

National Power, Strategic Goals, and Operational Art in the  
First World War: The Relationship

by

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ABSTRACT

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Using the historical case study method of examination, this monograph reviews the interrelationship of national power, strategy, and operational plans. It surveys the national power, strategic goals, and war plans of five countries prior to the First World War. The five countries selected for review are Germany, Austria-Hungary, England, France, and Russia.

The paper provides a background summary of conditions in Europe prior to the outbreak of war, reviews the factors which influenced each country's national power capability, surveys the relative strengths and weaknesses of the potential antagonists, examines strategic goals and operational plans, and analyzes the linkage between power, strategic goals, and plans.

Four conclusions are reached. First, a relationship exists between national power, strategy, and plans. Second, resource availability must drive the development of strategy and plans. Third, strategy and plans must be based on realistic conditions. Fourth, regardless of the quality of the calculations, strategy, or plans, the "fog of war" may cause them to be wrong.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

"Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy."

Clausewitz 1

Strategy is defined by the U.S. military as the "art and science of developing and using political, economic, psychological, and military forces ... to increase the probabilities and favorable consequences of victory ..."<sup>2</sup> Military strategy employs the armed forces "...to secure policy objectives by the application of force or the threat of force."<sup>3</sup> Strategic goals are achieved in a military context by the "design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations"<sup>4</sup> at the operational level. These definitions clearly show an hierarchal linkage between national strategy, military strategy, and military operations. Paraphrasing Clausewitz, establishing hierarchal linkage is very simple, but that does not mean that understanding that linkage is very easy.

This paper is concerned with the interrelationship of national strategy, military strategy, and operational plans. It investigates that relationship by review and analysis of the national power, strategic goals, and operational plans of five powers prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

The five powers selected for review are Germany, Austria-Hungary, England, France, and Russia. Although other countries were involved in the war, these five were the

strongest European economic and military powers in 1914. Shifts in their national strategy would have significantly influenced the existing balance of power. Primary attention will be paid to Germany since she was the paramount continental power and her dominant position was a major factor in the interrelationship of European states.

The paper will initially provide a background summary of conditions in Europe prior to the outbreak of war. That will be followed by a review of the factors which influenced each country's national power capability and a survey of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the antagonists. Next will be an examination of strategic goals followed by a look at operational war plans. Finally, analysis will determine the linkage between national power, strategic goals, and operational war plans in this historical case study and the relevance of the linkage to contemporary military operations.

## II. BACKGROUND

"Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."

Sun Tzu \*

The period prior to the First World War was one of rapid and profound change. In the prewar era Europe experienced a significant and accelerating transformation. Almost every element of European society reacted to new and often poorly understood forces. It was within the context of this transformation that the strategy and war plans of the antagonists developed. It was an age of changing demographics, technological breakthroughs, industrial revolution, evolving political systems, rising nationalism, and shifting alliances.<sup>7</sup> Each of these factors influenced the decisions made by the major powers.

Declining death rates and growing birth rates resulted in a European population explosion. In 1800, the population was fifty million; by 1914, it had grown to over 300 million. Although the overall population was expanding, its growth was inconsistent among the major powers. Inconsistent growth between Germany and France, for instance, contributed to a change in their relative power. That change reinforced other factors which influenced the level of both international and domestic tension.

Populations not only increased, they moved. People were

needed to support rising industrialization, trade, and colonization. The result was twofold: First, urbanization increased as rural families sought jobs in cities, and, second, ethnic composition changed as people migrated between countries. Both caused increased social pressure.

Demographic changes combined with technological innovations produced tremendous increases in productivity. The impact on national industrial capabilities was almost overwhelming. For example, between 1870 and 1914 coal production by the major European powers rose from just over 168 million tons to over 693 million tons.<sup>9</sup> Manufacturing between 1885 and 1913 rose at an annual rate of 2.11 percent in Great Britain, 4.5 percent in Germany, and 5.72 percent in Russia.<sup>10</sup> And, although industrialization failed to provide all the benefits some expected, it caused tremendous change.

The growing and increasingly urban population, coupled with industrial and technological revolutions, exacerbated social pressures and fueled those who sought revisions in government structures.<sup>11</sup> The conflict between monarchy and subject, conservative and liberal, have and have-not was evident in the rise of "new doctrines". Communism, socialism, anarchy, and nihilism were all popular movements during the period. These "new doctrines" were considered a threat to the existing governmental structures.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the pressure generated by idealists intent on changing the existing social order, rulers faced challenges

from increasingly vocal laborers who, while they might not want to change the form of government, did want more responsive leaders, greater individual freedom, and redistributed wealth.<sup>13</sup> The labor movement gained strength among skilled workers and pressed demands for legal recognition of collective bargaining, political parties, and the right to strike.<sup>14</sup>

Another new force -- Nationalism, and its practical expression as Imperialism and Militarism, also influenced the period. Especially among the middle and lower classes, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and national awareness was increasingly evident. That awareness manifested itself in egocentric attitudes toward both other countries and toward minorities within existing countries.<sup>15</sup> It reinforced unity in western states (which were predominately of the same racial and linguistic groups) and amplified problems in the eastern states (where significant minorities were actively seeking independence). The problems were magnified where ethnic minorities overlapped existing state boundaries.<sup>16</sup>

Significant national power realignments reinforced these social and economic changes. The consolidation of Germany under Bismarck (with its concurrent rise as a dominant continental power), combined with decreases in the relative power of France, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, forced important shifts in the interrelationships between the major European countries.<sup>17</sup> Traditional alignments, as well as traditional antagonisms, were reviewed in light of new situations. The resulting shifts in

the balance of power led to political or military confrontations worldwide.

A short list of confrontations illustrates the stress Europe was under. England had disagreements with Germany over colonies in Africa, access to ports in Asia Minor, and conduct during the Boer War; with Russia in the Crimea, Afghanistan, and Persia; and with France over Egypt and Sudan. In addition to her problems with Great Britain, Germany argued with France over Morocco and with Russia over the future of Asia Minor, the Bagdad Railroad, and pan-Slavism.<sup>18</sup> Several of these confrontations came close to war and all fueled nationalist (if not jingoistic) feelings.

Intensifying these pressures was the European attitude toward war. Actual war experience was limited. The recent wars had been relatively bloodless, short, or in colonial backwaters. Europeans saw no reason to believe future wars would be different. Many believed it was a valid problem solving tool.<sup>19</sup> They thought war might strengthen the social fabric, reduce internal tensions, and minimize moral threats from their neighbors.<sup>20</sup> Besides, it was probably inevitable.

Whatever their views, the tools were clearly available if war came. The population explosion and industrial revolution provided the raw resources and nationalism the motivation. Improved productivity with its accompanying wealth allowed increased military spending and large standing armies.<sup>21</sup> Technology provided the machine guns, barbed wire, preserved

food, railroads, quick-firing artillery, magazine rifles, telegraphs, telephones, and airplanes needed to fight the battles.<sup>22</sup> Increasingly, professional military staffs, especially in Germany, provided the skills needed to mobilize and employ the forces.<sup>23</sup> The only thing lacking was the decision to use the tools and a true understanding of what 20th century war would bring.

The decision for war, of course, should have been based on a realistic appraisal of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the potential opponents. If, as Clausewitz said, "war is...an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,"<sup>24</sup> then a nation considering war should believe it can muster the forces needed to enforce its will. The next section reviews the elements of national power each nation should have considered before they opted for war.

### III. NATIONAL POWER

**"Now if estimates made in the temple before hostilities indicate victory it is because calculations show one's strength to be superior to that of his enemy; if they indicate defeat, it is because calculations show that one is inferior."**

**Sun Tzu 25**

Sun Tzu's advice seems almost self-evident. Obviously, a prudent nation constantly evaluates its own, and its enemy's strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. Those critical evaluations chart viable courses of action; ones which accomplish national objectives.

Strengths and weaknesses can be evaluated many ways. One method, and the one used in this paper, considers five elements of national power. The elements are the geographic, national will, economic, political, and military factors which are the basis for a nation's capabilities or limitations.<sup>26</sup>

Each element consists of a number of components which contribute to the national power base. Geography is influenced by a country's location, size, shape, and configuration; physical relationship to neighbors; climate, vegetation and soil composition; mineral and energy resources; and the size and characteristics of the population. National will is determined by both sociological and psychological influences on the leaders and the population. Economic power is affected by the country's decision structure, mobilization base, capital infrastructure,

national resources, multinational enterprises, international finances, and overall general economic situation. Political power is based on internal political components, dynamics, development, and capabilities as well as external alignments. Military power is governed by the size, equipment, composition, and organization of forces and their projectability, employment philosophy, mobilization potential, and alliance structure.<sup>27</sup>

The major European prewar powers in 1914 were Germany, Austria-Hungary, England, France, and Russia. A short review of each country's power base provides a framework for later analysis of their relative strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities and the strategy and operational plans each developed prior to the outbreak of war.

Located in the center of Europe, surrounded on all sides by other great powers, and lacking both natural frontiers or easy access to the sea, Germany's geographic situation was not favorable. Furthermore, raw materials and energy sources were limited. Offsetting these disadvantages were good internal lines of communication and a robust, energetic population. By 1913 she had 65 million people, second only to Russia among the great powers. More importantly, her people were vigorous, highly educated, and patriotic.

The population's character also provided the tenacity needed to support war. Their sense of ethnic superiority reinforced German demands for world recognition and their intense nationalism ensured patriotic support once war

began.<sup>20</sup> Internal disagreements were not over war itself but over the type of war to be fought. Social democrats favored a defensive war, while bourgeois parties saw war as an opportunity to expand German power.<sup>21</sup>

German economic power was enviable. She was the most rapidly expanding industrial nation in Europe.<sup>20</sup> Between 1870 and 1913, she had achieved spectacular growth. In those years, her society shifted from predominately agrarian (50 percent in 1870) to mostly urban (67 percent by 1913).<sup>21</sup> She was dominant in new industries, especially highly sophisticated ones like chemicals, electronics, and machine tools. Germany was first among European nations in manufacturing and second only to Britain in commercial power.<sup>22</sup> She was a strong competitor in world trade, banking, insurance, and shipping. Her economic vitality was highly dependent, however, on continued access to raw materials and world markets.<sup>23</sup>

The German Empire's political organization was based on Bismarck's 1871 constitution. It established an Empire organized as a federal state with a bicameral legislature. Internal procedures ensured Prussia was the dominant state within the confederation. Prussia's King was also the German Emperor. The federal government, through the Emperor, was responsible for foreign affairs including treaties and declarations of war. The end result was concentrated power in the hands of a small number of Junkers, industrialists, and landowners.

Like other parts of government, the German military was dominated by Prussia. German soldiers swore their oath to the Kaiser and, although Germany was a federation, it was Prussian military leadership which determined the composition and employment philosophy of military forces. The Empire's standing army of 760,000 was expandable to 1.7 million within two weeks. Fully mobilized, it reached 5.7 million. She had the best reserves in Europe and her mobilization system was a model followed by others. The Navy, although not yet capable of defeating Great Britain's battle fleet, was professional and growing. 34

The force was controlled by a professional general staff, which, if not dominant in political affairs, was certainly influential in them. That staff ensured military concerns were considered in the political process and developed a coherent, effective military doctrine. Doctrine was supported by effective use of technology and training in both offensive and defensive operations. As the Germans saw it, they were militarily invincible because of their superior staff system, better training, higher morale, and excellent equipment. 35

Austria-Hungary's national power was influenced by many of the same factors affecting Germany. Geographically, she, like her northern partner, was centrally located and, on all but her northern border, surrounded by hostile neighbors. Some defensive protection was provided in the east by the Carpathian Mountains, south by the Transylvania Alps, and west and

southwest by the Alps. Good rail nets existed in Austria but Hungary's internal communications were poor. Internal natural resources were generally adequate to support her population and economic situation.<sup>36</sup>

Her multi-ethnic population of 49.9 million caused significant internal problems. Numerous vocal, and often violent, minorities sought either the government's overthrow or independence from it. In addition to minority problems, conflicts between the ruling Austrians and Hungarians threatened state stability. Given these circumstances, national consensus in support of war demanded a strong outside impetus.<sup>37</sup>

Economically, Austria-Hungary's situation, like its population, was in conflict. The west was enjoying growing industrial strength while the east was much more backward. Austria had become the dual monarchy's industrial center; Hungary its food center. Industrial output was fifth in Europe. Foreign trade was fourth.<sup>38</sup> She produced a surplus of foodstuffs and growing economic strength but political problems prevented full use of available resources. Despite its growth, the economy was certainly not capable of supporting prolonged military operations without considerable outside help.<sup>39</sup>

The nation itself was a dual monarchy presiding over separate countries. Austria was governed by a constitutionally established parliament elected by universal suffrage. Hungary was ruled through a parliament controlled by an oligarchy of Magyar landowners. Political parties were divided along ethnic

lines. Governmental services were in the hands of a large, powerful civil service with a vested interest in continued monarchical rule. They, along with most of the other members of the middle and upper classes, supported the status quo.<sup>40</sup>

The Army was a polyglot force comprised of twelve ethnic groups. Officers were mostly Germanic, while 75 percent of the soldiers were non-German. Ethnic sensitivities were so great that unit composition dictated where they could be employed. The army had a mobilized strength of 2.3 million but its effectiveness was considered poor.<sup>41</sup> Employment philosophy recognized the need for defensive operations against Russia but was offensive against small neighbors.

An island nation, England was a naval, rather than a continental power. Geography provided security from a ground attack but made her vulnerable to a naval blockade. Lacking natural resources, she was dependent on sea control for raw materials, food stuffs, and continued economic viability.<sup>42</sup>

Her relatively homogeneous population of 46.4 million people supported the state and the British Empire. Patriotic, nationalistic, and proud, they recognized the need for naval strength and supported efforts to maintain and protect England's worldwide economic position. They were, however, hesitant to get involved in continental wars requiring mass armies.<sup>43</sup>

As a wealthy trading nation, England had extensive global links, enormous overseas investments, and important industrial and financial resources.<sup>44</sup> During the prewar period, she was

the leading European producer of coal and second only to Germany in pig-iron and steel production. Her well-educated population, strong manufacturing base, and large overseas empire made her capable of financing and industrially supporting an extensive war.

Politically, England was a parliamentary, two party democracy. Her world-wide historical, economic, and political ties around the world generated enormous moral influence and support.<sup>46</sup> Popular consensus was critical, however, to successful prosecution of any war policy. National leaders were aware of the need for that consensus and the military capability of the nation reflected their awareness.

While she had a professional army, England's primary military focus was on her Navy. It was the largest single naval force in the world. Capable of dominating any single opponent, it was designed to protect Britain's critical sea lines of communication and bottle-up or destroy any opposing fleets. Professional, dedicated and long serving, it enjoyed popular support and prestige.<sup>46</sup> The Army was by far the smaller than those of the other major powers. Comprised of an excellent 160,000 man expeditionary force and a territorial force for home island defense, its mobilized strength was only 700,000 men. The soldiers were well-led, highly trained, and professional.<sup>47</sup>

France was, despite long coastlines along her north, east, and southern borders, a continental power. The most western

land power in Europe, she was protected in the southwest by the Pyrenees and southeast by the Alps, but her eastern border was vulnerable to a German invasion and the northeast was open through Belgium. Coal and iron resources were located along her vulnerable eastern border but access to outside resources was possible by sea.

France's population, unlike the rest of Europe, was growing slowly. At 39.4 million she had, in relative numbers, become the least populous of the major powers.<sup>48</sup> Her people were generally homogeneous and loyal to France. Internal disagreements and political unrest were factors for political consideration, but external aggression generated fierce resistance in defense of the homeland. The population was also united in their desire to regain the territories of Alsace and Lorraine lost to Germany in 1870 and to avenge her defeat.<sup>49</sup>

The country maintained significant accumulated wealth but suffered from declining industrial strength relative to all the other great powers except Austria-Hungary. For example, her total industrial potential was only forty percent of Germany's; steel production less than a quarter. The industrial base was adequate for a short war, but a long mobilization would hurt an already sagging economy. Personnel shortages would be particularly acute since 89 percent of available youth were mobilized for the armed forces.

Military strength was concentrated primarily in the Army but naval forces working with allies could help protect lines of

communication and enforce blockades. She had a standing Army of 800,000 with a mobilized strength of 4.5 million. The force was manned by conscripts who late in the prewar period increased their service from two to three years. Employment doctrine emphasized offensive operations by spirited Infantry supported primarily by light artillery.<sup>50</sup>

Russia was the continent's eastern most land power. That position effectively isolated her from potential allies and enemies in the west. Geographic protection was provided through vast distances and an inhospitable environment. Abundant natural resources made her almost immune to pressure from that area and her vast population gave her unlimited human resources.

With a population of 167 million, she dwarfed any other major power.<sup>51</sup> The people were primarily poorly educated peasants living under feudal conditions. Loyal to Mother Russia, the peasants were willing to defend her. Large minorities did exist, social movements were strong, and revolts were not unknown. Russia itself was a monarchy controlled by elite ruling families. The civil service was poor, the government inefficient, and the rulers fearful of revolution.<sup>52</sup>

Economically still the most backward of the major powers, her level of industrialization was improving. Despite this growth, it was less than a quarter of Germany's level and one-sixth of Britain's. Modernization concentrated in military-related heavy industry like steel and railways rather than education, bureaucratic efficiency, or technology.<sup>53</sup>

Military power was based on her most abundant resource: people. Russia's standing army was 1.3 million. Mobilized, it reached 5.3 million.<sup>54</sup> Plans existed to increase its size even more.<sup>55</sup> Despite a vast number of brave soldiers, its efficiency was poor. The army was miserably led, trained, equipped, and supported. It had inadequate supplies, heavy weapons, and doctrine.<sup>56</sup> Mobilization plans were mediocre and power projectability limited.

An isolated review of national power, while a necessary first step in analysis, is incomplete. The next step is the comparison of the elements of power to determine relative strengths and weaknesses. Figure 1 provides a shorthand comparison between countries.

ELEMENTS OF POWER COUNTRY	GEOGRAPHIC	WILL	ECONOMIC	POLITICAL	MILITARY
GERMANY	-	+	++	+	+
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY	-	-	-	-	-
ENGLAND	++	0	++	0	+ NAVY - ARMY
FRANCE	+	0	+	0	+
RUSSIA	+	-	-	-	+

Figure 1, National Power Strengths and Weaknesses<sup>57</sup>

As the figure shows, Germany's relative power was significant. Geography made her vulnerable to a two front war but that was offset by excellent internal communications and effective planning. Her people were solidly patriotic and governmental control ensured both popular support for war and total mobilization when it came. The German economy was superior to all other continental powers and was rapidly approaching or had surpassed England in all areas. The industrial base supported armaments and her military forces were professional, well-equipped, and large. Plainly, she was the dominant continental power. No other antagonist could match her power one-on-one.

Austria-Hungary's power was inferior when compared to most other countries. Her land was vulnerable to invasion, her people divided, her economy lagging behind, her government ineffective, and her military, while relatively large, ineffective. Her relative power was declining and she needed strong support in any confrontation with one of the larger powers. Her power base allowed a certain dominance over smaller neighbors however it was inadequate for an independent conflict with another major power.

England's national power base was less balanced than Germany's. Her principal strengths were invulnerability to ground attack, economic vitality, industrial capacity, and naval forces. Despite a powerful navy, her sea lines of communication were vulnerable to action by much weaker forces. Moreover, her

army was so small that she could not hope for success in land operations on the continent without allied support.

France's comparative power was deteriorating. Besides her vulnerability to western invasions, her birth rate, when compared to the other powers, was poor and her economy was stagnating. Economic strength was principally based on accumulated wealth rather than on expanding industrial capacity. Internally, significant social unrest dominated the political process, although her homogeneous population was capable of rallying behind the country if it was threatened. Her military strength was centered in her Army. It, although large, was trained and organized to support outdated doctrine. She was capable of supporting military operations, but each day reduced her potential for success against almost all potential opponents.

Russia's primary strengths were people and space. The vastness of her territory made her difficult to conquer. Sheer numbers ensured any attempt would be costly. These two factors marked her as a formidable power despite poor internal communications, an inefficient government, and inadequate military organization. When compared to the others her defensive strength was formidable. Offensively, a weak economic base and difficulty in military force projection spelled problems against all but an isolated Austria-Hungary.

An understanding of each country's power is critical to any survey of the linkage between national strategy, military strategy, and operational plans. National power is the base on

which the others are built. It provides the resources (the means) to connect concepts or courses of action (the ways) to strategic and military goals (the ends).

This section identified the crucial elements of power for the major powers. The resources available to support strategic objectives provide the framework for the review of those goals. The next section outlines the major goals of each antagonist and discusses the ways and means used to pursue the desired ends.

IV. STRATEGIC GOALS

"Strategy depends for success, first and most, on a sound calculation and co-ordination (sic) of the end and the means."

Liddell Hart ss

Strategic goals are Liddell Hart's "ends". They define national interests and drive the allocation of resources. Their pursuit establishes policy. Their achievement means success. The major national, political, economic, domestic, and military goals for the key European powers are summarized in Figure 2.

Country \ Ends of Goals	NATIONAL	POLITICAL	Economic	Domestic	Military
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain State</li> <li>• Establish rightful place in the sun</li> <li>• Unite all Germans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominate Europe and the world</li> <li>• Lead Pan-German Movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Mitteleuropa</li> <li>• Expand markets</li> <li>• Gain colonies</li> <li>• Maintain access to raw materials</li> <li>• Maintain leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit emigration</li> <li>• Maintain monarchy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominate Europe militarily</li> </ul>
Austria-Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain State</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominate Balkans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominate Balkans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain domestic control</li> <li>• Maintain dual-monarchy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure Balkans</li> <li>• Protect country from Russia</li> </ul>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain State</li> <li>• Keep Empire</li> <li>• Maintain balance of power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain Balance of Power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominate world markets</li> <li>• Maintain access to raw materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain current form of government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain Naval supremacy</li> <li>• Keep SLOC open</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain State</li> <li>• Regain dominance on the continent</li> <li>• Avenge defeat of 1870</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolate Germany</li> <li>• Dominate Europe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand French Economy</li> <li>• Protect French spheres of influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain current form of government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regain Alsace and Lorraine</li> <li>• Defeat Germany</li> </ul>
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain State</li> <li>• Expand in Balkans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent German dominance</li> <li>• Dominate Balkans and Far East</li> <li>• Lead Pan-Slavic movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand Russian Economy</li> <li>• Dominate Balkans and Far East</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain monarchy</li> <li>• Maintain domestic control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defeat Austria-Hungary</li> <li>• Expand into Balkans</li> </ul>

Figure 2, Strategic Goalsss

Germany sought the maintenance of the Empire as a free and independent entity, recognition of her "rightful place" in the world order, and unification of all Germanic people under German leadership. Like all sovereign nations, her primary concern was continued existence. Unlike some others, she believed her strength, especially geographic, economic, and military power, gave her the right to expect a greater voice in both European and world affairs. Those expectations are reflected in her political, economic, and military goals.

Politically, she pursued her national interests through a policy of Weltpolitik or "world policy". That policy called for the establishment of a colonial empire and a navy to protect it. Furthermore, it required a strong army which was capable of protecting the German state and threatening those who opposed it.<sup>80</sup> Weltpolitik was translated into Mitteleuropa or "middle Europe" economic policies. The Mitteleuropa concept created a unified economic body in central Europe under German leadership. The objective was the creation of an entity capable of effectively competing with the United States, Great Britain, Russia, Japan, and China. Its implementation would ensure mastery of the European market and sufficient strength to penetrate other world markets. In practice, Mitteleuropa meant German dominance of the continent through the annexation of territory, the creation of vassal states, and the confirmation of German ascendancy.<sup>81</sup>

Austria-Hungary's goals, like her power, were more limited.

She too wanted to maintain her sovereignty and political system. That required absolute control over her minorities and sufficient strength to deter aggressive neighbors. In addition, she sought to dominate the Balkans. That required her to stop both Russian expansion and independence movements in the Balkans.<sup>62</sup> Attempts at dominating the Balkans, of course, meant confrontation with Russia.

England's primary concerns were economic. To maintain her share of the world market (and her Empire), she could not allow a single country to dominate the European land mass or challenge her access to world markets. "Balance of Power" was her watchword. In its pursuit, she tried to deny others access to raw materials and world markets,<sup>63</sup> limit Russian control over the Balkans,<sup>64</sup> protect India and the middle-east from Russian or German influence, stop German economic and colonial expansion,<sup>65</sup> and restore the balance in the continent.<sup>66</sup>

France's position was more complicated. In addition to maintaining sovereignty, she sought to regain both her lost territories and her position as the dominant continental land power. To do that she had to isolate Germany.<sup>67</sup> The isolation of Germany required greater economic power and a stronger military.

Russia sought, like the others, to expand her influence. Pan-slavism, domestic problems, and economic needs pushed her toward attempted dominance in the Balkans and economic and political penetration in the far east. An ice-free port and

control of the Dardanelles were key elements of her strategy. 88

The military strategy each developed is summarized below.

COUNTRY	MEANS	WAYS	ENDS
GERMANY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Effective Army and Navy</li> <li>o Effective mobilization</li> <li>o Industrial capability</li> <li>o Triple Alliance / Central Powers</li> <li>o War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Deter war thru military strength</li> <li>o Defeat Allies</li> <li>o Schlieffen Plan (Strategy: offense/defense)</li> <li>o Naval Blockade of Britain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Military domination of Europe</li> </ul>
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Effective Army</li> <li>o Effective Mobilization</li> <li>o Triple Alliance / Central Powers</li> <li>o War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Defeat Allies</li> <li>o Plan B (offense against Serbia)</li> <li>o Plan R (offense against Serbia and Russia IOW Germany)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Secure Balkans</li> </ul>
ENGLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Effective Navy</li> <li>o Triple Entente / Allies</li> <li>o War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Deter war</li> <li>o Defeat German Navy</li> <li>o Blockade Germany</li> <li>o Protect French coast</li> <li>o Deploy BEF to France</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Maintain SLOC</li> <li>o Maintain Naval Supremacy</li> </ul>
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Effective Army</li> <li>o Effective mobilization</li> <li>o Triple Entente / Allies</li> <li>o War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Defeat Germany</li> <li>o Plan XVII (Offense against Germany)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Regain Alsace and Lorraine</li> <li>o Avenge defeat from Germany</li> </ul>
RUSSIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Effective Army</li> <li>o Effective mobilization</li> <li>o Triple Entente / Allies</li> <li>o War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Defeat Austria-Hungary</li> <li>o Defeat Germany</li> <li>o Plan A (offense against Germany)</li> <li>o Plan G (strategic defense)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Expand into Balkans</li> </ul>

Figure 3. National Military Strategies 88

The interaction of each country's goals propelled them into alliances. German, Austrian-Hungarian, and Italian strategic concerns resulted in the Triple Alliance; Great Britain, France, and Russia formed the Triple Entente. Once formed, the alliance structure became crucial to each antagonist's military strategy. They were part of the critical means to achieve military ends. The other critical means, all dependent on one or more elements

of national power, were effective national mobilization, adequate military forces, and a resolute national will.

In support of their military strategy, each power developed specific war aims. Germany saw a potential conflict as a defense against an aggressive France, a preventive war against a potentially stronger Russia, and part of the continuing struggle with England for world supremacy.<sup>70</sup> She hoped to make France a second rate power incapable of challenging her in the future, to push Russia back from her borders, to establish buffer states on all sides, and to gain greater access to both world markets and raw materials.<sup>71</sup> Austria-Hungary intended to secure her dominance in the Balkans. England desired a military defeat of Germany sufficient to cure her of Prussian militarism, curtail German naval and colonial competition, and teach her that military gambles would not work. That demanded Germany, rather than her allies, be defeated in battle.<sup>72</sup> France wanted Germany's defeat in order to regain lost territory, avenge her earlier defeat, destroy Prussian militarism, and maintain her status as a great power.<sup>73</sup> Russia felt she had to demonstrate her status as a great power after her earlier defeat by Japan and defend her leadership in the Slavic countries after having failed earlier to protect Slavic interests. That required the defeat of Austria-Hungary.

The "ways" to victory were varied. Each country developed detailed operational war plans which they believed would achieve their objectives. The next section reviews those plans.

V. OPERATIONAL PLANS

**"Battle is the bloodiest solution"**

**Clausewitz 74**

Each of the great powers developed operational war plans in the event the "bloodiest solution" became necessary. Only one was defensive in nature (and, as it turned out, that plan was not executed). All shared a common desire to seize the initiative and destroy the enemy's armed forces in a decisive, quick campaign.

Germany had two major war plans; one naval, one ground. The naval plan, prepared by Alfred von Tirpitz sought the destruction of the British fleet through a decisive naval battle in the North Sea.<sup>75</sup> It was dependent on the production of a battle fleet equal to Great Britain's. That fleet did not exist, and Tirpitz's plan was never implemented. The ground plan, named after Alfred von Schlieffen, was designed to "seize the initiative, exploit fleeting opportunities, and achieve decisive victory by the rapid annihilation of enemy (ground) forces."<sup>76</sup>

Recognizing the potential for a two front war, the plan concentrated German offensive strength against the French in order to defeat them. Concurrently, German forces remained on the strategic defense in East Prussia to slow any Russian attack. Once France was defeated, German forces would shift to

the east using their efficient rail system and defeat Russia. The plan featured a wide turning movement through Flanders (violating Luxemburg, Belgian, and Dutch neutrality), overwhelming superiority of the right wing (five armies), and economy of force operations both in the east (territorial and fortress troops) and on the western left flank (two armies). The right wing was to deliver the main blow against the French flank and rear by an attack in the Metz-Thionville area.<sup>77</sup>

Moltke's modified plan is outlined in Figure 4.

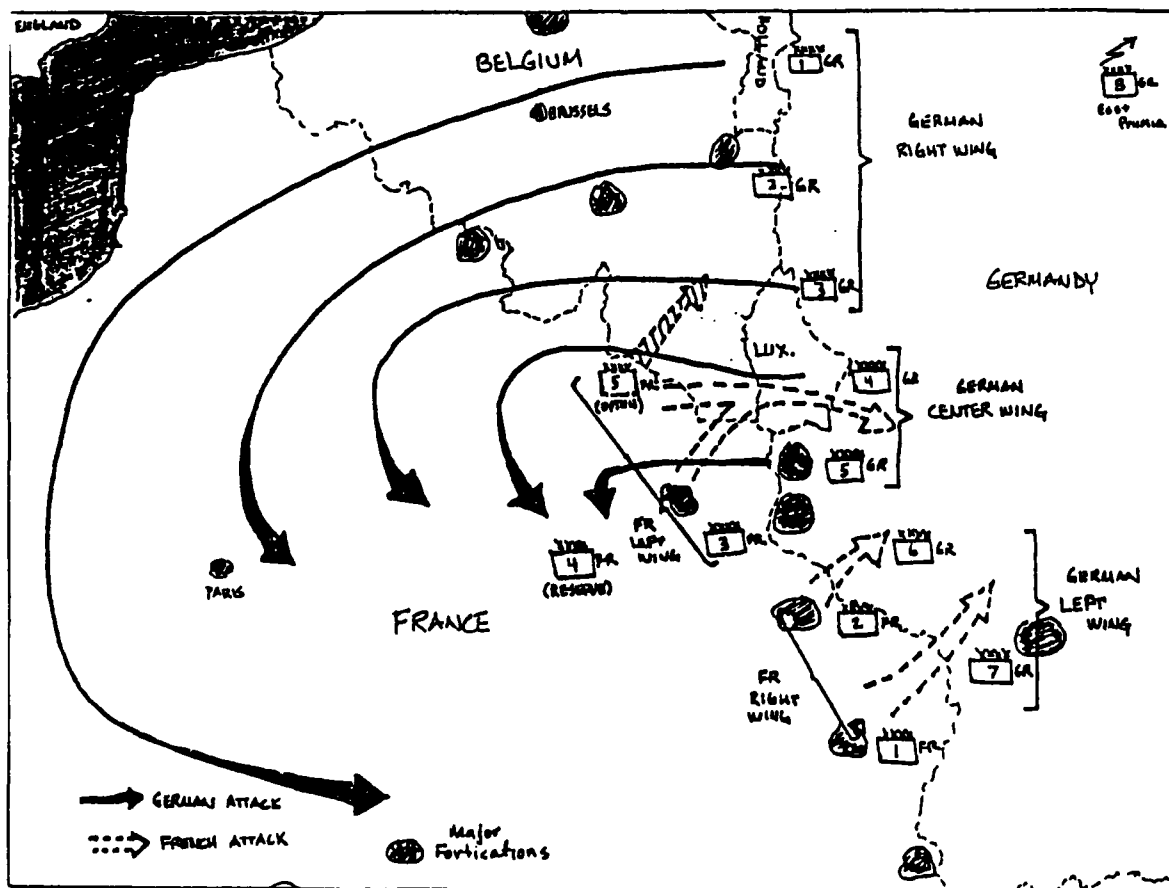


Figure 4, German and French Plans<sup>78</sup>

The Moltke modifications restricted the right wing to preserve Dutch neutrality. By doing so, he hoped to keep England out of the war and maintain a neutral outlet for commerce. He reduced combat power in the right wing. He strengthened the left in the hope of maintaining German control over important iron and coal resources in the face of an anticipated French offense. Based on the increased strength of the left wing, he changed their mission from delay to defend. And finally, he organized an additional Army to defend East Prussia against a more capable Russia. The modifications changed the combat power of the right wing from 35.5 to 27.5 corps.<sup>79</sup>

France's operational plan was Plan XVII. Also depicted in Figure 4, it called for an immediate concentration of all forces and an attack into Alsace-Lorraine. The goal was the disruption of the German plan of attack, destruction of the opposing army, and seizure of enemy territory. Two alternatives were considered. The first advanced two armies north and two armies south of the Metz-Thoinville fortresses and held one army in reserve. The second sent two of the five available armies north to cut any German penetration of the low countries. Because of the perceived need for speed and recognized mobilization problems, the plan initially used only first line troops. The British Expeditionary Force would be used if it were available.<sup>80</sup> The French navy was to concentrate in the Mediterranean and support transfer of colonial troops to the continent if that became necessary.

England's major effort was naval. Her plans saw the concentration of the Grand Fleet in the North Sea in order to bottle-up the German Fleet and protect the French coast from enemy action. This was to be followed by a naval blockade of Germany. Naval operations in the Mediterranean were to be coordinated with France, in the Pacific with Japan. The goal was to keep the German Fleet from influencing the ground battles or cutting British sea lines of communication.

Ground operations sent the small British Expeditionary Force to France. Comprised of six infantry divisions and one cavalry division, it was to operate on the left flank of the French Army while the Territorial Army stayed home to protect England from invasion.

Austria-Hungary's war plans considered two options. The first, Plan B, envisioned war with Serbia only. The second, Plan R, was for a war against both Serbia and Russia. The plans are shown in Figure 5.

Under both plans Austria-Hungary mobilized six armies. In Plan B three were for an immediate attack against Serbia and three were deployed to "watch" the Russians. Plan R sent two armies against Serbia and four into an attack from the south against the Polish Salient. The attack was to be made in coordination with a German attack from the north.

Russian operational plans considered two situations. The first, Plan A, assumed the main German effort was against France. The second, Plan G, assumed the bulk of German forces

were deployed against Russia. They are displayed in Figure 5. The differences in the plans were twofold: first the location of the Fourth Army and second, the missions assigned. Under both plans, the Russian First and Second Armies were controlled by the Northwest Army Group. The Third, Fifth, and Eighth were commanded by the Southwest Army Group.

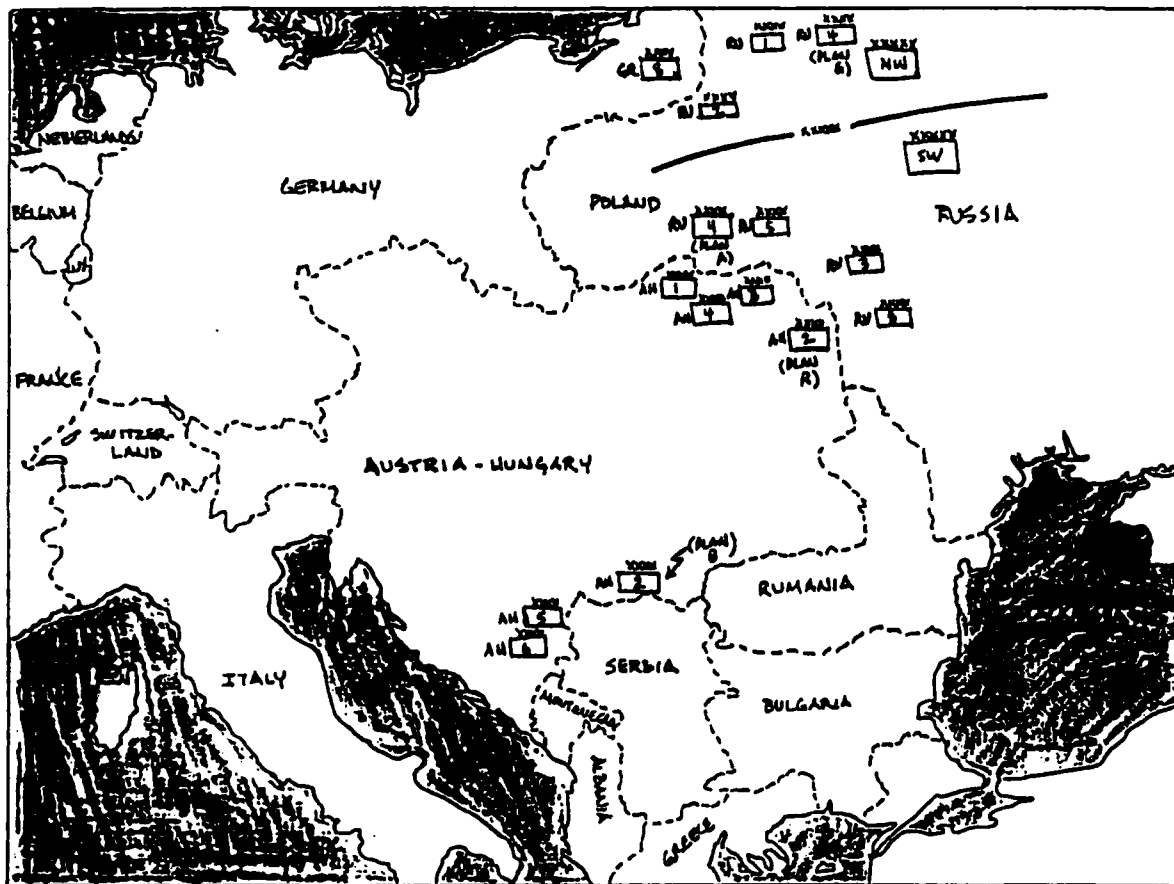


Figure 5. Plans in the Eastes

Plan A was developed at French insistence. It sought an immediate offensive against Germany to relieve pressure on the French. The Fourth Army shifted to the Southwest Army Group and simultaneous advances were made into East Prussia and Galicia to

secure the flanks of the Polish Salient prior to an attack into Silesia.

Plan G traded space for time. It was the only purely defensive plan developed by the antagonists. Russian forces were deliberately withdrawn into the interior until mobilization was adequate to build the combat power needed for a counter offensive.↵

All the plans had several common features. All were to be executed in a coalition context. Except for Plan G, all immediately sought to seize the initiative through offensive action. Almost all depended on the immediate mobilization of vast, trained reserves and the rapid concentration of the mobilized forces along their borders. Speed and mass were to lead to victory.↵ War was to be relatively short, yet produce decisive results.↵ The plans all failed.

VI. ANALYSIS

"No one starts a war - or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so - without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."

Clausewitz #7

An unstated assumption in the quote above is that anyone starting a war would believe they could win it. Yet none of the antagonist's operational plans were successful. Instead of the quick, painless, decisive war they sought, they got a long, painful, indecisive one. The plans resulted in a stalemate broken only after years of struggle and millions of lost lives. Why were the calculations so incorrect?

The answer to that question may be in the relationship between national power, strategy, and operational plans. Operational plans are developed to implement military and national strategies. Successful plans are characterized by two things. First, they are adequately resourced, and second, they accomplish or at least support national and military strategies. The war plans each antagonist developed failed for one or both reasons.

The Schlieffen Plan, as modified by Moltke, failed both ways. Insufficient resources were available to ensure success and it was incapable of guaranteeing military dominance of Europe.

Successful implementation of Schlieffen's concept required a right wing strong enough to envelop the French left. The Germans had to destroy the French armies and transfer their strength to the eastern front before Russian mobilization was complete. They believed they had about four weeks to defeat the French and counter the Russians. To do this, Schlieffen needed seven more corps. There was not room for seven additional corps along the right wing's attack axis. As it turned out, the German right wing attacked with even less force since Moltke transferred some forces to the left wing and the eastern front. Furthermore, German violation of Belgium neutrality brought England, and her economic strength, into the war on the Allied side immediately.

German power, except perhaps for total numbers of troops, was adequate to support the plan. Popular support for the war and the Army was high. The economic and industrial might of the nation provided the equipment, supplies, and transportation needed by the plan. Political control ensured the efficient mobilization of resources and the will needed in pursuit of the military objectives. The training and organization of the Army gave it the professionalism required to execute the plan. The only resource which seemed lacking was troops. Had additional troops been available to both reinforce East Prussia and Alsace-Lorraine and build up the German right wing, they might have been successful. Furthermore, even without more troops, had Moltke accepted greater risk in the east and on the left wing,

the right wing might still have been successful. A lack of troops may have influenced success, but on the whole, national resources were not the reason for failure.

The German military strategy demanded an early knock-out blow against France. In and of itself, that strategy was not wrong. Given the forces arrayed against her, Germany's central position between two great powers, and the potential effect a long war would have on her economy, she had only one option: defeat her strongest adversary before the other could attack her. She could not win a long defensive war. France was the strongest opponent and the one who could strike her quickest. France had to be destroyed. Germany failed because her operational plan was flawed, not because her military strategy was inaccurate or her power insufficient. Failure to provide the needed strength on the right meant tactical failure on the battlefield. Her attack was stopped at the Marne and with it her hopes for a quick victory.

French Plan XVII was another failure. An offensive plan which sought the quick defeat of Germany, French forces were inadequate to penetrate German lines and encircle the German right wing or strike to Berlin. German reinforcement of their left wing, combined with barbed wire, quick firing artillery, and machine guns, made the defense too strong. France could neither regain Alsace-Lorraine or avenge her previous defeat by the Prussians. She had the resources for effective military operations but Plan XVII did not use them properly. Although

growing progressively weaker when compared to Germany, her economic, political, geographic, and military strength was still formidable. Had her war plans called for defensive operations along her borders, resources were available to throw Germany's attack plans off-schedule and create the conditions for an allied counter offensive in both the east and the west.

Her military strategy, like her operational plan, can, at best, be described as foggy thinking. It never went beyond the need to avenge French honor, take Alsace-Lorraine, and defeat the German Army on German, rather than French soil. The way she chose to accomplish this strategy was Plan XVII.

Plan XVII, if it can be judged a plan, failed to identify war-winning objectives or consider potential German operations. It was simply slavish compliance with a dogma; the offense. The method itself was to achieve the victory. French resources were not sufficient to support the method. Success under Plan XVII required more soldiers than France could find.

England's national and military strategies were consistent with both her resources and plans. The deployment of the BEF to France demonstrated support for both Belgium neutrality and French alliance obligations. The fleet was able to neutralize the German Navy and both England and France were safe from German naval operations in the initial stages of the war. If anything, her national power, as it later proved, was capable of providing much more.

Russia started war by implementing Plan A, an offensive

against Germany. Designed to support France, the resources needed for success against strong German resistance were inadequate, but they were probably adequate to achieve more limited objectives against the weak forces she actually faced. The mobilization for the operation went well, and military supplies, equipment, and transportation were lavish by Russian standards.<sup>29</sup> It is only if military leadership and organization are also considered components of national power that resources can be considered inadequate. The plan also drew forces away from the fight against Austria-Hungary which Russia also attacked as part of Plan A.

Plan A seems inconsistent with Russian national and military strategy. Her primary military objective was the defeat of Austria-Hungary. Plan G, which envisioned a strategic defense against Germany while the Austrian and Hungarian armies were destroyed, was more consistent with her objective. That plan, while ignoring the needs of her allies, was within her industrial and military capabilities.

Austria-Hungary also started the war with an offensive. Her initial assault was against Serbia (Plan B). Soon she found herself shifting troops north for an attack against Russia as well (Plan R). The Austria-Hungary attack, designed to support Germany, met the Russian offensive head-on in Galicia. Neither side was successful in destroying the other but the Austria-Hungary armies were eventually forced to retreat.<sup>30</sup>

National resources allowed Austria-Hungary to wage

effective military operations against both Russia and Serbia, but she was incapable of defeating Russia without German assistance. She would have much preferred war against Serbia alone but political decisions precluded that option. As a result, she too was captive to the Schlieffen Plan. Either her opponent had to give her the victory or Germany had to defeat France in time to turn and help her face the superior Russian strength. Her military strategy was driven by political decisions and placed her fate in the hands of others.

As analysis shows, some of the operational plans were inconsistent with the strategic goals they were supposed to support, others were inadequately resourced, and at least one was guilty of both failings. One wonders how different the results would have been had the strategists correctly assessed the elements of national power, the leaders developed realistic goals, the planners designed proper operational plans, and the commanders been capable of successfully executing assigned missions.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

**"We can thus only say that the aims a belligerent adopts, and the resources he employs, must be governed by the particular characteristics of his own position; but they will also conform to the spirit of the age and to its general character."**

Clausewitz 21

This paper used the First World War as a tool; a method of evaluating the interrelationship of national power, strategy, and plans. It summarized the sociological background of the prewar years, reviewed the elements of national power for each belligerent, looked at their national and military goals, and reviewed their operational plans. It also analyzed the relationship each had to the other and searched for insights into today's problems.

The first insight is that an interrelationship between national power capability, strategy (both national and military), and plans exists. They are in effect the means, ends, and ways of successful military operations. Each is tied to the other. A strategy, no matter how brilliant, will not be successful unless the operational plan which executes it is properly resourced. No operational plan, no matter how innovative, is worth executing unless it accomplishes the strategy it was designed to support. No nation, no matter how powerful, will achieve its national goals unless its strategy is effective. Inconsistency between national power, strategy, or

operational plans will produce failure.

Second, resource availability must drive the development of strategy and plans. Destruction of the enemy force may be the preferred strategy and offensive action the ideal plan, but resources may restrict the options open to the military planner. The strategy and the plan must achieve the objective. Resources provide the means. France obviously preferred an offensive strategy but her resources should have driven her to a defensive one.

Third, strategy and plans must, as Clausewitz says, be consistent with the "spirit of the age and its general character."<sup>22</sup> They must conform to reality as it is now; not as it was in the last war. The technological innovations of the prewar period changed the character of the war Europe faced, yet she failed to realize it. Technology favored defense, but every power started the war with an offensive. Military planners must constantly question their vision of war and anticipate the impact technological, economic, societal, and political changes will have on it.

Fourth, and finally, regardless of all calculations, the "fog of war" may still render them irrelevant. As Jomini says,

"A general thoroughly instructed in the theory of war but not possessed of military ... skill, may make an excellent strategic plan and be entirely unable to apply the rules of tactics in the presence of an enemy."<sup>23</sup>

In other words, people implement plans and people are not

perfect. They make mistakes. Moltke's execution of the Schlieffen Plan comes to mind, as does the Russian offensive into East Prussia. Things go wrong regardless of the quality of the calculations. Planners must be flexible enough to modify their plans when that happens.

The insights provided by this historical case study are relevant to contemporary problems. We must learn from the past if we are to find successful solutions for the future.

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