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0521545307 - Decisions for War, 1914-1917
Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig
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Decisions for War, 1914–1917

This work poses an easy but perplexing question about World War I – Why did it happen? Several of the oft-cited causes are reviewed and discussed. The argument of the alliance systems is inadequate, most agreements lacking compelling force. The argument of an accident (or “slide”) is also inadequate, given the clear and unambiguous evidence of intentions. The arguments of mass demands – those focusing on nationalism, militarism, and social Darwinism – it is argued, are insufficient, lacking indications of frequency, intensity, and process (how they influenced the various decisions).

Decisions for War focuses on the choices made by small coteries, in Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France, Britain, and elsewhere. In each case, the decision to enter the war was made by a handful of individuals – monarchs, ministers, military people, party leaders, ambassadors, and a few others. In each case also, we see separate and distinct agendas, the considerations differing from one nation to the next. The leaderships of not only the major countries, but also Japan, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, the Balkans, and the United States are explored.

Richard F. Hamilton is Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Political Science and Research Associate of The Mershon Center at Ohio State University. He is coeditor, with Holger Herwig, of *The Origins of World War I* (Cambridge, 2003). His previous books include *Who Voted for Hitler?* (1982) and *The Bourgeois Epoch* (1991).

Holger H. Herwig is Professor of History and Canada Research Chair in Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary. Among the many books he has written are *Biographical Dictionary of World War I* (1982), co-authored with Neil M. Heyman, *The First World War* (1997), and *The Destruction of the Bismarck* (2001).

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Advance praise for *Decisions for War, 1914–1917*

“The debate on the origins of the First World War remains one of history’s most important and hotly contested topics, and this excellent book does it justice by presenting up-to-the-minute research in a refreshingly accessible way. The breadth of its coverage is especially impressive, with Hamilton and Herwig treating the outbreak of the war as a global rather than merely a European event. Quite simply, this is the best introduction to the origins of the 1914–18 war yet published.”

– Dr. Gary Sheffield, Senior Lecturer in History, King’s College London

“The First World War – was it an accident or was it design? Historians have debated this question for 90 years, and this latest contribution, aimed at a general audience, offers comparative conclusions about the major and minor powers’ motivations for fighting in World War I. Hamilton and Herwig make a convincing case for the importance of human agency in the decisions for war, ranging from a forced hand, blunder or miscalculation, to decisions calculated to provoke a conflict. This book is a welcome contribution to the continuing debate on the origins of the First World War and will provide readers with a useful guide through the maze of conflicting interpretations on this controversial subject.”

– Annika Mombauer, The Open University, UK

“This book is an abridged version of the collection of essays edited by the same two authors, *The Origins of World War I* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). The footnotes have been removed and its text and bibliography skillfully abridged in order to produce a shorter and cheaper edition that can be made more readily accessible to students and the general reader. This wider accessibility is greatly to be welcomed. The book is the most comprehensive and up-to-date account available of the decisions that led first to the outbreak of the First World War and then to intervention by most of the global powers. A strong feature is the authors’ comparative approach, which focuses attention on who made the crucial decisions in each country, how they did so (in what institutional context), and why they acted as they did. The presentation is clear and cogent, and corrects the widespread but misleading view that the war happened by accident or through inadvertence. On the contrary, the book rightly insists that the governments of the day made deliberate choices to fight rather than give way.”

– Prof. David Stevenson, Department of International History,
London School of Economics and Political Science

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For Irene and Lorraine

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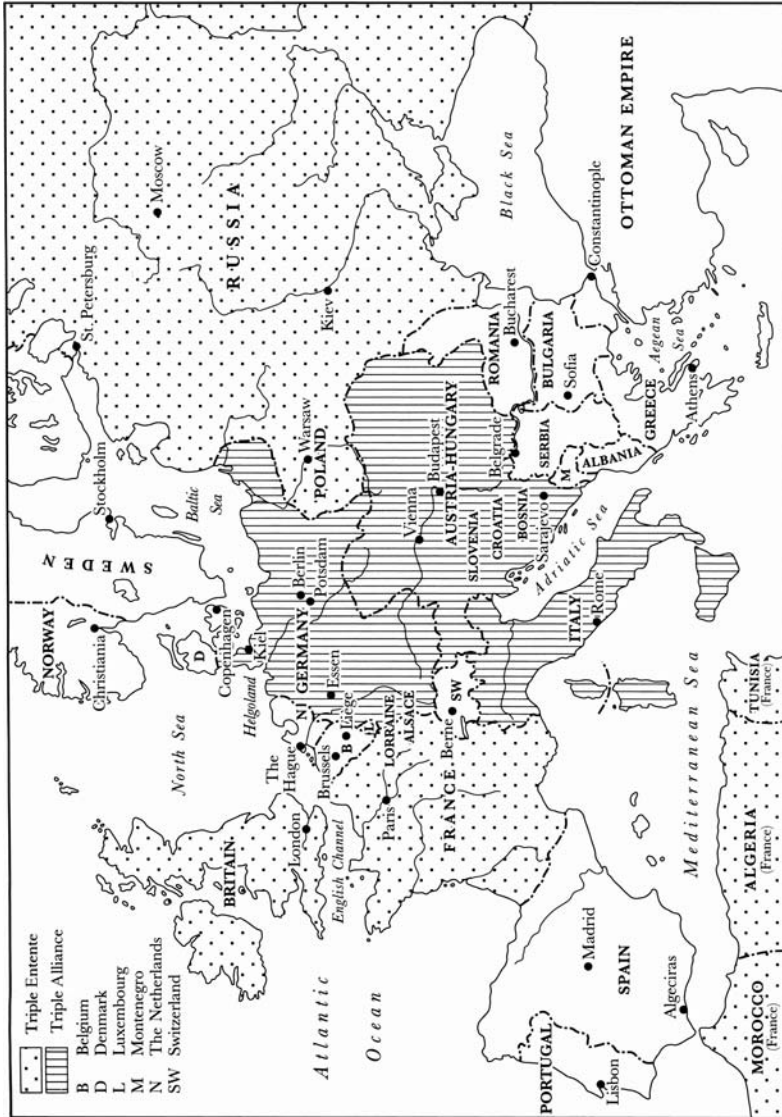
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MAP 1. General map of Europe: June 1914

Acknowledgments

In 2003, Cambridge University Press published our lengthy, detailed, and heavily annotated volume entitled *The Origins of World War I*. Therein, ten scholars contributed chapters addressing a key question that we sensed had been missed in many “origins” books: Which individuals or groups wielded the “war powers” in 1914? The authors addressed this question on the basis of the extant documentary record.

In all twelve nations studied, the decisions for war were made by small coteries, most of them having fewer than ten persons. In three cases, the decisions had to receive some kind of legislative approval. In half of these nations the “war powers” were held by a single person, the monarch, who was aided by a small coterie of decision-makers, usually the prime minister, the foreign minister, the minister of war, the chief of the General Staff, and in one case even the minister of agriculture. In the nations with some kind of republican regime, the key decision-maker was a prime minister (or a president), one aided by a different kind of coterie, its members, typically, being leaders of parties (or of party factions). The second question addressed was the obvious one: What were the grounds for their decisions?

As editors of that larger work, we agreed with Cambridge editor Frank Smith’s suggestion to pare down that tome and to make it available to instructors and students in an abridged (and revised) version designed for classroom use and discussion. We made deep cuts, a process we found troubling and painful. Our coauthors gave us permission to proceed with this work. The text that follows, most of it, retains the words of the original authors. We have made a few changes,

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mostly bridge passages and, here and there, some needed explanation. We wish once again to acknowledge their contributions to the individual chapters: John Milton Cooper, Jr. (United States), Frederick R. Dickinson (Japan), Richard C. Hall (the Balkan states), J. Paul Harris (Great Britain), Eugenia C. Kiesling (France), David Alan Rich (Russia), Ulrich Trumpener (Ottoman Empire), and Graydon A. Tunstall, Jr. (Austria-Hungary).

This work was supported by the Mershon Center at The Ohio State University. We are indebted to Richard Ned Lebow and Richard Herrmann, the Center's directors, and to Mershon's superb staff.

We hope that with this volume, we can contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of what George Kennan called "*the great seminal catastrophe of this century.*" Decision-makers are still using war as a tool of statecraft. Coteries are still debating the pros and cons of armed state intervention. Scholars still debate the wisdom of those actions. Our intent is to keep that thought process alive.

Richard F. Hamilton
Holger H. Herwig
15 March 2004