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978-1-107-03994-0 - Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War

Peter Jackson

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Beyond the Balance of Power

This is a major new study of French foreign and security policy before, during and after the First World War. Peter Jackson examines the interplay between two contending conceptions of security: the first based on traditional practices of power politics and the second on internationalist doctrines that emerged in the late nineteenth century. He pays particular attention to the social and political context in which security policy was made and to the cultural dynamics of the policy-making process. The book reconsiders the evolution of French war aims and reinterprets the peace policy of the Clemenceau government in 1919. It also provides a new interpretation of the foreign policy of successive French governments in the early 1920s. Jackson shows that internationalist ideas were far more influential over this entire period than is commonly understood. The result is a thorough reassessment of France's security policy and a new perspective on international relations during this crucial period in European history.

Peter Jackson is Professor of Global Security in the History Department at the University of Glasgow.

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*I have striven not to laugh at human actions, nor to weep at them, nor to hate them,
but to understand them.*

Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus* 1, 4.

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Preface

This book considers the impact of the First World War on the politics of national security in France. It argues that the sacrifice and suffering caused by the Great War created political space for internationalist doctrines of peace and security to play an important role in policy making. Two general approaches to the problem of security are identified. The first is defined as the *traditional* conception of security. It was based on long-standing practices of the balance of power and alliance politics. The second is described as the *internationalist* approach. It was understood chiefly in terms of peaceful cooperation between states under a regime of international law. This cooperation would be underpinned by international institutions designed above all to implement and enforce the rule of law in international society. While advocates of a purely internationalist conception of security remained for the most part marginalised from the decision-making process, the steady rise in support for this approach within both the public and parliamentary spheres constituted a factor that could not be ignored in the policy-making process. This fact has not received the attention it deserves from historians of this period. The traditional and internationalist approaches together provided the conceptual framework for debates about national security among political and policy elites.

These debates took place in an era of revolutionary change. In 1914 the international system entered a lengthy transition period that brought about the end of European dominance. Spring 1917 was a pivotal moment in this process. It witnessed the collapse of Imperial Russia, France's principal pre-war ally, into revolutionary chaos that would force it to leave the Great War. At the same time the United States, which was well on its way to becoming the world's most powerful state, entered the conflict as an 'Associated Power'. These developments had profound consequences for the post-war political order. They transformed the structural environment in which France's security policy was made in ways that have not been fully understood by historians of this period. Among the many legacies of the war were a new distribution of power and a new set of international norms. Both of these developments created new external and internal pressures to which French policy makers were forced to respond. Their chief consequence was to create favourable conditions for a more

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internationalist approach to security. This process did not come to full fruition until the advent of the centre-left Cartel des gauches political coalition inside France in May 1924. The Cartel government of Édouard Herriot responded with a multilateral security strategy based on the principles of interlocking mutual assistance, arbitration and close Franco-British cooperation. This strategy, in turn, laid the conceptual foundations for French policy leading to the Locarno Accords of 1925. It also opened the way for the more audacious efforts of Aristide Briand to achieve European peace based on Franco-German reconciliation and European federation in the late 1920s. Briandism did not emerge fully formed from the ether in 1925.

The book's focus on contending conceptions of security raises a number of interesting methodological challenges. As David Stevenson has observed, 'security' was an 'intangible' concept that could 'expand indefinitely' to mean everything from the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to the destruction of Germany as a political entity.¹ The tension between various and often incompatible conceptions of security was never fully resolved. But it was central to the political and cultural context in which virtually all debates concerning foreign and defence policy took place. The book therefore pays careful attention throughout to internal discourses of national security and their role in shaping the policy context. Developments in the international sphere were equally important and receive equal attention. The strategies of other states, and in particular France's Great Power allies Britain and the United States, presented a different range of challenges and often constituted powerful restraints on France's freedom of action. Also important, however, was the transnational flow of ideas about peace and international legitimacy. The impact of new international norms is more difficult to assess but was also crucial in shaping the way policy makers understood and responded to the wider environment of international politics. The analysis that follows is therefore oriented systematically towards understanding the complex interaction of external and internal dynamics in the evolution of foreign and security policy. A central contention throughout is that the wider structures that conditioned policy decisions were constituted not only by the distribution of material power in the international system, but also by the emergence of new normative standards for state behaviour during the Great War.

It is with this latter point that I hope to make a small contribution to debates about the role of power and ideas among theorists of international relations. My chief aims, however, are first to reinterpret the course of French foreign and security policy during this period of upheaval and second to offer a case study for understanding the way policy-making elites adapt to seismic changes in their structural environment.

¹ D. Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914–1919* (Oxford, 1982), 200–2.

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The origins of this study stretch back to spring 2002 and to one of the many fruitful discussions that I have had over the years with Zara Steiner. Zara observed that French policy makers of the inter-war period seemed unusually concerned with embedding French policy in binding legal arrangements. She remarked that it would be interesting to explore the origins of this cultural reflex. Zara's remarks niggled away at me as I began a year's sabbatical leave to research a book on French security policy after 1919. It was clear to me that the juridical dimension of French policy practices was an expression of long-standing traditions within French political culture that could be traced back to the period before the revolution. But I also came to realise that certain of its characteristics could be traced to late nineteenth-century pacifist thought and in particular the movement for 'peace through law' that emerged along with the profession of international law during this period. I owe a significant debt for this realisation to the innovative and important work done on the French internationalist movement by a new generation of scholars that includes Norman Ingram, Carl Bouchard and especially Jean-Michel Guieu.

In the end I decided that it would be much more interesting to trace the evolution of French thinking about peace and security from the period before 1914 through to the aftermath of the First World War. The aim is to integrate the transnational history of internationalist thought into an archive-based study of the evolution of foreign and security policy. In order to explore the origins of various and often contending beliefs about security, I resolved to pay careful attention to the social and educational backgrounds of various policy elites as well as the cultural environment in which they worked. By the time I realised the scale of the project I had set for myself it was too late to turn back, and I found myself delving into such diverse literatures as the evolution of transnational civil society in the mid-nineteenth century, the social composition of the French officer corps, the military history of the Great War and the dynamics of veterans' politics after 1918. The result is a much longer book than I ever intended to write, but one that I enjoyed researching and writing much more than I ever thought possible.

This enjoyment owed much to the help and support of others. It is a pleasure to express official thanks for the invaluable financial assistance provided by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Staff Research and Learned Societies funds at Aberystwyth University, the Nuffield Foundation and the John Anderson Research Leadership scheme at the University of Strathclyde. I am also grateful for the opportunity to present my ideas at seminars at the Institut d'études politiques in Paris, the University of Nottingham, the Université de Paris IV, the University of Cambridge, Boston University, the Institute of Historical Research, the University of Glasgow, the University of Utah, the University of Western Australia, the Royal Military College of Canada, the University of Western Ontario and the Ohio State University. The project began while I was a research fellow at 'Sciences po' in 2002 and was finished while I was a visiting

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professor at the same institution in 2012–13. I am grateful to all of the above organisations. I am also happy to thank Michael Watson at Cambridge University Press for the faith he has shown in this book.

The assistance and support of friends and colleagues was also invaluable. Special thanks must go to Andrew Webster, who listened patiently to many hours of my ramblings as the idea for this book first took shape way back in 2002–3. And I am also very grateful to Mehmet Basutçu, Craig Ritchie and Alison Rodger for providing both a place to stay and excellent company during many research trips to Paris and London. I would also like to acknowledge the supportive research environment at the Department of International Politics in Aberystwyth (where I worked for more than twelve years). Lengthy books such as this one are increasingly rare in the era of the Research Assessment Exercise (now the Research Excellence Framework) in Britain. The fact that I was given the institutional support necessary to see the project through to conclusion is a credit to the research culture at ‘Interpol’ and in particular to the support of Andrew Linklater, Colin McInnis and Ian Clark. Ian deserves additional thanks for suggesting the title of the book. Other friends and colleagues at ‘Aber’ read portions of the manuscript and I would especially like to thank R. Gerald Hughes, Martin Alexander, Patrick Finney and Campbell Craig for their commentary on various drafts of the manuscript.

Beyond Aberystwyth I received extremely helpful insights and advice from Georges-Henri Soutou, John Ferris, Sally Marks, Hidemi Suganami, Nicolas Roussellier, William Keylor, Phillips O’Brien, Andrew Barros, Robert Young, Taylor Jackson, Robert Boyce, Claire Sanderson, Andrea Thomas, George Peden and Keith Neilson. My Ph.D. student Lora Gibson wrote an excellent thesis advancing an interpretation very much opposed to my own. It is a great pleasure to acknowledge the importance of her ideas in sharpening my own thinking. At the University of Strathclyde I was fortunate to work with a convivial and supportive group of friends and colleagues. I am particularly grateful to Allan MacInnes, Alison Cathcart, Rogelia Pastor-Castro and Richard Finlay for making my time there so enjoyable.

Three friends and colleagues read virtually every word of the manuscript and provided truly invaluable feedback. It is no stretch to say that the book could hardly have been written without the expert advice of Martin Thomas, Joe Maiolo and Talbot Imlay. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers of the manuscript for Cambridge University Press, whose comments and suggestions strengthened the book. While the contribution of the aforementioned scholars was crucial, any errors of fact or interpretation in the pages that follow are my own.

My greatest debt, as ever, is to my family. My sister Mary-Jane has always been a source of inspiration and support for me. My children, Erika, Taylor, Eva and Cameron, have lived with this book for all or most of their lives. They have rarely seen the point to all of the time away, or the agonising over

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minor details. But without them the whole business would mean very little. My final and most important thanks go to Jackie, who provided love, support and the constant reassurance that one day I would finish this ‘damn book’. She was right (as usual). And it is to her that this book is dedicated with a love that continues to grow after all these years.

Abbreviations

AFSDN	Association française de la Société des nations
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AN	Archives nationales
AS	Archives du Sénat
BDIC	Bibliothèque de documentation internationale et contemporaine
BL	British Library
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CAEAN	<i>Commission des affaires étrangères de l'Assemblée nationale</i>
CAES	<i>Commission des affaires étrangères du Sénat</i>
CCAC	Churchill College Archives Cambridge
CDH	<i>Les Cahiers des droits de l'homme</i>
CEH	<i>Contemporary European History</i>
CISDN	Commission d'études interministérielles pour la Société des nations
CSDN	Conseil supérieur de la défense nationale
CSG	Conseil supérieur de guerre
CTP	Commission du Traité de paix (sub-commission of the CAEAN)
DAPC	Direction des affaires politiques et commerciales (foreign ministry)
DDF	<i>Documents diplomatiques français</i>
D&S	<i>Diplomacy & Statecraft</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
FHS	<i>French Historical Studies</i>
FRUS	<i>Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GMCC	<i>Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporaines</i>
GQG	Grand quartier général
Hj	<i>Historical Journal</i>
HLRO	House of Lords Records Office
IHR	<i>International History Review</i>
IMCC	Inter-Allied Military Control Commission

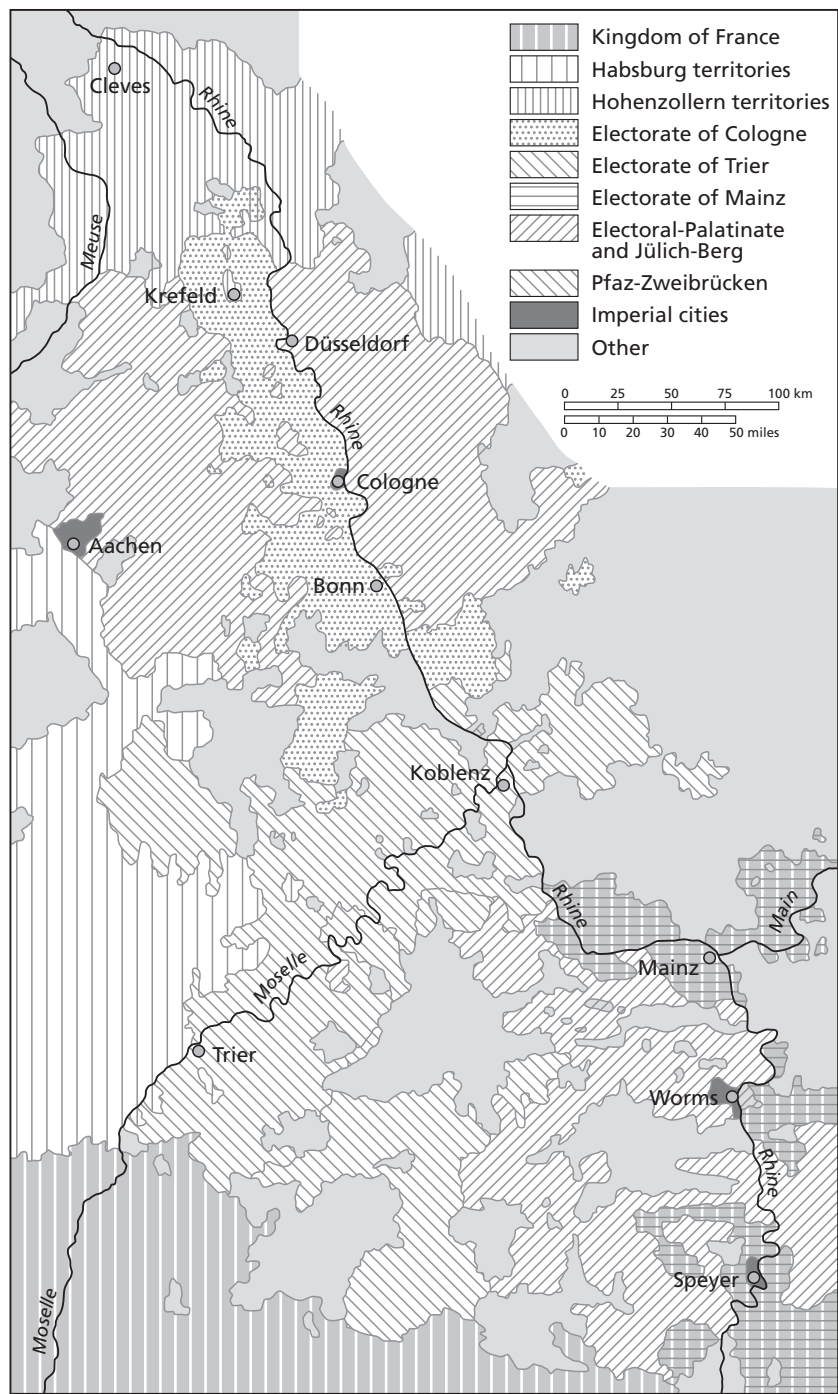
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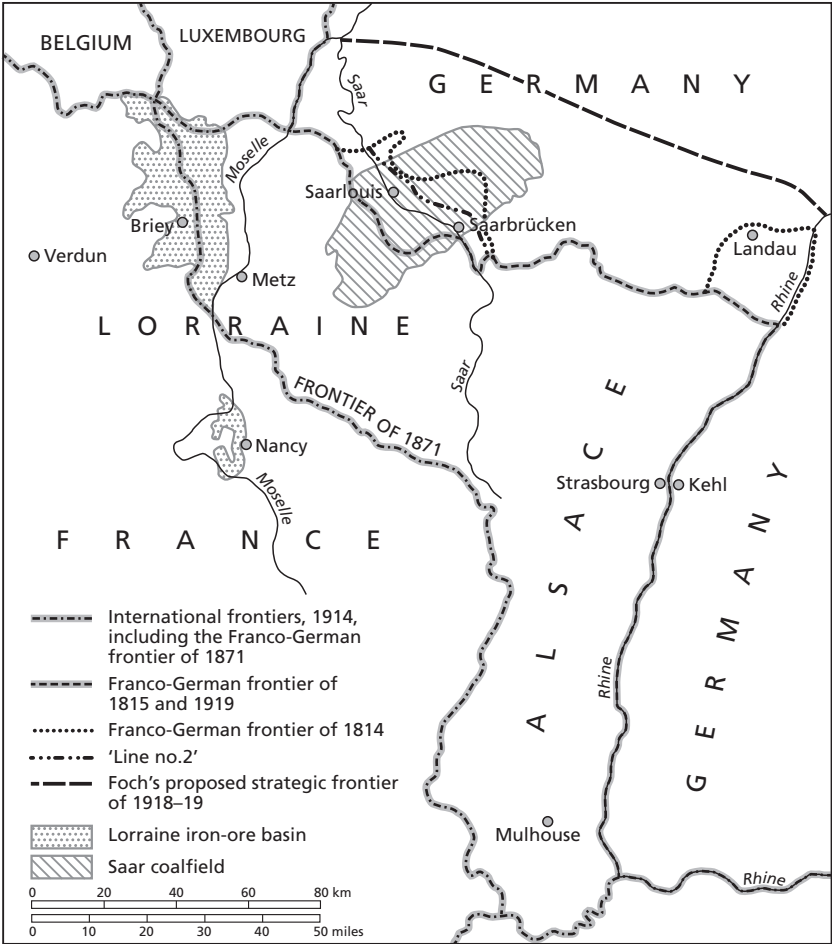
IOL	India Office Library (British Library)
JCH	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
JMH	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
JO	<i>Journal officiel de la République française</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i>
LDH	Ligue des droits de l’homme
MAE	Ministère des affaires étrangères
PAC	Permanent Advisory Commission on Military, Naval and Air Questions (League of Nations)
PPC	<i>Paris Peace Conference</i>
PPD	<i>La Paix par le droit</i>
PV-SDN	A. G. Lapradelle (ed.), <i>La Paix de Versailles</i> , vol. I; <i>La Conférence de la Paix et la Société des Nations</i>
RDDM	<i>Revue des Deux Mondes</i>
RH	<i>Revue Historique</i>
RHA	<i>Revue historique des armées</i>
RHD	<i>Revue d’histoire diplomatique</i>
RI	<i>Relations internationales</i>
SDN	<i>Société des nations</i>
SFIO	Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière
SFSDN	Service français de la Société des nations (foreign ministry)
SGDN	Secrétariat général de la défense nationale
SHD-DAT	Service historique de la défense – Département de l’armée de terre
SLYU	Sterling Library, Yale University
TMC	Temporary Mixed Commission (League of Nations)
TNA-PRO	The National Archives – Public Records Office
VS	<i>Vingtième siècle</i>

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Map 1 The Rhineland in 1789. Adapted from M. Rowe, *From Reich to State*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. ix

Map 2



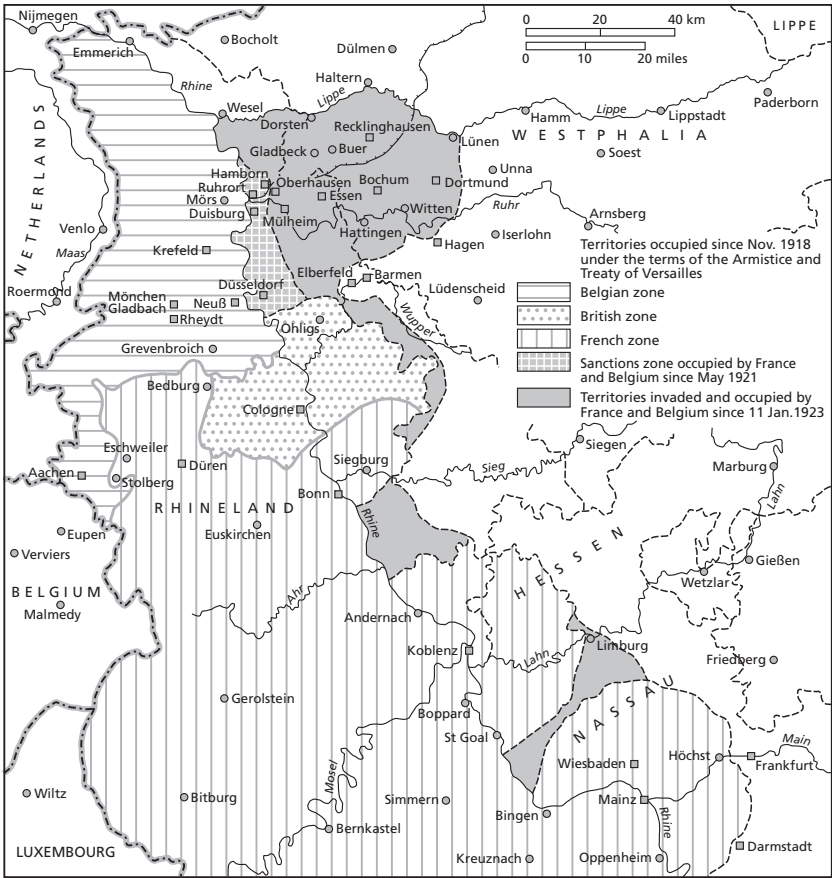
Map 2 Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar. Adapted from D. Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914–1919*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 217

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Map 3 The Rhine basin in 1914. Adapted from D. Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914–1919*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 221

Map 4



Map 4 Rhineland zones of occupation. Adapted from C. Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis 1923–1924*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. x–xi