car carried the archduke and then stepped out into the street to throw a grenade at it. Franz Ferdinand's Czech driver saw the object coming and accelerated. The bomb fell on the folded roof, rolled off into the pavement and exploded under the rear wheel of the next car in the procession. The would-be assassin jumped over the embankment into the river.⁸⁴

Lt.-Col Merizzi and a second officer, in the car behind the archduke, were hit by bomb fragments and were rushed to a military hospital. Franz Ferdinand dismissed the attack as madness and insisted on proceeding to the city hall. Following the ceremony there, the archduke asked General Potiorek if there were likely to be any more attacks. Potiorek advised taking a different route and skipping the planned visit to the museum. Other members of the archduke's party urged him to leave Sarajevo immediately, but he insisted on visiting Col. von Merizzi in the military hospital and then going on to the museum. The cars drove up Appel Quay, this time at high speed, but the lead car turned into Franz Josef Street by mistake and the next car with the police guard followed suit. Franz Ferdinand's driver, in the third car, was turning to follow when he was ordered by General Potiorek to stop, back up and continue down Appel Quay. At that moment, Princip, standing at the intersection, took a revolver out of his coat and a nearby policeman reached out to grab his hand. An accomplice struck the policeman, and Princip fired twice at point blank range into the car containing Franz Ferdinand and Sophie.⁸⁵

Numerous minimal rewrites could prevent the assassinations: Princip might have obeyed the order to abort the assassination sent to him by the military conspirators in Belgrade. Austrian authorities in Bosnia might have taken security as seriously as they did the menu and music for the banquets they planned in the archduke's honor, Franz Ferdinand might have canceled his trip in response to multiple warnings and his wife's fears, he might have followed the advice of his advisors and left Sarajevo directly after the ceremony at city hall, or his cavalcade could have adhered to the planned route and raced down Appel Quay past Princip. None of these changes strain our understanding of the world because most royal processions do not stray from their intended routes and most security details would have rushed the archduke and his wife to safety at the first sign of violence.

WAS WAR AVOIDABLE?

Without the assassinations there would have been no war in the summer of 1914. Could some other country, or combination of countries, have found a reason to start a war? Britain was committed to the status quo and was consumed with its Irish problem. France coveted Alsace-Lorraine, but had been on the defensive in Europe since 1871 and perceived itself increasingly weaker militarily vis a vis Germany. The lynchpin of French security was the *Franco-Russe*, and France supported Russia in 1914 to preserve this alliance. France had also drawn closer to Britain and relied on British military assistance in case of a war with Germany, but the French knew this support would only materialize if they were attacked by Germany. Italy pursued an aggressive colonial policy that led to war with the Ottoman Empire, and aspired to those parts of Austria-Hungary inhabited by Italian speakers. But before 1914 Italy was constrained by its

alliance with Austria and Germany. The Ottoman Empire was everywhere on the defensive and not about to challenge any of the major powers or provide them with a pretext to intervene in support of any of its neighbors. Russia had more or less recovered from its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and was intent on expanding its influence in the Balkans. But Russian leaders did not want war; they mobilized reluctantly in 1914, and hoped, although did not expect, that their action would deter Austria from attacking Serbia. Serbia had long-term aspirations to acquire Bosnia-Herzegovina, but its energies were fully consumed with overcoming the resistance of its newly acquired subjects in Macedonia. In 1910, German Foreign Minister Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter rightly observed that “If we do not conjure up a war into being, certainly no one else will do so.”⁸⁶.

A failed assassination attempt would not have started a war; pre-1914 Europe was full of them, and Austria would have found little sympathy in Europe if Franz Ferdinand had survived. A bungled assassination could have had beneficial consequences for Europe. Serbia’s diplomatic humiliation in 1909 encouraged the formation of secret societies aimed at undermining Austrian rule in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Apis [a pseudonym for Col. Dragutin Dimitrievi_] was head of the “Black Hand” and at the center of many of these conspiracies, and supplied arms and other assistance to the archduke’s assassins. Paši_ was hostile to the conspirators and knew of their preparations, but felt constrained to provide only veiled warnings to the Austrian ambassador. Ironically, neither Apis nor the other conspirators wanted war with Austria, and Apis did not expect the assassination to provoke one. Apis hoped to strengthen his hand vis a vis civilian authorities, and sought to call off the assassination when he became convinced that it would not

buttress his authority. From the perspective of those who mattered in Belgrade, the war was an unintended and largely undesired consequence of an unwanted assassination. A failed assassination might have allowed Serbian prime minister and foreign secretary, Nikola Pašić, to rein in Apis, which he finally did in the summer of 1915, when he dismissed Apis as chief of military intelligence. In December 1916, Apis was arrested and tried and was executed in 1917.

Historians who contend that a European war was inevitable root their argument in the deeper trends they see pushing the powers toward war. Would these trends have become more or less pronounced in the years after 1914? Structural determinists assume they would have intensified, although they offer no reasons why. We can conjure up scenarios of more acute Austro-Russian competition in the Balkans, British-German economic competition in the Middle East, and the breakup of the Triple Alliance due to Italy's defection. With no more imagination, we can identify developments that would have muted underlying tensions and made war less likely.

The principal difference between the Balkan crises of 1908-09 and 1914 was Russian willingness to go to war in support of Serbia in 1914. Some historians maintain that Russia was ripe for revolution in 1914 and that World War I postponed the upheaval for three years.⁸⁷ If revolution had broken out in the absence of war, Russia might have been consumed by domestic turmoil for several years afterwards and not have been in any position to pursue an aggressive policy in the Balkans. This could also have happened to Austria. Franz Josef died in 1916 and was succeeded by Prince Karl. If Franz Ferdinand had lived, he would have ascended to the throne. Motivated by hatred of Hungarians and the Ausgleich of 1867, Franz Ferdinand would

have sought to reduce the power of Hungary and had considered several strategies toward this end, including a triple rather than dual monarchy that would include southern Slavs as the third “pole” and a looser form of federalism. The documents he had prepared for his succession indicate that he probably would have introduced universal suffrage in Hungary at the outset of his reign in the hope of increasing the power of minorities at the expense of the Magyars. This would have provoked a strong reaction from Budapest, and further attempts by Franz Ferdinand to undercut the *Ausgleich* would have raised the prospect of civil war. Vienna would not have been in any position to start a war with Serbia.⁸⁸

One of the principal causes of war in 1914 was the German military’s belief that war was inevitable and had to be fought before 1916 or 1917 when improved Russian mobilization and armaments would have rendered the Schlieffen Plan obsolete. The most obvious alternative, a direct onslaught on France across the Meuse and Moselle had little chance of success because of the terrain and French fortifications. Schlieffen contemplated such a campaign in 1894, but quickly gave the idea up as unrealistic.⁸⁹ Could Germany have conducted an offensive in the East? Russian railway and fortress construction made an Austro-German offensive in Poland difficult, but not impossible. It could not produce the kind of decisive victory Moltke sought. If the Germans breached the Narew River line, the Russians could withdraw with relative ease into their vast hinterland.

If offensives against Russia or France were unrealistic, the most sensible strategy was a defensive posture on both fronts; German generals knew that France and Russia planned to march against Germany at the outbreak of war. With no German invasion of Belgium, Britain

would almost certainly have remained neutral. The French army would have exhausted itself, as it began to do in 1914, in a series of unsuccessful and costly assaults against the strong German defensive position in Alsace. In the east, the Russian offensive into Prussia was blunted by the meager forces Germany had left in the region. Reserve forces could have conducted a limited counter-offensive, after which Germany could have called for a restoration of peace on the basis of the *status quo ante bellum*. It seems improbable that there would have been much support in France or Russia for continuing the war after a series of disheartening defeats. Nor could these powers have resisted British, and perhaps, American, pressures to lay down their arms and accept a reasonable peace. Austria-Hungary would have been preserved, although the Russian empire might have succumbed to revolution. German preeminence on the continent would not only have been maintained but immeasurably strengthened.

Moltke was willing to tinker with details of the Schlieffen plan but very reluctant to consider alternatives. Some other members of the general staff doubted the likelihood of victory in 1914, but still clung to the Schlieffen Plan because of their collective commitment to the offensive.⁹⁰ By 1917, according to the calculations of the general staff, Germany would have had no hope of waging successful, sequential offensives against France and Russia. It is likely that if war had been avoided in 1914 and the contradiction between strategy and reality had, as a result, become more pronounced. Moltke or his successor would have been compelled to abandon the Schlieffen Plan. As funds for additional troops were out of the question, and the concept and technology of the *Blitzkrieg* had not yet been developed, there were no viable alternatives to the defensive. The German general staff might have been compelled to adopt such a strategy or

some variant of it. They would then no longer have had any incentive to launch a preventive war or preempt in crisis, and to the extent that they were fearful of Russian military capabilities, they might even have become a force for preserving the peace.

I have asked if a European war could have been delayed in the absence of an appropriate catalyst. Could it have come *sooner*? I am inclined to discount the prospect of an earlier war. Austria considered and rejected going to war with Serbia in December 1912, April-May 1913 and October 1913. Between 1905 and 1914, German leaders spurned Moltke's several pleas to exploit great power crises as pretexts for war. Austrian and German swords remained sheathed because political leaders in Berlin and Vienna saw war as politically and militarily risky and did not feel threatened enough to take these risks.

If war had come earlier, there is no structural reason to suppose a different outcome. The biggest military change between 1909 and 1914 was the Russian railway construction that so worried the Germans. The German general staff would have felt more confident about war in 1910-1912, but whether their confidence would have kept Moltke from panicking, as he did in 1914, and given him the courage to adhere to the original invasion plan, are open questions. Gerhard Ritter does not think it would have made any difference; the Schlieffen Plan, he insists, left too much to chance.⁹¹ Gordon Craig believes that Germany sorely misjudged the military capability of its adversaries and even if the Schlieffen Plan had achieved a battlefield success it would not necessarily have been decisive for the outcome of the war. I have made a similar argument elsewhere.⁹²

ALTERNATIVE EUROPES

How different would Europe and the world have been if the major powers had negotiated the first several decades of the twentieth century peacefully? The Great War accelerated the relative political and economic decline of Europe.⁹³ It sapped the continent's strength demographically by killing off so many men and leaving its generally undernourished population vulnerable to the great influenza pandemic of 1919; undermined French and British will to fight another war; created the conditions for Hitler's rise to power and the vastly more destructive war he and Stalin would unleash; led to the Russian revolution, the Bolshevik coup, civil war and communist triumph that kept Europe divided for seventy years; hastened the emergence of the United States as the world's leading economic and military power; and accelerated demands for independence by Europe's colonies. Could any or all of these outcomes have been averted?

Let me edge towards a conclusion by identifying two of many possible futures for Europe. I do not want to make an argument for the contingency of World War I and then insist that some alternative world was structurally determined.⁹⁴ In the optimistic scenario, Europe avoids a First World War and enjoys decades of sustained economic development. Eastern Europe, not held back by two world wars and communism, pulls abreast of the West sooner rather than later. Russia undergoes a revolution, loses most of its empire and is governed by a quasi-authoritarian but avowedly capitalist regime. Like the countries of the Pacific rim in the late twentieth century, Russia and most of its successor states gradually evolve more stable and democratic regimes as the result of economic prosperity and the emergence of a large, educated middle class and export-oriented business elite. Austria-Hungary survives, but under pressure

from dissident nationalities and a democratic Germany concerned about the consequences of unrest along its southern border, adopts a looser, federal structure despite Magyar opposition. Later in the century, European powers confront demands for independence in Africa and Asia, but decolonization works itself out in relatively peaceful ways, and in the absence of a Cold War and ideological competition, most newly independent countries maintain reasonably amicable relations with their former metropolises. Europe remains the political and economic center of the world but confronts stiff economic competition from the United States and Japan. In response, the continent evolves various forms of supranational cooperation and organization, a development facilitated by nearly universal knowledge of German by the region's political, business and intellectual elites.

The pessimistic scenario also starts from the premise that there was no war. But Russia is consumed by a revolution that leads to prolonged civil war, and these events destabilize Austria-Hungary, leading Vienna and Budapest to rely on increasingly repressive measures to retain their empire and hegemony in the Balkans. Germany remains the preeminent military and economic power, consolidates its economic hold on Eastern Europe and achieves something akin to superpower status. Within Germany, democratic reforms at the national level are frustrated, and during a period of sharp economic downturn — a version of the Great Depression — an authoritarian regime comes to power in France and develops a “special relationship” with its German counterpart. Great Britain is increasingly isolated from “illiberal” Europe and moves closer to the United States. Two power blocs emerge — Anglo-America and a German dominated continent — and the ideological and interest-based divisions between them lead to a

prolonged Cold War, made more threatening by their mutual acquisition of nuclear weapons. An authoritarian Japan holds the balance, and exploits this situation to expand its territorial and economic influence throughout the Pacific rim. As the century ends, the millennium is greeted with great pessimism throughout the developed world. The number one book on the best-seller list, Paul Kennedy's *The Decline of the Great Powers*, argues that war is inevitable.

Either future, or others we have not described, could have come to pass — just as World War I could have been averted. Social scientists and historians of a deterministic persuasion err in thinking that major social and political developments are invariably specific instances of strong, or even weak, regularities in social behavior. These developments are sometimes the result of accidental conjunctions; they are events that might have had a low subjective probability. Conversely, events that seem highly likely may never happen. The concatenation of particular leaders with particular contexts, and of particular events with other events is always a matter of chance, never of necessity.⁹⁵

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30. Joachim Remak, “1914 — The Third Balkan War: Origins Reconsidered,” Journal of Modern History 43 (September 1971), pp. 353-66; Stevenson, The First World War, contend that a balance of power promoted peace, as it did in the Bismarckian system, where all the major power save France were bound, directly or indirectly, to Germany. After 1891, the balance of power was replaced by an unstable bipolarity between opposing coalition and became an engine for catastrophe.

31. Herwig, The First World War, pp. 18-19; Williamson, “Influence, Power, and the Policy Process,” “The Origins of World War I,” and Austria-Hungary and the Coming of the First World War;

32. Schroeder, “World War I as Galloping Gertie,” and his chapter in this volume depict the encirclement of Austria by a Russian-led Balkan coalition as the principal incentive for Vienna to attack Serbia in 1914; F. R. Bridge, From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 335-36; Stevenson, The First World War; Karl Dietrich Erdmann, “War Guilt 1914 Reconsidered: A Balance of New

Research,” in Koch, The Origins of the First World War, pp. 343-70; Williamson, “Influence, Power, and the Policy Process,” “The Origins of World War I,” and Austria-Hungary and the Coming of the First World War; Herwig, The First World War, p. 18.

33. D. W. Spring, “Russia and the Coming of War,” in Evans and Pogge von Strandmann, The Coming of the First World War, pp. 57-86.

34. Fischer, Germany’s Aims in the First World War, prompted Moltke to push for war since 1905; Hilgruber, “Riezlers Theorie des kalkulieren Risikos und Bethmann Hollwegs politische Konzeption in der Julikrise 1914”; Stern, “Bethmann Hollweg and the War”; Jarausch, “The Illusion of Limited War,” and The Enigmatic Chancellor; Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus and “Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy Before 1914”; Herwig, The First World War, p. 19.

35. Schroeder, “World War I as Galloping Gertie”, and “Austria-Hungary in the International System Before 1914: What Changes?” Paper presented at a conference on “The Origins of the Great War,” Oakland, CA, 24-26 April 1988, argues that the rules of the great power game changed at the end of the nineteenth century. Previously, the focus of imperialism had been outside of Europe and helped to preserve the peace. Now its focus became European and it had destructive impact.

36. Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany, trans. Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Fl.: University of Miami Press, 1970); II, pp. 107-09; H. W. Koch, ed., The Origins of the First World War 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), Introduction; Erdmann, “War Guilt 1914 Reconsidered,” pp. 343-70.

37. Wolfgang Mommsen, “The Debate on German War Aims,” Journal of Contemporary History 1 (July 1966), p. 47-74; Laurence Lafore, The Long Fuse: An Interpretation of the Origins of World War I (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966); Miles Kahler, “Rumors of War: the 1914 Analogy,” Foreign Affairs 58 (Winter 1979), pp. 371-96; Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, II, p. 107-09; Jarausch, “The Illusion of Limited War”; Joll, The Origins of the First World War, p. 235.

38. Fischer, Origins of the First World War.

39. Avner Offer, “Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honor?,” Politics & Society 23 (June 1995), pp. 213-41.

40. Arthur Rosenberg, Imperial Germany: The Birth of the German Republic, 1871-1918, trans. Ian Morrow (Boston: Beacon Pres, 1964), p. 58; Michael R. Gordon, “Domestic Conflict and the Origins of the First World War: The British and the German Cases,” Journal of Modern History 46 (June 1974), pp. 191-226.

41. Arthur Rosenberg, Imperial Germany; Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War; Geiss, Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges, ch 1; Arno J. Mayer, "Domestic Causes of the First World War," in Krieger and Stern, The Responsibility of Power, pp. 286-93; Paul M. Kennedy, The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980); Geoff Eley, Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, The German Empire, 1871-1914, trans. Kim Traynor (Birmingham: Berg, 1985); Volker R. Berghahn, Germany and the Approach of War in 1914, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
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43. Hans, Rogger, "Russia in 1914," in Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse, eds., 1914: The Coming of the First World War (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 229-53; Mayer, "Domestic Causes of the First World War"; Lieven, Russia and the Origins of the First World War; D. W. Spring, "Russia and the Coming of War."
44. Vladimir Dedijer, The Road to Sarajevo (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966); Remak, "1914 — The Third Balkan War."
45. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, I; Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, II, pp. 119-136.
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47. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, II, pp. 485-90; Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War; Stern, "Bethmann Hollweg and the War"; Jarausch, "The Illusion of Limited War," and The Enigmatic Chancellor; Herwig, The First World War, p. 19, argues that civilian leaders was well as military leaders were dominated by a "strike-now-better-than-later" mentality."
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51. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, I, *passim*.

52. Remak, “1914 — The Third Balkan War; Jarausch,” “The Illusion of Limited War,” and The Enigmatic Chancellor.

53. Stern, “Bethmann Hollweg and the War”; Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, II, “Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese?,” maintains that Bethmann-Hollweg only belatedly realized that an Austro-Serb conflict could not be localized, and then discovered that he was bound by the Schlieffen Plan to invade Belgium; Fischer, Germany’s Aims in the First World War; Hilgruber, “Riezlers Theorie des kalkulieren Risikos und Bethmann Hollwegs politische Konzeption in der Julikrise 1914”; Zechlin, Krieg und Kriegisiko, argues that Bethmann-Hollweg counted on British neutrality from the beginning of the crisis; Berghahn, Germany and the Approach of War in 1914; Herwig, The First World War, Ch 1.

54. Turner, Origins of the First World War, “The Role of the General Staffs in July 1914,” “The Russian Mobilization in 1914,” Richard Ned Lebow, Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), ch. 5; Mommsen, Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus; John C. G. Röhl, “Germany,” in Keith Wilson, ed., Decisions for War, 1914 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 27-54; Herwig, The First World War, Ch 1.

55. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, II; Ritter, “Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese?”; Fellner, “Austria-Hungary.”

56. Lieven, Russia and the Origins of the First World War, suggests that Russian foreign minister, S. D. Sazonov, might have looked for a way of distancing himself from Serbia and war, especially given revulsion at the assassination in Berlin and London. Austria’s failure to provide any kind of dossier, combined with a history of prior Austrian lies about Serbia, led Austrian claims of complicity to be regarded with suspicion by the Russian leadership.

57. Williamson, "Influence, Power, and the Policy Process," "The Origins of World War I," and Austria-Hungary and the Coming of the First World War; Herwig, The First World War, pp. 10-11.
58. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, II; Turner, Origins of the First World War, "The Role of the General Staffs in July 1914," and "The Russian Mobilization in 1914".
59. Williamson, "Influence, Power, and the Policy Process," "The Origins of World War I," and Austria-Hungary and the Coming of the First World War.
60. On this distinction, see Isaiah Berlin, The Hedgehog and the Fox (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966).
61. Geiss, ed., Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges (Munich: 1965), Ch 1.
62. On case studies, see Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, eds., Handbook of Political Science (Chicago: Addison Wesley, 1975), pp. 79-138; Alexander L. George, "Case Theories and Theory Development: The Method of Structured Focused Comparison, in Paul G. Lauren, ed., Diplomacy: New Approaches in History (New York: Free Press, 1979); Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers you Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," in James Stimson, ed., Political Analysis, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Ian Lustick, "History, Historiography and Political Science," American Political Science Review 90 (September 1996), pp. 505-18.
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66. Richard Ned Lebow, “Beyond Parsimony: Rethinking Theories of Coercive Bargaining,” *European Journal of International Relations* 4 (March 1998), pp. 31-66.
67. Lebow, Between Peace and War, ch. 2,
68. Senator Gravel Edition, The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking in Vietnam 4 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), vol. 3, pp. 687-91; Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention: An Inside Account of How the Johnson Policy of Escalation Was Reversed (New York: David McKay, 1969), p. 30.
69. Remak, “1914 — The Third Balkan War.”
70. Bridge, From Sadowa to Sarajevo, pp. 334-35.
71. Remak, “1914 — The Third Balkan War”; Bridge, pp. 335-37; Herwig, The First World War, pp. 8-18; Bridge, From Sadowa to Sarajevo, pp. 335-36.
72. Samuel R. Williamson, Jr. to the author, 22 January 1999.
73. Albertini, The Origins of the War of 1914, II, pp. 129-30; Williamson, Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War, p. 85.
74. Williamson, “Influence, Power, and the Policy Process,” and Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War, p. 51.
75. Alexander Spitzmüller-Harmersbach, ... und hat auch Ursach, es zu Leben (Vienna: William Frick, 1955), p. 103. Georg Franz, Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand und die Pläne zur Reform der Habsburger Monarchie (Vienna: G.D.W. Callwey, 1943), p. 107, quotes a similar statement to his wife in 1913.
76. Williamson, “Influence, Power, and the Policy Process,” and “The Origins of World War I.”
77. Williamson, Austria-Hungary and the Coming of the First World War, p. 434; Stevenson, The First World War and International Politics, p. 14, believes war much less likely in general if Franz Ferdinand had remained alive and continued to exercise restraint in Vienna.
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88. Zeman, "The Balkans and the Coming of War"; Dedijer, The Road to Sarajevo, Ch. 7.
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