REVIEW ARTICLE

A World of Enemies: New Perspectives on German Military Culture and the Origins of the First World War

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*A*bsolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany. By Isabel V. Hull. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 2005. Pp. xi + 384. $45.00. ISBN 0-8014-4258-3.

The Inverted Mirror: Mythologizing the Enemy in France and Germany, 1898–1914. By Michael E. Nolan. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2005. Pp. ix + 141. $50.00. ISBN 1-57181-669-0.

Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat. Die "Ideen von 1914" und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg. By Steffen Bruendel. Berlin: Akademie Verlag. 2003. Pp. 403. €49.80. ISBN 3-05-003745-8.

Die Nation als Waffe und Vorstellung. Nationalismus in Deutschland und Großbritannien im Ersten Weltkrieg. By Sven Oliver Müller. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. 2002. Pp. 427. €45.00. ISBN 3-525-35139-9.

Germany and the Causes of the First World War. By Mark Hewitson. Oxford and New York: Berg. 2004. Pp. ix + 268. $24.95. ISBN 1-85973-870-2.

Decisions for War, 1914–1917. By Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2004. Pp. xvi + 266. $60.00. ISBN 0-521-83679-4.

Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning, 1871–1914. By Terence Zuber. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002. Pp. xii + 340. $120.00. ISBN 0-19-925016.

German Strategy and the Path to Verdun: Erich von Falkenhayn and the Development of Attrition. By Robert T. Foley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. Pp. x + 301. $70.00. ISBN 0-521-84193-3.

Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration. Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914–1933. By Boris Barth. Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag. 2003. Pp. x + 625. €49.80. ISBN 3-7700-1615-7.

In the introduction to his 1915 book *Die Hohenzollern und ihr Werk*, Otto Hintze ruefully quoted an Englishman's observation that, "Prussian history is endlessly boring because it speaks so much of war and so little of revolution."[1] As the "Great War" entered its second year, and with Germany's hopes for a quick and decisive victory fading, Hintze saw history repeating itself. Like Frederick the Great's Prussia, he wrote, "The German Reich, under a Hohenzollern Kaiser, [now] battles for its existence against a world of enemies."[2] Since the beginning of the war, Entente propaganda had mobilized the home front by depicting the war as an epochal struggle against the enemy of all civilized men: the savage "Hun," the jack-booted, spike-helmeted despoiler of innocent Belgium. The crudity of this propaganda caricature aside, its power to persuade nevertheless drew on a widespread conviction that the story of war constituted the core of German history and that the disease of "militarism" was a peculiarly German deformation of the national psyche. In response to the censure of their nation's enemies, the German intellectuals rejected that diagnosis while defending the role war had played in their nation's history. Published in the *Kölnische Zeitung* on October 4, 1914, the hastily drafted manifesto "To the Civilized World!" was endorsed (if not read) by ninety-three of the Second Reich's most prominent scholars, scientists, philosophers, and theologians, including Peter Behrens, Lujo Brentano, Adolph von Harnack, Max Lenz, and Gustav von Schmoller. They vehemently repudiated the distortion of Germany's history: "Were it not for German militarism, German civilization would long since have been extirpated."[3] "The word *militarism*," the liberal jurist Gerhard Anschütz defiantly declared in 1915, "which is being used throughout the world as a swear word against us, let it be for us a badge of honor."[4] As Hintze, Anschütz, and their contemporaries understood the course of German unification (and Germany's rise as a great power under Prussian leadership), the modern German nation-state owed its very existence to what Hintze called "the monarchical-military factor."[5] If we are to advance our understanding of how a nationalist discourse obsessed with foreign and domestic threats supported a foreign policy that ignited two world wars in the space of twenty-five years, we must be prepared, I believe, to re-think the "*Sonderweg*

[1]Otto Hintze, *Die Hohenzollern und ihr Werk: Fünfhundert Jahre vaterländische Geschichte* (Berlin: P. Parey, 1915), vi.

[2]Ibid., 685.

[3]Peter Behrens, et al., "The Manifesto of the German University Professors and Men of Science," in *Documents of the German Revolution: The Fall of the German Empire, 1914–1918*, ed. Ralph Haswell Lutz, trans. David G. Rempel and Gertrude Rendtorff (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1932), 1: 140–158.

[4]Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 196.

[5]Otto Hintze, "Deutschland und das Weltstaatensystem," in *Deutschland und der Weltkrieg*, 2nd ed., ed. Otto Hintze, Friedrich Meinecke, Hermann Oncken, and Hermann Schumacher (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1916), 1: 12.

thesis," not in its relation to the putative immaturity of German liberalism or an atavistic predilection for autocratic rule, but as it was rooted in German military culture. The books under discussion in this essay reframe the militarism/ "Sonderweg" debate by examining the unique connection between modern German visions of the nation and the waging of war as revealed in the experience of the First World War. Representing the maturation of the new intellectual and cultural history of war, they pose two fundamental questions: What kind of war did the Second Reich's military, political, and intellectual leadership envision that would "complete" the German nation? And how did they define Germany's enemies?

The modern German discourse on war, shaped by memories of the Thirty Years' War, the war of liberation against Napoleon, and Bismarck's wars of unification, powerfully influenced the articulation of German war aims and how Germany waged war in the twentieth century. Despite the exhilarating victories of 1866 and 1870, this discourse was predicated on the belief that for hundreds of years, Germany had been surrounded by stronger powers intent on its partition and destruction or, at the very least, keeping it weak and divided. It is not surprising, given this interpretation of their history, that when Germans talked of war, they talked less of victory and more of confronting the twin threats of defeat and annihilation. More importantly, this interpretation, established in the nineteenth century's re-examination of the legacy of the Thirty Years' War, resulted in a national narrative punctuated by repeated and failed attempts to unify Germany.[6] From this pessimistic perspective, even the triumph of 1871, as time passed, seemed an incomplete victory and only a partial fulfillment of German ambitions in Europe. Ulf Hedetoft, reflecting on the connections between national identities and discourses on war, observes that German history "[has been] one of disruption and hiatuses, grandiose ideas and often less than grandiose implementation, of abortive revolution rather than evolution."[7]

For many patriotic Germans in 1914, the outbreak of war, the glorious "August Experience," signaled a world-historical moment when the project of German unification would be completed. For a moment, anxieties about Germany's precarious position on the continent were suppressed by a nationalist faith that the long-anticipated war would reveal, in the words of Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Meinecke respectively, the "life force" and "genius" of German civilization.[8] This faith in the power of German arms reflected a central tenet

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[6]See Kevin Cramer, *The Thirty Years' War and German Memory in the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming).

[7]Ulf Hedetoft, "National Identity and Mentalities of War in Three EC Countries," *Journal of Peace Research* 30, no. 3 (August 1993): 287.

[8]Ernst Troeltsch, "Der Geist der deutschen Kultur," and Friedrich Meinecke, "Kultur, Machtpolitik, und Militarismus," in ed. Hintze et al., *Deutschland und der Weltkrieg*, 71 and 757.

of Protestant nationalism, a belief in German exceptionalism, a singular cove-
nant with God that self-consciously adopted the rhetoric of holy war. In
1916, echoing the elder Helmuth von Moltke's fear that another Thirty Years'
War loomed, pitting "the Slav East and the Latin West against the center of
Europe," the philosopher Max Scheler condemned the wartime union of
France and Britain with Orthodox Russia as "a betrayal of western culture"
and characterized the conflict as a "German war," waged not only for his coun-
try's "existence, independence, and freedom," but also for the freedom of
Europe and all mankind.[9] This apocalyptic vision of civilizational conflict also
informed the militant "National Protestantism" of nineteenth-century
Germany, which Wilhelm Pressel believes found its ultimate expression in
what he calls the "war theology" that attempted to inculcate a "nationalist
understanding of God" as an instrument of total war.[10] This understanding sanc-
tified German war aims as a battle for a divinely ordained *Volksgemeinschaft*
morally superior to Germany's decadent, barbaric, and materialist enemies.
From this spiritual and philosophical perspective, Germany's war aim, according
to Wolfgang Mommsen, was to save Europe from a "degenerated individual-
ism."[11] Conceptualizing German war aims in the transcendent language of
holy war had become, in Michael Jeismann's phrase, an integral part of the
"German self-understanding" of their national development.[12]

In taking another look at the visions of the nation that were behind German
war aims as they evolved between 1914 and 1918, the new scholarship on Wil-
helmine military culture considerably expands our understanding of the German
discourse on war at the turn of the century. It is clear that there is more to this
picture than can be summed up in the conventional thesis describing an unstable
autocratic regime seeking to mend its fortunes in a "*Flucht nach Vorn,*" or in Fritz
Fischer's provocative indictment of imperial Germany's "*Griff nach der Welt-
macht.*"[13] One reason for the seductiveness of the Sonderweg argument, as
embodied in the narrative written by the "Prussian school" of historians, is
that it was clearly a conception of German national development that many

[9]Gunther E. Rothenburg, "Moltke, Schlieffen, and the Doctrine of Strategic Envelopment," in
The Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, Princeton
University Press, 1986), 305−306. Max Scheler, *Krieg und Aufbau* (Leipzig: Verlag der Weizen
Bücher, 1916), 14; and Max Scheler, "Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg [1916]," in
Politisch-Pädagogischen Schriften, ed. Manfred S. Prings (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1982), 137−139.
[10]Wilhelm Pressel, *Die Kriegspredigt 1914−1918 in der evangelischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vanden-
hoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), 21−26, 51, 81−83, 140−153.
[11]Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Bürgerliche Kultur und politische Ordnung. Künstler, Schriftsteller und
Intellektuelle in der deutschen Geschichte 1830−1933* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000),
178−181.
[12]Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde. Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriff und Selbstverständnis
in Deutschland und Frankreich 1792−1918* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1992), 301−302.
[13]See Fritz Fischer, *Germany's War Aims in the First World War*, trans. James Joll (New York:
W. W. Norton, 1967).

Germans themselves believed, even if it was not the version eventually constructed by twentieth-century historians. The nineteenth-century version, which would also be accepted in its fundamentals even by liberal Germans who resisted the Treitschkean "Prussian paradigm" explaining the course of German history, stipulated that Germany's geographical position in central Europe, its territorial and political fragmentation rooted in the confessional conflict between Protestant and Catholic, and the presence of aggressively acquisitive powers in the west, north, and south (and the "open frontier" in the east), made war the defining and formative historical experience of the nation. Furthermore, as the rise of Prussia to "Great Power" status apparently demonstrated, it was taken as a given that only a state built around an efficient war machine could survive and prosper in this perilous environment. And, most importantly from this point of view, this militarized state, in distinction to France, Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden, came into being not to pursue conquest and colonial expansion, but to ensure survival. For obvious reasons, this "survival thesis" sought, and found, its confirmation in Bismarck's wars of unification between 1864 and 1870, which were integrated into the longer story of Germany's struggle for independence and unity going back to the war of liberation against Napoleon, the Thirty Years' War, and the Reformation. Geographical insecurity, territorial truncation, internal disunion, "encirclement": These are the terms of the national "self-understanding" that informed German preparations for war, war aims, and waging of war early in the twentieth century.

Compelled by the catastrophe of the Second World War, historians pursued two lines of inquiry that examined this self-understanding as a malign outgrowth of the formation of the "militarized state." One approach, represented by major studies begun in the 1950s by Gerhard Ritter, Gordon Craig, and F. L. Carsten, concluded that the Hohenzollern monarchy, beginning with the reforms of the Great Elector following the Thirty Years' War, constructed the Prussian militarized state as the only realistic guarantor of the independence of a territory surrounded by enemies and lacking easily defended frontiers. A version of the survival thesis, predicated in part on the assumptions of the nineteenth-century "Prussian School," this approach identified this insecure environment, dramatically brought home by Napoleon's victories at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806, as the driving force behind the "defensive modernization" of the Prussian state pursued by Stein, Scharnhorst, and Hardenburg. German, or Prussian, "militarism," according to this line of argument, had evolved over a century and a half of warfare as a fundamental principle of absolutist *raison d'etat*. In practice, this meant that the military leadership, the instrument of Hohenzollern power, not only established itself as a decisive arbiter in foreign policy but, in confronting revolution after 1789, upheld the prerogatives of absolutism against demands for political liberalization. The long-term effect of this presence

on German culture and society, so this argument runs, ultimately led to the twin catastrophes of the world wars.[14]

Challenging the notion that the "German Problem" could be explained solely by the anachronistic survival of an absolutist elite determined to preserve monarchical and autocratic rule at any cost, the second line of inquiry sought answers outside the narrative parameters of the rise of Prussia. Influenced by the work of Eckart Kehr in the 1920s, post-war historians such as Fritz Fischer, Helmut Boehme, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and Wilhelm Deist studied German "militarization" as part of broader and long-term economic and social processes within the industrialized European nation-states, whose cultural analogue was a bellicose mindset that came to be called "militarism." In their view, which Niall Ferguson dubs the "Kehrite orthodoxy," this process acquired a dangerous dynamism in Germany alone because the Bismarckian state lacked the institutional mechanisms to shore up its legitimacy and internal stability, leaving no alternative other than the pursuit of an expansionist foreign policy that aimed at preserving the *ancien régime* by establishing German hegemony in Europe.[15] This interpretation of German national development (or the retardation thereof) was in turn challenged in the 1970s and 1980s by historians such as Volker Berghahn, Geoff Eley, Stig Förster, Jost Dülffer, and Thomas Rohrkrämer. They saw militarism not primarily as a "top down" phenomenon but also as a way of thinking about the nation that was being generated within the broader popular discourse of radical conservatism, nationalism, and imperialism. This multivalent militancy arose out of an anxious cultural and intellectual debate over German identity, constitutional form, and place in Europe that Richard Evans, reviewing Wolfgang Mommsen's studies of middle-class culture in Wilhelmine Germany, usefully terms "a mass of competing subjectivities." It influenced politics and policy as it was co-opted and encouraged by successive regimes between 1890 and 1914 that sought to harness its integrative energies while continuing to resist demands for genuine constitutional

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[14]See Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des "Militarismus" in Deutschland*, 4 vols. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1954–1968); Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955); and F. L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and German Politics, 1918–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[15]See Eckart Kehr, *Schlachtflottenbau und Parteipolitik, 1894–1901* (Berlin: E. Ebering, 1930); Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914–1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961); Helmut Böhme, *Deutschlands Weg zur Großmacht* (Cologne: Keipenheuer und Witsch, 1966); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne and Berlin: Keipenheuer und Witsch, 1969); and the essays in Wilhelm Deist, *Militär, Staat, und Gesellschaft. Studien zur preußisch-deutschen Militärgeschichte* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1991). See also Niall Ferguson, "Germany and the Origins of the First World War: New Perspectives," *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September 1992): 737; and the essays in Suzanne Marchand and David Lindenfeld, eds., *Germany at the Fin de Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

rule and a more liberal social and economic order.[16] To be sure, in a general sense this inchoate yearning to come to blows with foes real and imagined was not confined to *fin de siècle* Germany. As Marc Ferro, George Mosse, and Peter Gay have pointed out, after almost one hundred years of peace, obsessed with fears of spiritual decadence, racial decline, and the threat of enemies foreign and domestic, nationalist thinking in Europe was preoccupied with thinking, talking, and planning regenerative war.[17]

Nationalism, readiness for sacrifice, and a romantic cultural pessimism that sought violent transformation as an antidote to the malaise of "civilization"— all of these ideas have been studied as having clearly discernible roots, however attenuated, in early nineteenth-century (or even older) cultural traditions.[18] The consensus is that industrialized total war, as it was conceptualized, conducted, and (eventually) coped with, accelerated the transformation of these sentiments from essentially static conventions into a dynamic movement for individual liberation (from what, exactly, remained in dispute) that, united with a violently subjective vision of moral, social, and political obligation, created the modern age.[19] But what if the Great War heralded neither the death of the old nor the birth of the new? What if August 1914 was the long simmering explosion of a social, cultural, and intellectual instrumentalization of violence generated during the second half of the nineteenth century out of

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[16]Richard J. Evans, "From Unification to World War," review of *Das Ringen um den nationalen Staat. Die Gründung und der innere Ausbau des Deutschen Reiches unter Otto von Bismarck 1850 bis 1890* and Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Bürgerstolz und Weltmachtstreben. Deutschland unter Wilhelm II. 1890 bis 1918* in *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification, 1800–1996* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 51–52. See Volker Berghahn, *Militarismus* (Cologne: Keipenheuer und Witsch, 1975); Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Stig Förster, *Der doppelte Militarismus. Die Deutsche Heeresrüstungspolitik zwischen Status-Quo-Sicherung und Aggression, 1890–1913* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985); Thomas Rohkrämer, *Der Militarismus der "kleinen Leute." Die Kriegsvereine im Deutschen Kaiserreich, 1871–1914* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1990); and the essays in Jost Dülffer, *Im Zeichen der Gewalt. Frieden und Krieg im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Martin Kröger, Ulrich S. Soenius, and Stefan Wunsch (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2003).

[17]See the essays in John R. Gillis, ed., *The Militarization of the Western World* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Marc Ferro, *The Great War, 1914–1918*, trans. Nicole Stone (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973; London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 3–52; George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); and Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred*, vol. 3 of *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

[18]See, for example, George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Rene Schilling, *Kriegshelden. Deutungsmuster heroischer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1813–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002); and Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[19]See Eksteins and the works reviewed in J. M. Winter, "Catastrophe and Culture: Recent Trends in the Historiography of the First World War," *Journal of Modern History* 64 (September 1992): 525–532.

the collision between industrialization, contested notions of community, and imperialism? With this question, there arises the possibility that the radicalization of state violence (and the cultural and intellectual discourse about war that supported it) long pre-dated the decline of European civilization conventionally seen as beginning in Sarajevo and reaching its nadir in Auschwitz.[20]

In taking up this question, Isabel Hull's timely and innovative study, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, renews the militarism debate by directing our attention to the substantive continuities between the "institutional extremism" of the Imperial army and that of Hitler's war machine. Hull's important contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of modern war speculates that the military leadership of the Second Reich evolved a concept of war that embraced the necessity of "final, or total, solutions," characterized by a resort "to terrific violence and destruction in excess of Germany's own security requirements or political goals, in contravention of international norms, and even contrary to ultimate military effectiveness." According to Hull, this doctrine of "the unlimited application of violence," originating in the confrontation with the irregular *franc-tireurs* and Gambetta's volunteer armies during the Franco-Prussian War, was employed in the campaign against the Herero and Hama tribes in German Southwest Africa between 1904 and 1907 and subsequently pursued during the First World War. She concludes that, in the absence of constitutional restraints and rational policy direction through civilian oversight, the German military between 1870 and 1918 consistently resorted to "the default program of escalating violence," leaving an "unintentional legacy" of habits, practices, and behavior to the Nazi conception and waging of war. As Hull sees it, this legacy also included an implicit tolerance of genocidal action in German military thought that emerged, as Hannah Arendt first intuited, out of the experience of Imperial rule and colonial war. Hull has worked for some time to demonstrate that genocide can result from non-ideological imperatives, or "institutional routines and organizational dynamics." In an exploratory essay on this subject that appeared in 2003, she proposed that German military culture, in prioritizing total annihilation of the enemy on the battlefield, established a pattern of behavior and policy "that played a critical role in predisposing later decision makers and institutions beyond the military to conceive of, tolerate, and/or attempt final solutions to political problems." Perhaps from apprehensions that this conclusion re-visits the Sonderweg thesis rather too explicitly, Hull is less emphatic in the book in linking Wilhelmine "institutional and organizational-cultural foundations" to Nazi racial war. On the other hand, in the book, she uses the case study of German Southwest Africa as the introduction to a much more comprehensive

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[20]See, by comparison, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14–18*, 32–36.

examination of the "doctrines of fear and force" that evolved out of the experience of 1870–1871 and were put into practice between 1914 and 1918.[21]

Beginning with the methodological assumption that "military culture is a way of understanding why an army acts as it does in war," Hull asks two questions that focus on how the lessons of Germany's nineteenth-century wars became codified in doctrine. How different was German military culture from that of other industrialized nations? How did institutionalized norms create the potential for "non-normal" behavior? In looking at the experience of the First World War as the testing ground for the Final Solution, Omer Bartov has asked similar questions in his studies of how industrialized war influenced the German conception of war as an exercise in total destruction and annihilation.[22] For her part, Hull locates the origins of this doctrinal worldview further back in the nineteenth century while modifying the commonly accepted explanation for German "militarism," namely that it was the Prussian tradition of a militarized autocracy that deformed German political development and civil life.[23] Hull believes that "the peculiar functioning of the German military was strongly a product of Germany's constitution and the political culture it engendered." Her reasoning begins conventionally enough in proposing that there were three key aspects of the Bismarckian state that created the conditions in which the military felt it had carte blanche to use the most radical measures in the name of national security: One, the success of the wars of unification made the status and prerogatives of militarized autocracy extremely difficult to challenge; two, to protect these prerogatives, the constitutional structure deliberately isolated the already socially separate military estate from civilian oversight and restraint to a degree not found elsewhere in the industrialized world; and three, the consequent lack of functional political mechanisms to create consensus resulted in a civil society susceptible to mobilization through nationalist discourse based on extreme "us versus them" rhetoric directed at enemies foreign and domestic.[24] Hull concludes that under these conditions, the army acquired

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[21]Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1–2, 325, 333; and Isabel V. Hull, "Military Culture and the Production of 'Final Solutions' in the Colonies: The Example of Wilhelmine Germany," in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141–162.

[22]Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 92–93. See Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York and London: New Press, 2003).

[23]For a thoughtful recent study of this phenomenon, see Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription, and Civil Society*, trans. Andrew Boreham and Daniel Brueckenhaus (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).

[24]On this modernization thesis, see Nikolaus Buschmann, *Einkreisung und Waffenbrüderschaft. Die öffentliche Deutung von Krieg und Nation in Deutschland, 1850–1871* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2003).

an overweening sense of its own importance in maintaining the integrity of the state and gradually conceived doctrine in a "symbolic mode" that took as its fundamental premise a view of the world "as a place of ubiquitous, inevitable, existential conflict, and only that nation that was prepared to give itself up entirely to military preparedness would survive." This burden of responsibility, reinforced by civil society's "identification of the military with Germany's essence," was enormous and the fear of failure so immense it inhibited judicious calculation of implications beyond the battlefield.[25] What resulted, as Nikolaus Buschmann has pointed out, was an aestheticization, or "popular reading," of war in both the military and civilian culture of nineteenth-century Germany as a-no-holds-barred conflict between civilizations.[26]

Hull's argument emphasizes the formative experience of the Franco-Prussian War. When it "created" the German nation-state in 1870–1871, the army assumed an "imperative to succeed" that rejected any conventions or norms that limited its mission to pursue the total destruction of the enemy.[27] In a world of enemies, all threats to the nation were conceived as mortal and no restrictions on the army's ability to defeat them could be countenanced. But how did this understanding of threat translate into a "German model of right warfare" as it manifested itself in the colonial war against the Herero between 1904 and 1905? In essence, according to Hull, what emerged was the primacy of the doctrine of "annihilative victory" (*Vernichtungssieg*), the only result that would protect the nation and maintain the standing of the army as the embodiment of the power and integrity of the state. The tactic of absolute destruction had been elevated to an operational principle that defined war as a clash between civilizations, even on the scale of the conflict in the deserts of Southwest Africa, that accepted no other result but the utter extirpation of the enemy nation. As the German commander Lt. General Lothar von Trotha explained in a letter to the chief of the General Staff (Schlieffen) in October 1904, "I think it better that the [Herero] nation perish rather than infect our troops and affect our water and food. In addition, the Herero would interpret any kindness on my side as weakness. They must now die in the desert or try to cross the Bechuanaland border."[28] Hull's analysis of the conduct of the

[25]Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 92, 95–99, 103–109; see also Jakob Vogel, "Militärfeiern in Deutschland und Frankreich als Rituale der Nation (1871–1914)," in *Nation und Emotion. Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Etienne Françoise, Hannes Siegrist, and Jakob Vogel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995), 199.

[26]Nikolaus Buschmann, "'Moderne Versimpelung des Krieges.' Kriegsberichterstattung und öffentliche Kriegsdeutung an der Schwelle zum Zeitalter der Massenkommunikation (1850–1870)," *in Die Erfahrung des Krieges. Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweitenweltkrieg*, ed. Nikolaus Buschmann and Horst Carl (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 102–111.

[27]Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 108.

[28]Ibid., 28–29, 59–60.

campaign against the Herero reveals the crucial and ominous dysfunction, the "destructive micro-logics," within German military culture:

> The world of total victories and perfect order in the end rested completely on force, on the demonstration of it in punitive expeditions and exemplary destructions and executions, and on the philosophy of it. Although not many Wilhelminians were simple-minded, brutally logical, or desperate enough before World War I openly to embrace the endpoint, genocide, the developmental logic was nonetheless clear.[29]

For Hull, the importance of this episode from Germany's colonial military history is that it clearly shows how what she calls the "flight into technique" manifested itself in practice prior to 1914. Studying it allows a more complete understanding of how the institutional culture at the top levels of the German military, from Moltke the Elder through Waldersee and Schlieffen to Moltke the Younger, conceived the fundamental premise of German war planning: the total annihilation of the enemy's forces in a swift, overwhelming victory. In Hull's view, the prevailing concern about Germany's strategic position and the self-conceived "symbolic" status of the army as the shield of the nation combined to subordinate rational analysis of complex strategic considerations to simple questions of how to wage war. Or, as Dennis Showalter puts it, a lethally efficient operational instrument, a "doomsday machine," was created at the expense of an institutional capacity to address political and strategic priorities.[30] Driven by a fear of failure, the *only* goal this extreme thinking ("an unusual mix of daring and desperation") pursued was the decisive battle. When the army failed to achieve this objective by autumn 1914, further radicalization of the conduct of war was inevitable as the German military became increasingly desperate to bring off the "annihilative victory" that would lead to the "victorious peace" (*Siegfrieden*). Falkenhayn's "attrition strategy," as employed at Verdun, was criticized at the time as a disastrous departure from orthodoxy. With the ascension of Hindenburg and Ludendorff to supreme control of the German war effort in 1916, the pursuit of the decisive battle again assumed priority. Behind the planning for the offensives Ludendorff launched in the spring of 1918 was a discourse on war, justified by what Hull believes was the increasingly threadbare legitimacy of the "national-power idea," that admitted of no other purpose than the survival of the nation and that, by implication, could conceive of no other way of attaining that objective than the utter destruction of the enemy nation on the battlefield: "In the absence of a positive national war policy, practices and actionism took over." German nationalist thinking, obsessed with German weakness in a world of enemies, had long made clear

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[29]Ibid., 180, 197.
[30]Dennis Showalter, "From Deterrence to Doomsday Machine: The German Way of War," *The Journal of Military History* 64, no. 3 (July 2000): 680.

that war was their nation's "special path" to unification, sovereignty, and power. Isabel Hull paints an arresting picture that shows how this self-perception buttressed a military culture that bequeathed the "cult of violence" to National Socialism.[31]

Modern German national identity not only asserted distinction from the "other" but also rooted itself in Protestant nationalism's exaltation of the nation at war expressed in what Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann eloquently describes as the "pietistic language of liberation."[32] Beginning with the Reformation, the theologian Karl Holl wrote in 1911, the German nation had been tested by God in a continuous life-and-death battle with Catholic Europe and had demonstrated a "conviction of the ethical worth of the state [that] produced a commitment to the whole which was prepared even for heavy sacrifices." Addressing an assembly of Lutheran clergy in occupied Warsaw five years later, Holl declared that all German wars had been religious wars, from the Thirty Years' War to the War of Liberation against Napoleon, which "as today, were battles for existence."[33] After 1914, Martin Greschat and Michael Jeismann point out, the secularized analogue to this idea was the widespread conviction among German intellectuals that the Great War was the renewal of the civilizational struggle begun in 1813 and continued in 1870 against French rationalism, materialism, and republican egalitarianism.[34] Hull shows us how this discourse on war, grounded in an overmastering anxiety about the survival of the national community, had a significant impact on military doctrine and practice. But what broader complex of cultural, social, and intellectual ideas about the "enemy," that essential fiction generated by the nationalist consciousness, was behind the widespread German perception that the outbreak of war in August 1914 signaled the beginning of modern Europe's second great revolution, this time led by Germany?[35] Recent books by Michael Nolan, Steffen Bruendel, and Sven Müller offer some answers to that question in new analyses of that still incompletely understood phenomenon known as the "Spirit of 1914."

Michael Nolan, in his *The Inverted Mirror: Mythologizing the Enemy in France and Germany, 1898–1914*, examines the poisonous atmosphere of late

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[31]Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 159–169, 179, 326–333.

[32]Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Mythos und Geschichte. Leipziger Gedenkfeiern der Völkerschlacht in 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert," in *Nation und Emotion*, ed. Françoise, Siegrist, and Vogel, 114.

[33]Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation* (1911; repr., New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 57–61; and Karl Holl, *Die Bedeutung der großen Kriege für das religiöse und kirchliche Leben innerhalb des deutschen Protestantismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1917), 4–5.

[34]Martin Greschat, "Krieg und Kriegsbereitschaft im deutschen Protestantismus," in *Bereit zum Krieg: Kriegsmentalität im Wilhelminischen Deutschland, 1890–1914*, ed. Jost Dülffer and Karl Holl (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986), 35; and Jeismann, *Vaterland der Feinde*, 301.

[35]On this "semantic radicalization" of the experience of war, see Nikolaus Buschmann and Aribert Reimann, "Die Konstruktion historischer Erfahrung. Neue Wege zu einer Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges," in *Erfahrung des Krieges*, ed. Buschmann and Carl, 261–272.

nineteenth-century nationalism in which social Darwinist interpretations of history insisted on the omnipresent threat of the "enemy" and the necessity of his annihilation. Conventional wisdom holds that the Franco-German antagonism was a key contributor to the tense international situation prior to 1914. On the French side, so the argument runs, this enmity crystallized in the desire for revenge for the humiliation of 1870–1871, which included recovery of the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine—sentiments that moved the German leadership to contemplate preventive war more than once. Across the Rhine, France, because of her territorial ambitions, had long held the privileged position of Germany's ancient and hereditary enemy. But Nolan identifies a symbiotic relationship at work in this confrontation that was directly connected to the social and cultural anxieties of the fin de siècle. Briefly, he contends that both sides, weighing each other's vices and virtues in a "comparative moral balance," defined their enemy as the embodiment of the most negative manifestations of modernity. In the French view, German society was regimented and hostile to individual liberty; Germans saw France as rotted through with decadent materialism and a predilection for revolution and anarchy.[36]

Nolan wants to probe more deeply into the prevailing attitudes of unease and fear in both nations that contributed to the general European apprehension at the turn of the century that war was somehow inevitable. In the context of this gloomy atmosphere, he identifies some key moments of reciprocal animus that accelerated the deterioration of Franco-German relations. The year 1871 represented for Germans a victory of Teutonic virility over Gallic effeminacy (easily transposed into claims of racial superiority); for the French, the humiliation of Sedan was a temporary triumph of brute Prussian bellicosity that sounded a much needed wake-up call for French national re-birth. The Dreyfus Affair, for many Frenchmen, revealed a foreign conspiracy to undermine the nation; Germans saw this prolonged civil discord as further evidence of the "twilight of the Gauls." The 1894 alliance between Russia and France, the conclusion of the entente cordiale in 1904, the succession of provocative international incidents and diplomatic démarches between the first Moroccan crisis of 1905 and France's restoration of three-year military service in 1913— all of these events reinforced the impression of Teutonic saber-rattling on the one hand and of French collusion, through the "encirclement" of Germany, to destroy the European peace on the other. As Nolan describes it, these confrontations were elevated in the popular press, the feuilletons, and innumerable books, editorial cartoons, and speeches into episodes of an epochal conflict between two fundamentally opposed ideas of civilization: idealism versus materialism; "liberty, equality, and fraternity" versus technocratic regimentation;

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[36]Michael E. Nolan, *The Inverted Mirror: Mythologizing the Enemy in France and Germany, 1898–1914* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 2–6, 47–48.

Catholic devotion to generosity and sacrifice versus stern Protestant fealty to routine and profit; modernity versus humanism.[37]

The basic components of Nolan's argument about public opinion and nationalist rhetoric should not be in dispute, although a cursory survey of popular German histories written prior to 1871 (particularly in the 1840s), such as those by Wilhelm Bötticher and Wolfgang Menzel, would show that his assertion that the idea of the French as Germany's "hereditary enemy" emerged only after unification is simply not tenable.[38] And even if we remain skeptical about Nolan's claim that the critical literature on the mythogenesis of the enemy is slight (I hope the notes to this essay shows that this is not quite the case), his book nevertheless provides crucial insight into the fixations that mobilized public opinion on both sides of the Rhine to look forward to war—if not eagerly, then with a grim conviction that much more was at stake than mere lines on a map. It also offers a valuable corrective to the truism that it was only the Germans, vaporous idealists all, who couched their war aims in the language of civilizational struggle.

Steffen Bruendel also challenges conventional wisdom concerning the ideas behind the Second Reich's grasp for *Weltmacht* in 1914 by looking more closely at the German debate over war aims. Was this argument essentially a clash between reformers who saw the *Burgfrieden* as an opportunity to advance political modernization and reactionary annexationists who saw autocracy's salvation in war? Yes and no. Bruendel agrees with Wehler that, outright pacifists aside, German intellectuals of all ideological stripes embraced the war as an opportunity to advance domestic agendas.[39] Bruendel's book, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat*, attempts to understand what might be called the "programmatic" support for the war as a revolutionary moment in the intellectual life of modern Germany when the thinking classes asserted radical new conceptions of the national community. To be sure, contested conceptions of the nation had long roiled political discourse in the Second Reich. Nevertheless, according to Bruendel, the unprecedented collective energies released by mobilization for total war were co-opted by the *Gelehrten* to animate proposals for a new political and social order in Germany. He argues that the "ideas of 1914," far from being an undifferentiated collection of nationalist assertions of German cultural and spiritual superiority, on the contrary consisted of substantive challenges to the legitimacy of the Bismarckian system. War was greeted by influential academics and intellectuals (or those who hoped to gain such influence) as the beginning of a tectonic shift in the bases of European and global power that would determine the future political, social, and economic shape

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[37]Ibid., 11–21, 27–31, 50, 78–79.
[38]Ibid., 2–4.
[39]See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871–1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers, 1985), 177, 183, 240.

of Germany. The dissolution of old social and political divisions that they perceived as immanent in the "August experience" would bind the expansion of German hegemony (economic, cultural, geopolitical) in Europe with bold schemes for domestic social and political reform. "*Kriegsnationalismus*," in effect, radically expanded the parameters for debate on alternative political orders.[40]

Bruendel identifies a remarkable cognitive dissonance in this embrace of 1914's revolutionary moment: It allowed public intellectuals simultaneously to maintain their patriotic conviction that Germany was fighting a defensive war while advocating radical plans for a "new" Germany within a "new" Europe. Reactionaries and modernizers alike welcomed 1914 as the advent of a "war of civilizations" that must inevitably result, upon the triumph of the German idea of freedom, in the transformation of Europe. Bruendel is not the first to explore this phenomenon. "All parties," Jeffrey Verhey observes, "attempted to develop a narrative of the August experiences which in practice was a meta-phor for their own ideology." But what new type of national community was mobilization going to bring? Verhey sees two possibilities emerging: devolution of sovereignty to the people (as a reward for their collective sacrifice) in which, as Friedrich Naumann hoped, "subjects became citizens," or the submerging of the absolutist state within the organic racial community of the *Volk*, the funda-mentally anti-democratic vision of the radical nationalism espoused by the Pan Germans, among others.[41] But where Verhey is mainly concerned with pointing out the disparity in public opinion between the elites' enthusiasm for the war and the general population's decidedly ambiguous response, Bruendel focuses on how the war aims debate infiltrated ideological positions in that prototypi-cally German milieu where the academy and politics intersected. His analysis complicates the traditional juxtaposition pitting "reformers" (modernizers) against "reactionaries" (defenders of the status quo). He argues that both camps saw German victory as the instrument that would create a new national community. Bruendel views the clash between the moderate group, represented by Hans Delbrück and Lujo Brentano, and the radical annexationists, rep-resented by Heinrich Class and Dietrich Schäfer, as the defining struggle. The former faction, as far as their domestic agenda was concerned, were con-stitutionalist advocates of the "*Volksstaat*." The latter faction, advocates of what Bruendel calls a "new form of nationalism," saw the future in terms of a restructured authoritarian "*Volksgemeinschaft*" built on a hierarchical/corporatist model. For their part, the moderates believed that national mobilization for total war, in its need for consensus, must necessarily lead in the direction of

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[40]Steffen Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat. Die "Ideen von 1914" und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 9–18, 57–58, 136.
[41]Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 156.

more political participation and a significant diminishment of class antagonisms. Yet they did not want to undermine support for constitutional modernization by appearing to endorse wholesale adoption of their enemies' political and social model. Furthermore, the moderates' "war nationalism" was founded on the conviction that a German victory could lead to an advantageous peace without major annexations. Taking this position, however, did not mean rejecting the informal projection of German economic power and cultural influence in central Europe (as outlined in the "*Mitteleuropa*" scheme supported by Naumann, Schmoller, and Rathenau), expansion of colonial possessions, or not insisting on revisions of the western and eastern frontiers that would guarantee German security.

The radical conservative faction placed its hopes for a "modernization" of autocracy on racial lines, imagined as a new authoritarian "Volksgemeinschaft," on a decisive demonstration of German power: the humbling of France and Britain, the neutralization of the looming Russian threat by extending German hegemony deep into eastern Europe, and major annexations of important economic and strategic territories in the west.[42] Nevertheless, there were those on the conservative side that questioned the wisdom of adding more non-Germans to the empire.[43] Both factions held fast to the belief that the war was a moment when the pre-1914 social, cultural, and political antagonisms that divided Germany could be neutralized through a victory that established German hegemony on the continent, however hegemony was defined.

This was not a clear-cut confrontation between the "good" Germany and the "bad" Germany. For Bruendel, the revelation is that neither side relinquished a common faith in the power of war to make the nation whole. At the end of the long continuum dating back to the battle of the Teutoburger Wald in 9 A.D. and running through the Thirty Years' War, the uprising against Napoleon, and Bismarck's wars of unification, 1914 was the beginning of the war that would complete German unification. Bruendel makes it clear (as does Nolan) that the "mobilization euphoria" of 1914 was counter-balanced by an equally strong sense of mortal threat. This "existential crisis situation" created an environment in which one's definition of the aims of the "German Revolution of 1914" (which both sides positioned against the revolution of 1789) could be easily (and patriotically) constructed around stereotypes of the "national character" of the enemy: spiritual German idealism versus materialist French aestheticism; sober German Protestantism versus rapacious English capitalism; scientific

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[42]See, by comparison, Volker Berghahn, *Imperial Germany, 1871–1914: Economy, Society, Culture, and Politics* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994), 293. Berghahn asserts that the old conservative elites "were not that extremist" and fully expected the war to be limited to the Balkans.

[43]Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat*, 137–139, 175, 216–217, 291.

German socialism versus barbaric Russian absolutism. A "war of nations" was re-imagined as a "war of civilizations."[44]

By 1916, after Germany had failed to secure a quick and decisive victory, the pre-war divisions manifested themselves in renewed ideological combat. The moderates, realistically concluding that some form of a negotiated peace was Germany's best hope, gathered in the *Volksbund für Freiheit und Vaterland*, while their opponents, pursuing a peace on German terms, coalesced around the *Vaterlands-Partei Deutschland*. Germany's increasingly perilous situation lent legitimacy to radical solutions as the *Oberste Heeresleitung* (OHL) dictatorship of Hindenburg and Ludendorff attempted to reinforce national unity and secure a victorious peace through the search for internal enemies and a more comprehensive and coercive mobilization of the home front. Even with the collapse of Russia in 1917 (counter-balanced by America's entry into the war), the belief in ultimate victory, grounded in faith in Germany's singular resilience and fortitude as embodied in the creed of "militarism," became harder to sustain. The faith in German arms, the belief in the irresistible superiority of German "civilization" that had for a moment made the next phase of German unification seem within reach, faded. As 1914 offered the hope of political and social rebirth in victory, so 1918 offered it, ironically, in defeat. The "war nationalism" of 1914, which had briefly reconciled disparate conceptions of national unity within a broader faith in the militant dynamism of the German Sonderweg, metamorphosed on the right into what Bruendel calls the "new nationalism" of 1918, which jettisoned what remained of the Prussian *Obrigkeitsstaat* in its advocacy of a new "*Volkskönigtum*" founded on the categorical rejection of western concepts of civil liberty and political participation. In Bruendel's judgment, that rejection was already manifest implicitly in the general intellectual support for the war. The "ideas of 1914," as they opened up the German discourse on war and made it part of an argument about the ideal political order, implicitly questioned the legitimacy of old state forms. Moderate or radical, Bruendel concludes, belief in the fundamental symbiosis between war and social and political change emerged as the most dangerous idea in the German self-conception: "The inner political conceptions represented in the ideas of 1914, viewed in terms of the ends they pursued, anticipated the totalitarian state in multiple ways."[45]

Sven Oliver Müller, in *Die Nation als Waffe und Vorstellung. Nationalismus in Deutschland und Großbritannien im Ersten Weltkrieg*, also examines how new conceptions of the nation found sources of legitimacy in the mobilization for total war. But in contrast to Verhey and Bruendel, who focus on the popular and elite conceptions of German war aims respectively, Müller sees the "August

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[44]Ibid., 30−48, 58−65, 90−92.
[45]Ibid., 175−176, 292−313.

experience" generating contested "cults of community," or "nationalist fanta-sies," in which the question of who belonged and who did not dominated argu-ments about the social order. Müller's argument is substantially the same as that proposed by Arthur Rosenberg in 1928: that the Burgfrieden of 1914 tempo-rarily suspended the destabilizing political and social conflict between defenders of the status quo and progressive and socialist advocates of democratization; that a quick and decisive victory was the only means of preserving autocracy; that pre-war divisions would resurface and intensify if the war became prolonged; and that the mobilization for war would also intensify the debate over the boundaries of the "nation," that is, who belonged and who did not.[46] Müller's departure from Rosenberg lies in his comparison of the mobilization experience of Britain and Germany and his methodology, which uses Haber-mas's critical theory to analyze how claims to social integration manifested themselves in ideological definitions of the nation.[47] He believes that both nations entered the war burdened by similar "legitimation crises" manifested in increasing demands from the left for inclusion in the political process, resis-tance to democratization by entrenched elites, and social disruptions arising out of worker militancy and women's movements. Exacerbating these domestic tensions were the anxieties arising from imperial and economic competition and the arms race.[48] With the outbreak of war, the mobilization efforts of both nations put unprecedented pressure on national cohesion. As Müller sees it, the demands of total, industrialized war created a legitimation crisis of a new type that was met in both nations with the instrumentalization (or socialization) of the national idea as a weapon of war. Excluded groups could advance their claims for full membership in the national community; in other words, mobili-zation necessitated an expansion of the boundaries of the "national." How this mobilization could be facilitated and the extent to which it could be controlled remained problematic, however. In seeing nationalist thinking as the malleable byproduct of shifting forms of social organization, Müller follows Ernest Gellner when he emphasizes the protean and "contextual" character of the nation as a "community of communication." Competing nationalisms, rooted in class, confession, gender, and ideological orientation, emerge out of total war as instruments of political and social contestation. This instrumentalization of nationalism in the First World War had contradictory consequences according to Müller. On the one hand, state authority was successfully expanded and

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[46]Arthur Rosenberg, *Imperial Germany: The Birth of the German Republic, 1871–1918*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1931; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 73–78.

[47]See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 17–118.

[48]On July 21, 1914, King George V worried that "the cry of civil war is on the lips of the most responsible and sober-minded of my people." See David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780–1914* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 455.

strengthened through the process of mobilization. On the other, this mobilization created opportunities for marginalized groups to ratchet up their claims to political and social inclusion, thus paradoxically threatening to undermine the war effort.[49]

How did this process work itself out in the German case? Similarly to Bruendel, Müller points out that the outbreak of war opened up public discourse on conceptions of the nation. While "national unity" was the hoped-for result of mobilization, in fact each faction saw the war as the opportunity to fulfill a particular vision of that unity, or what Müller calls a "social utopia." Instead of transcending the old interest conflicts, war intensified the domestic political battle over the boundaries of the state even as it allowed new contestants into the fight. Bruendel revealed how ideological opponents sought to legitimize their vision of the nation by linking its establishment to the fulfillment of German war aims. Müller takes a somewhat different approach by examining how different conceptions of the "main enemy" evolved as the primary means each faction used to define the nation. In other words, who was fighting the war that mattered most for Germany's future? Liberal and socialist resistance to autocracy, mixed in with Protestant anxieties about the advance of the Asiatic hordes of Muscovy, found expression in a special abhorrence of czarist Russia. The conservatives' particular animus toward "England" stemmed from their apprehensions about social revolution driven by industrialization and economic modernization on the one hand and hostility toward democracy on the other. For their part, the Social Democrats could justify their support of the war, particularly the conflict with Russia, as part of a "democratic war of liberation on the model of the wars of revolutionary France." Political Catholicism could see in Orthodox Russia the most dangerous threat to Catholic religious and political freedom. Just as there was no unifying enemy in Germany during the First World War, there was no unifying nationalist concept.[50] Similarly, the intensification of the economic mobilization of the home front after 1916 brought claims for inclusion on the part of workers and women to the forefront, which pushed their definitions of the nation up against that of the conservative elites. In turn, strikes and the employment of women in war were demonized as aiding the enemy and jeopardizing social stability. Total war, reliant on the absolute dichotomy of friend and foe, had militarized politics.[51] Rejecting any meaningful expansion of the boundaries of the national community

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[49]Sven Oliver Müller, *Die Nation als Waffen und Vorstellung. Nationalismus in Deutschland und Großbritannien im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2002), 12–19, 35. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 48–59.

[50]Ibid., 108–119.

[51]James M. Diehl, "No More Peace: The Militarization of Politics," in *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919–1939*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 97–112.

through reform of the franchise and the constitution, the OHL military dictatorship resorted to increasingly coercive measures on the German home front to maintain productivity. By 1917, the government had essentially forfeited its ability to appeal to an idea of the nation that disaffected and marginalized groups, identified as "internal enemies," could accept.[52]

Like Bruendel, Müller sees the climacteric of the Second Reich arriving in 1914, not 1918. The "Spirit of 1914" was an illusion. War nationalism in Germany proved to be a radically destabilizing force as it disintegrated the already infirm foundations of the Bismarckian state. Müller's key insight from his comparative perspective is that the "call to the nation" in total war must *always* set in motion demands for changes in the social and political order. For Britain, there was a potentially stabilizing aspect to the war: Mobilization broke down the remaining barriers to a broadly inclusive democratic system. Obviously, Britain had a constitutional structure that could accommodate this change without revolution. The reverse was the case in Germany, where, as Ulrich Kluge observes, the "democratization of obligation" demanded by total war stood in fundamental contradiction to the "democratization of rights and opportunities."[53] Mobilization produced no unifying concept of the nation, no clear definition of victory, no effacement of social and cultural demarcations. Arthur Rosenberg knew that "all moral justification for the old system disappeared in September 1914," as the German army, which he believed "united all the qualities that have enabled the German people to distinguish themselves in industry, craftsmanship, and organization," failed to pull off a "second Sedan" and retreated from the Marne.[54] At the moment of truth in the long struggle to complete the German nation, the instrument of unification shattered.

The intellectual histories of Hull, Nolan, Bruendel, and Müller, as they examine the German discourse on war at the turn of the century, are mainly concerned with how conceptions of war and its aims influenced political, social, and cultural definitions of the nation. They show, as well, that there were multiple definitions of what constituted "victory." What is important about these studies of doctrine, propaganda, war aims, and mobilization is that they demonstrate how competing ideological factions in a pluralistic society, fatally dysfunctional in its ability to manufacture consensus, were nevertheless united in their faith in the power of German arms to make the nation. "Victory" was much more than a decision on the battlefield; it was sought as a sign from on high that the Promised Land, a Germany made whole, awaited.

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[52] Müller, *Nation als Waffen*, 285–286, 349–351.
[53] Ulrich Kluge, *Die Deutsche Revolution, 1918/1919* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), 46.
[54] Rosenberg, *Imperial Germany*, 78, 84.

Another dimension of German military culture (which seems, at this junc-
ture, a more apt locution than "militarism") is being reexamined as part of
the new intellectual history of warfare, that of the actual German practice of
war. If we accept the premise of the previous studies, that the Germans' cultural,
social, and intellectual discourse on war set their nation apart in the history of
Europe, we should be inspired to look more closely at how German generals,
politicians, and ideologues conceptualized the waging of war. As Isabel Hull
has pointed out, understanding the ideas and beliefs behind this conceptuali-
zation should give us some clues about the origins of the radical violence
practiced by the Nazi state.

In the introduction to his book, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War*,
Mark Hewitson rightly observes that the traditional fascination with the "cause"
of the war or more accurately, with arguing about the extent of the German role
in the chain of cause and effect, is obsolete. The focus is now on the "unspoken
assumptions" that James Joll identified as playing a key role in the run-up to war;
in other words, the broader discourse on war, empire, and national identity.
Hewitson does, however, return to an earlier debate about causation, specifically
that ignited by Fritz Fischer's 1961 *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (published in English
in 1967 as *Germany's War Aims in the First World War*). Citing the work over the
last twenty years of Jost Dülffer, Gregor Schöllgen, Ralf-Harald Wippich, and
Klaus Hildebrand, among others, Hewitson points out that much of Fischer's
argument regarding continuities between Imperial and Nazi foreign policy
has been superceded by the thesis that Imperial Germany, under unmanageable
foreign and domestic pressures, more or less acted like the other powers in 1914
in choosing to fight a war of national defense (though not as Gerhard Ritter
defined it) that had been forced upon it by an uncontrollable sequence of
events. Hewitson, though he agrees with Eley that the "Kehrite" component
of the Fischer thesis, the insistence on the calculated "flight into war" orches-
trated by elites desperate to preserve autocracy, is questionable, nevertheless
believes Fischer to be largely correct in his fundamental conclusion that the
Second Reich launched a war of choice that it thought it could win to
achieve ambitious goals.[55]

The problematic part of this assertion lies in how one calculates the level of
aggressive intent in German war planning in the decade prior to 1914. On
one end of the moral judgment continuum is Schöllgen, who sees the launching
of a "pre-emptive war" as a comprehensible response by a great power to a
precarious strategic position. On the other end are scholars such as Annika
Mombauer and Stig Förster, who condemn the criminal fecklessness of the
German leadership in allowing a crisis in the Balkans to drag all of Europe

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[55]Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War* (Oxford and New York: Berg,
2004), 1–4.

into war. Somewhere in the middle would be the work of Eley, Roger Chickering, and Wolfgang Mommsen, who see weak, vacillating politicians like Bethmann-Hollweg clumsily playing with the fire of popular radical nationalism. All of these historians assume, more or less, an environment of political, economic, and social instability forcing Germany's leaders to seek to mend their fortunes in war. Hewitson disagrees, pointing to a healthy economy that would incline industrial and commercial interests to oppose war; the solid resistance in the public sphere of center and left to the goals of radical nationalism; and, most importantly, the confidence of the army that they could win a continental war against multiple foes in a series of limited campaigns. Given the historical German fixation on the Slavic threat and the possibilities of empire in Eastern Europe, I think that Hewitson is on solid ground when he identifies another key factor: the elevation of czarist Russia to "*Hauptfeind*" after 1913 when it became evident that Russian military modernization was gaining traction. It was this new threat assessment that brought progressives, socialists, and Catholics together when Russia mobilized in July 1914.[56] There was more to this shift than strategic calculation, however. Hewitson tends to slight the fact that, despite Bismarck's efforts to shift it, German nationalism's center of gravity remained in the east. The expansion of the eastern frontier into the sparsely settled and economically and culturally backward lands of Poland and Russia had traditionally been seen as crucial to "completing" Germany's unification.[57]

Hewitson does not subscribe to the view, as proposed by Bruendel and Müller, that a disintegrative and radicalized nationalism, or a destabilizing and exclusionary discourse about German national identity, pushed public opinion to embrace the inevitability of war as a solution to Germany's problems. In fact, he is rather dubious about the whole idea (or existence) of German "militarism." On the contrary, he sees a sober assessment, reflected in the calculations of popular opinion and the civilian and military leadership, of Germany's strong (and improving) position as a continental and global power, at least vis-à-vis Britain and France. The possibility of war was accepted as a necessary component of international relations, and preparations for war as necessary for German security. To be sure, anxieties about the Russian threat were sharp and increasing and to a considerable extent, according to Hewitson, dictated planning for pre-emptive war that neutralized France before Russia could bring its weight to bear. Hewitson modifies Fischer to the extent that he views this mindset as evidence of rationally premeditated brinkmanship, or calculated risk, as part of a strategy to consolidate and expand Germany's position on the continent. Hewitson challenges those who challenged Fischer,

[56]Ibid., 4–13.
[57]See Hans Rothfels, *Bismarck, der Osten, und das Reich*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), 7–11, 224–225; and Eberhard Demm, *Ostpolitik und Propaganda im ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 137, 192, 335.

concluding that "German leaders risked military conflict in July 1914 not out of weakness and despair, but from a long-established position of strength . . . [it was] the readiness of German leaders to use the threat of a European war [that] distinguished them from those in other countries."[58] In short, Hewitson revives the "survival thesis" of Hintze and Anschütz.

How was this war to be fought and won? What were the calculations about relative strengths and weaknesses? What was the thinking behind the decisions the leadership made in terms of planning and, once the war had started, continuing operations? For a century, a fundamental premise of the historiography of the First World War has been the "failure" of the Schlieffen Plan. It has been taken as an article of faith that this plan manifested German anxieties about "encirclement" (the two-front war) and was the key to understanding how the German General Staff subordinated geo-political questions to the maximization of Germany's declining strategic advantage to make possible the knock-out blow on the battlefield. It is cited as evidence of a fatally limited "technocratic" mindset on the part of the military leadership that, combined with the fact that the politicians had no clear notion of German war aims beyond the vague goal of preserving the state, launched Germany into a desperate bid for continental hegemony, summed up in Bethmann-Hollweg's description of his policy in 1914 as "a leap into the dark."[59] More recently, as we see in Richard F. Hamilton and Holger Herwig's *Decisions for War, 1914–1917*, the "desperate gamble" interpretation has given way to the more nuanced one of the "calculated risk." Hamilton and Herwig locate the origins of the war in the very deliberate decisions made by a relatively small group of politicians and military men rather than in the inexorable and essentially uncontrollable "processes" inherent in the alliance system, militarism, nationalism, and imperialism, the nineteenth-century shibboleths that Columbia historian Carlton Hayes, writing in 1920, believed "embodied the spirit of Anarchy, a spirit that could not permanently endure on a shrinking globe or among social animals."[60] After Sarajevo, European leaders courted escalation of the crisis with a clear-eyed recognition of the hazards involved. Hamilton and Herwig call this the "strategic argument": "The decision-makers of the five major powers sought to save, maintain, or enhance the power and prestige of the nation." In the case of Germany, this argument combines elements of both the "defensive thesis" and the revisionist view of "crisis management": War was perceived as a legitimate instrument of state policy; Germany's

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[58]Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War*, 42–48, 85, 90–103, 117–121, 189, 228–229.

[59]Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866–1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 337.

[60]Carlton J. H. Hayes, *A Brief History of the Great War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 7.

strategic position was gradually deteriorating, thereby dictating an "offensive diplomacy"; and mobilization for this war was the best hope of patching over the widening cracks in the foundation of the state. Hamilton and Herwig agree with Hewitson that the crux of German war planning, and hence that of the Schlieffen Plan was to neutralize France in order to pursue victory in the most decisive theater for German security and ambitions: the Russian East. In short, Germany went to war in 1914 on the basis of a more or less rational assessment of national interest.[61]

The importance of the Schlieffen Plan for assessing German strategic thinking is obvious. It has two other dimensions that must be considered as well. One, it has been adduced as the key piece of evidence proving the malign aggressiveness of German militarism. Two, after 1918, top officers in the German army insisted that Moltke had fatally tampered with the Plan in 1914 by weakening the right wing, thus fumbling the great opportunity to end the war quickly and decisively on German terms. This assertion (in conjunction with the "stab in the back theory"), which absolved the German army for responsibility for losing the war, hardened into historical dogma. Terence Zuber believes that, as an operational order, the Schlieffen Plan was a myth deliberately concocted after the war to preserve the reputation of the German army. The bulk of the Imperial army's operational records were destroyed by British bombing in World War II, so the paper trail confirming the existence of the plan is exiguous. Zuber points to the fact that there was no mention of the Plan before 1920 and that the text of the Plan, published in 1956, was actually that of a memorandum Schlieffen composed in early 1906, after his retirement. Zuber reads this memorandum as a brief précis of general principles that must govern future German planning. Schlieffen believed that, given the numerical superiority of the Entente, Germany must pursue a defensive strategy in the west. This meant taking advantage of interior lines to force the French into a shallow battle of envelopment in close proximity to Germany's western frontier (and logistical base). The goal was quickly knocking France out of the war, isolating Britain, and dealing with Russia at leisure, not taking Paris in a massive re-enactment of the Battle of Cannae.[62]

Zuber bases this conclusion on an unpublished study written in the late 1930s by Maj. Dr. Wilhelm Dieckmann, an economic historian working in the Reichsarchiv on the official history of the war. "*Der Schlieffen Plan*" was based on summaries of various operational studies, memoranda, and staff

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[61]Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig, *Decisions for War, 1914–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5, 9, 19–21, 73–77, 85–89, 225–251. This book is a condensed version of their much more comprehensive *The Origins of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[62]Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56, 22–26.

rides (material destroyed when the RAF bombed the Reichsarchiv in April 1945). Given the serious lacunae in the historical record, Zuber believes that the Dieckmann manuscript (which was suppressed by the anti-Moltke cabal) remains our best account of the evolution of Schlieffen's strategic thinking before his retirement. Based on this study, Zuber claims that Schlieffen, preoccupied with German numerical inferiority, consistently planned on engaging the French in a limited offensive intended to break their fortress line and force them into negotiations. There was no hint that Schlieffen seriously contemplated a massive outflanking maneuver to the north. In fact, Dieckmann asserts that this idea of a limited, largely defensive frontier battle in the West found favor with Waldersee and was in turn adopted by Schlieffen. Zuber concludes that the memorandum of 1906 was not a summary of Schlieffen's strategic thinking, much less an operations plan. Rather, it was written, in Zuber's view, to support a substantial increase in the size of the German army by establishing the rationale that Germany's only hope for victory was through a massive battle of annihilation in the west, the success of which depended on a substantial increase in troop strength.[63] Zuber is very critical of generations of historians who have taken the existence of the Plan as prima facie evidence of the Second Reich's dysfunctional militarism, aggressive intentions, and responsibility for the start of the war. There is no question that, by shedding light on the motives of the officers who insisted on Moltke's incompetent tampering with a plan that, if left alone, would have guaranteed a German victory, Zuber gives us new insight into the lengths the military went to rescue its reputation after 1918. Zuber's valuable study does not, however, overturn entire paradigms. Rather, it is an important contribution to a more naunced interpretation of Wilhelmine Germany's military planning as a mixture of defensive thinking and calculated risk.[64]

No matter what our assessment of German motives and plans prior to 1914, it is a fact that the German armies failed to knock France out of the war that summer and autumn. What, then, were Germany's options after this unexpected check? Erich von Falkenhayn, the Prussian minister of war who had taken over from Moltke as chief of the general staff, was appalled at the lethality of modern weapons and came to the conclusion that traditional offensive tactics were doomed to bloody failure. He saw no other recourse but negotiation, telling Bethmann-Hollweg in November 1914 that, "if Russia, France, and England hold together, we cannot defeat them in such a way as to achieve acceptable peace terms. We are more likely to be slowly exhausted." This realistic appraisal

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[63]Ibid., 46, 133–143, 164, 190–191, 218, 302–304.
[64]See the essays in Gregor Schöllgen, ed., *Escape into War? The Foreign Policy of Imperial Germany* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1990).

of the situation fell on deaf ears.[65] Falkenhayn has suffered the lasting censure of history as the inventor of the "war of attrition," a strategy that had its awful debut at Verdun in April 1916. How do we reconcile his counsel to the Chancellor in 1914 with his launching of an unprecedented bloodbath two years later?

Robert T. Foley's *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun* attempts to answer this question and as it does so, provide a more complete understanding of one of the key events of the First World War that, like the Schlieffen Plan, has also hardened into myth. Foley locates the genesis of Falkenhayn's ideas in the context of a pre-war "*Strategiestreit*" (ably described by Zuber) that grew out of the lessons of the Franco-Prussian War. As interpreted by Hans Delbrück, that conflict revealed the potential of a new paradigm of warfare, that of the "*Volkskrieg*," (as embodied in the mobilization of Gambetta's volunteer armies in 1870), in which the mobilization of the human and material resources of the industrial state and the lethality of new weapons and tactics signaled the end of the short, decisive war. Delbrück's theory, which he relentlessly promoted in the pages of the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, was vigorously resisted at the upper levels of the army leadership, who adhered to the Napoleonic-Clausewitzian model of the decisive victory as prelude to a dictated peace on the victor's terms ("*Niederwerfungsstrategie*"). Given the prevailing views of Germany's limited resources and strategic position, it is not surprising that this latter model dominated German war planning prior to 1914. Foley directly challenges Zuber's conclusions about Schlieffen's thinking at this juncture. Zuber argues that Schlieffen sought a shallow envelopment of the French fortress line (which Dieckmann called "The Outflanking Plan," in place up to 1903), not a sweeping "Cannae-style" encounter in Belgium and northern France. Foley cites a section in Dieckmann's manuscript headed "The Envelopment Plan" that brings Schlieffen's thinking up to 1905 as the basis for his belief that Schlieffen's adherence to the short-war strategy eventually dictated striking as heavy and devastating a blow as possible, which meant a heavily weighted right wing sweeping through Belgium on the southeast-northwest Diedenhofen-Brussels axis. This deployment, explored in a staff ride in the summer of 1905, ultimately became the basis of the 1914 operation. Nevertheless, Foley emphasizes that there was nothing dogmatic about Schlieffen's thinking as he experimented with different solutions to the two-front war dilemma. In all the scenarios that he considered, the swift and decisive destruction of the French forces was the paramount goal.[66]

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[65]Holger Afflerbach, "Planning Total War? Falkenhayn and the Battle of Verdun, 1916," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118.

[66]Robert T. Foley, *German Strategy and the Path to Verdun: Erich von Falkenhayn and the Development of Attrition, 1870–1916* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5, 25–30, 38–41, 67, 68–72.

It is clear, however, that the execution of the plan broke down in the fog of war. After the retreat from the Marne, Moltke was eased out and Falkenhayn became chief of the general staff on September 14, 1914. At Ypres in November, the war of movement ended, and the trench war began. Short of seeking an immediate armistice, how could Falkenhayn best employ Germany's limited forces to break up the enemy coalition? He faced strong opposition, centered in the Hindenburg-Ludendorff faction in *OberOst*, who were convinced by the Battle of Tannenberg that the annihilative victory, the knockout blow, was still the key to winning the war. Though forced to relinquish the post of war minister, Falkenhayn continued to seek limited victories that would force Russia and then France to conclude a separate peace, freeing Germany to deal with her main enemy, England. Though widely criticized for failing to exploit his success in driving the Russians out of Poland in 1915, Falkenhayn's goal had been to break the Russian offensive capability, not drain German resources in a pursuit toward Moscow.[67]

Could this strategy work on the western front? Falkenhayn believed, based on intelligence reports and his own observations of the failed French offensives in Champagne in 1915, that France was rapidly approaching collapse. How could he employ the "strategy of attrition" ("*Ermattungsstrategie*") to weaken the French army, while husbanding German resources, to the point that France would be forced to sue for peace? Based on the experience of the 1915 campaign in Poland, Falkenhayn planned a limited offensive aimed at Verdun, the key to the Lorraine fortress complex. He calculated that the French response in defense of this important position on their southern flank must necessarily lead to a counter-offensive, in which their army would break against the massed German artillery and strong defensive positions. Launched on February 21, 1916, the offensive ultimately failed as the German army failed to take the heights on the east bank of the Meuse that would allow them to control the Verdun battlefield. The strong defensive positions, the key to the plan's success, were never secured. Hew Strachan pointedly observes that attrition, as a tactic, sought limited battlefield objectives in pursuit of a limited victory. The problem was that it had to target strategically important objectives in order to work, which almost inevitably escalated the stakes of the battle and forced both sides to commit more and more troops.[68] Falkenhayn fell into this trap. As he continued to press the offensive, the battle acquired a momentum of its own, as battles so often do. Foley emphasizes the tragic irony of Verdun: Falkenhayn had never intended to break the French line, but as German losses mounted through July, it appeared as if he were caught

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[67]Ibid., 104−107, 113, 119−124, 151−152.
[68]Hew Strachan, "From Cabinet War to Total War," in *Great War, Total War*, ed. Chickering and Förster, 28−29.

up in the pursuit of the decisive battle. In August 1916, Hindenburg and Ludendorff assumed overall command. The "new paradigm" had failed; OberOst was in control and with it, the dogma of the battle of annihilation returned to primacy. Its failure was finally acknowledged two years later on September 29, 1918, when Ludendorff informed the Kaiser that it was the Imperial army, and by implication the nation itself, that now faced annihilation.[69]

During the last year of the war and after the armistice, the debate over how the catalytic energies released by total war could be instrumentalized to recast the German nation acquired a new intensity. The delegitimation by defeat of the militarized Bismarckian state collapsed the optimistic visions of "completing" German unification that had marked the heady days of August 1914. The "revolution" of 1914 had failed. With the monarchy gone, how would the right-wing revolutionaries of 1918−1923 continue to appeal to the discourse of war to offer a new and radical conception of Germany's future? What means would they advocate? In addressing these questions, Boris Barth's *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Disintegration*, a long overdue intellectual history of the German "revolution," takes up where Sven Müller left off by showing how the "disintegrating tendencies of the war" spilled over into the post-1918 civil war and put Germany on the path to a new form of authoritarian rule. Barth examines how the disorienting shock of the armistice, a "spiritual catastrophe," rippled through bourgeois conservative and elite factions to inspire new definitions of the national community emerging out of the various explanations for Germany's defeat. In Barth's view, one explanation in particular, the "stab in the back theory" proffered by the generals, gained popular support because it shielded the creator of the German nation-state, the army, from blame for the catastrophe. What emerges from Barth's analysis is a picture of a traumatized civil society that was willing to abandon the delegitimized monarchical component of Hintze's "military-monarchical principle": "Left in the lurch by the Kaiser in a decisive moment...there grew on the right groups that, in abandoning the monarchy, were prepared to back new dictatorial forms of rule." In other words, the failed "Bismarckian order" was discarded in favor of a radicalized militarism that manifested itself in support of what Barth calls the "totalitarian option," first demonstrated in the OHL dictatorship of 1916−1918. Barth concludes that the forces of democratization, in the political vacuum created by 1918, failed to offer a compelling alternative to the "enemies discourse" that the radical right brought back from the battlefields. The *Freikorps*, at least, could appeal to deeply rooted apprehensions about German "survival." Democratic abstractions, Barth implies,

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[69]Foley, *German Strategy*, 179−188, 207, 258−263. See also Michael Geyer, "Insurrectionary Warfare: The German Debate about a *Levée en Masse* in October 1918," *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 3 (September 2001): 465.

could scarcely compete with the visceral narrative of Germany's unfinished struggle through war toward a new and higher type of community:

> The conception of war articulated by the National Socialist movement was heterogeneous and, at its core, apolitical. For the old conservative right, the First World War had been about the achievement of specific aims, namely continental hegemony. In National Socialist ideology war and violence became simultaneously the aim and purpose of human existence.[70]

There has been an aspect of the German self-conception, impenetrable and threatening to the outside observer, that has been conventionally labeled "militarism." As a cultural, intellectual, social, and political discourse on war, the primary instrument (in the view of contemporaries) of German unification, it still compels our attention. Germany was always the "unfinished nation," surrounded by more powerful enemies who stood in the way of the nation's perceived manifest destiny and fragmented internally between Catholic and Protestant; among conservative, socialist, and liberal; and among the advocates of the *Ständestaat*, the *Rechtstaat*, the Obrigkeitsstaat, and, eventually, the Volksgemeinschaft, all of whom offered competing notions of what the "nation" was or should be. We should not be surprised that for Germans, the war of unification was never over and that peace, or completion of unification, was only imaginable with total victory. The books discussed in this essay all describe, in its various manifestations, a defensive and militant reaction to internal and external threats to the national community. Taken together, they comprise the first wave of an important new intellectual history of the German conception and practice of war. Wilhelmine military culture and the "enemies discourse" that permeated every level of historical, cultural, and political argument over war aims and the ultimate constitution of the German national community contained the seeds of an extreme theory of war that sought annihilative victory as the only conceivable guarantor of national survival. This intellectual turn in the history of German war prompts two significant metacritical questions. Do these new studies of German militarism breathe new life into the "Sonderweg" thesis? Do they point toward new approaches to understanding how the genocidal violence of the Third Reich was conceived and carried out? I believe the answer to both questions is yes because German military culture, in its preoccupation with threat and response, was so obviously a fundamental shaping force on German nationalist thinking.

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[70]Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration. Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg, 1914–1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2003), v, 4, 149, 171, 195–211, 444–463, 544–548.