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978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

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## The Outbreak of the First World War

The First World War had profound consequences both for the evolution of the international system and for domestic political systems. How and why did the war start? Offering a unique interdisciplinary perspective, this volume brings together a distinguished group of diplomatic historians and international relations scholars to debate the causes of the war. Organized around several theoretically based questions, it shows how power, alliances, historical rivalries, militarism, nationalism, public opinion, internal politics, and powerful personalities shaped decision-making in each of the major countries in the lead up to war. The emphasis on the interplay of theory and history is a significant contribution to the dialogue between historians and political scientists, and will contribute to a better understanding of the war in both disciplines.

Jack S. Levy is Board of Governors' Professor in the Department of Political Science at Rutgers University.

John A. Vasquez is Mackie Scholar in International Relations in the Department of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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Frontmatter

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---

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*Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making*

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*and*

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Frontmatter

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To my sister, Caroline Jonas, the artist – JSL  
and

To my nephews and niece, Rick, Brian, Michael,  
Scott, and Cristina – JAV

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978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Contents

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <i>List of figures</i>   | <i>page</i> ix |
| <i>List of tables</i>  | x              |
| <i>List of contributors</i>  | xi             |
| <i>Preface</i>   | xv             |
| <br><b>Part I Overview of debates about the causes of the First World War</b>  |                |
| 1 Introduction: historians, political scientists,<br>and the causes of the First World War<br>JACK S. LEVY AND JOHN A. VASQUEZ | 3              |
| 2 July 1914 revisited and revised: the erosion<br>of the German paradigm<br>SAMUEL R. WILLIAMSON, JR.                          | 30             |
| <br><b>Part II Structure and agency</b>  |                |
| 3 Strategic rivalries and complex causality in 1914<br>KAREN RASLER AND WILLIAM R. THOMPSON                                    | 65             |
| 4 A “formidable factor in European politics”: views<br>of Russia in 1914<br>T. G. OTTE   | 87             |
| <br><b>Part III The question of preventive war</b>   |                |
| 5 Restraints on preventive war before 1914<br>WILLIAM MULLIGAN   | 115            |
| 6 The sources of preventive logic in German<br>decision-making in 1914<br>JACK S. LEVY   | 139            |
|  | vii            |

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making  
Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

|   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| viii  | Contents  |     |
| 7   | International relations theory and the three great puzzles of the First World War                       | 167 |
|   | DALE C. COPELAND  |     |
| 8   | Was the First World War a preventive war? Concepts, criteria, and evidence                              | 199 |
|   | JOHN A. VASQUEZ   |     |
| <b>Part IV The role of the other powers</b> |   |     |
| 9   | War accepted but unsought: Russia’s growing militancy and the July Crisis, 1914                         | 227 |
|   | RONALD P. BOBROFF   |     |
| 10  | France’s unreadiness for war in 1914 and its implications for French decision-making in the July Crisis | 252 |
|   | J. F. V. KEIGER   |     |
|   | <i>References</i>   | 273 |
|   | <i>Index</i>  | 294 |



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making  
Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

Figures

---

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 3.1 Bivariate correlations across varying time periods,<br>starting with 1813–1913 and ending with 1900–1913.     | <i>page</i> 70 |
| 3.2 Average bivariate correlations across varying time<br>periods (for correlations in graphs B–F in Figure 3.1). | 72             |
| 3.3 Four rivalry streams.   | 75             |

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making  
Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

Tables

---

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| 3.1 Indicators for nonlinear rivalry ripeness model.                   | <i>page</i> 69 |
| 3.2 Rivalries begun and ended, 1864–1913.                              | 73             |
| 8.1 Dyadic participants in the First World War,<br>July 1914–May 1915. | 219            |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii List of contributors

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

List of contributors

xiii

SAMUEL R. WILLIAMSON, JR. has taught at West Point, Harvard, UNC-Chapel Hill, and the University of the South. He has written frequently about the origins of the First World War, including *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War*, and *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War*. In articles and reviews he has often argued that Russian actions in 1914 require reevaluation, and that German actions should be judged from a comparative, rather than a unilateralist, perspective.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Preface

---

Like many international relations scholars, we have always been fascinated by the First World War. Our own theoretical training in political science and our focus on interstate conflict initially led us each to think primarily about the implications of the war for theories of the causes of war. In the process, however, we have each come to take an increasing interest in the question of the causes of the First World War as a singular historical episode. Our respective interests were motivated by the fact that the war was probably the most consequential interstate conflict in modern history, and that it has had an enormous impact on the development of international relations theories. The continuing proliferation of interpretations about the origins of the war and the lack of consensus among historians after nearly a century has created a puzzle that is hard to ignore. Our interest, like that of other scholars, has grown as the centennial of the war approaches.

At the same time, during the last decade or so we have each been interacting more and more with historians at annual meetings of the International Studies Association, and at other, more specialized, conferences. We were aware that historians were planning numerous things to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the war, and began to think that we might do something as well, but in a way that provided a different perspective. We concluded that the most distinctive thing we might do would be to organize a conference and follow-up volume that brought together historians and political scientists. The aim was to reconsider some of the leading arguments about the causes of war within each discipline, expose political scientists to new archival research by historians, expose historians to new conceptual approaches in international relations theory, and to promote the ongoing collaboration between scholars in the two disciplines. Plans for a conference expanded into plans to set up additional panels at conventions.

We each thought that one of the selfish pleasures we would get out of the process was that for at least two years we would read nothing except works on the First World War. As we should have expected, of course, we

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978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi Preface

each had too many commitments for that to be possible, but we were able to devote a fair amount of time to reading the expanding literature on the origins of the war. In this way, the coming of the 100th anniversary has led each of us, as it has many others, to rethink our earlier beliefs about the causes of the war and about how to approach the study of those causes. We hope that this book will lead our readers to do the same.

Our own respective interests in the First World War go back many years. Jack Levy's interest in the theoretical question of the impact of rigid organizational routines on the causes of war led him to write an article on the subject in 1986 that included a case study of the First World War (*International Studies Quarterly*, June 1986). He was then asked to write an essay on the question of whether the First World War was driven more by tangible conflicts of interests between states or by the mismanagement of the crisis by political leaders, culminating in an article, "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914," in *International Security* in 1990/1.

Initially, John Vasquez had been applying his theoretical models to the Second World War, but he soon found that the intellectual intricacies of the First World War proved too interesting to resist. When Samuel Williamson, Jr. and Russel Van Wyk released their documentary history *July 1914: Soldiers, Statesmen, and the Coming of the Great War* in 2003, it became a staple of Vasquez's course on Crisis Diplomacy that compares crises that resulted in war with those that did not from 1815 to 1948. Williamson's fresh approach played a large role in Vasquez's decision to begin working on the First World War. In 2010, he put together a conference among historians and political scientists (including Levy) on the spread of the war from 1914 to 1917. The stimulation and success of that conference, and of the symposium in *Foreign Policy Analysis* (April 2011) that followed, helped to motivate us to do more on the causes of the First World War. Our thinking about the war was further stimulated by a conference we attended in Syracuse, New York, in April 2012. Organized by Colin Elman, the "First World War Data Workshop" gave us the opportunity to engage in debates about the war by political scientists familiar with the war, while also discussing efforts to increase the transparency of qualitative research in political science.

Meanwhile, we had invited several historians to join us on a panel on the First World War at the joint meeting of the British International Studies Association (ISA) and International Studies Association in Edinburgh, Scotland, in June 2012. We also organized a panel for the 2012 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA) a couple of months later. Papers from each of these conferences (including the APSA conference, which had to be canceled due to a hurricane) were revised and then presented, along with other papers, at our major conference on the



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

war, a day-long workshop in San Francisco just prior to the International Studies Association meeting of April 2013. We also organized an additional panel on the war for the same ISA conference. The papers from the ISA workshop, with two others, form the core of this volume.

In selecting scholars currently working on the causes of the First World War to join us in this interdisciplinary effort, we found no dearth of candidates. We had three main criteria in selecting our contributors in addition to the excellence of their scholarly work, and their fit with some of the analytic and historiographical themes we wanted represented. First, we wanted a mix of historians and political scientists, and among these we wanted some who had worked in an interdisciplinary fashion before so as to facilitate communication across disciplinary boundaries. Second, we wanted a mix of North Americans and Europeans, because we believed that these differences in geography reflect deeper influences, different historical memories, and a diversity of perspectives. Third, we wanted as many contributors as possible to be familiar with non-English sources. Lastly, we wanted a mix of senior scholars, who have long worked in this field and have had a lasting impact on it, and of rising younger scholars, who were mining new sources and exploring new analytic perspectives.

Several people have helped us enormously at various stages in our efforts to put this volume together. Early on, we benefited from the advice of Peter Jackson and David Stevenson about European historians whom we might approach with regard to contributing to the volume. The final drafts of most of the chapters in the volume benefited from feedback at our 2013 ISA workshop. We thank the International Studies Association and the ISA Workshop Committee, chaired by Cameron Thies, for financial support. We give special thanks to Marc Trachtenberg and David Rowe for their role as formal discussants at the workshop. We thank Paul Schroeder and Mira Rapp-Hooper for presenting papers at the workshop, and a number of other scholars who attended the workshop and contributed significantly to the discussion. We all benefited enormously from their contributions.

We received some assistance in the process of putting together the footnotes and references, and for their help we thank Delinda Swanson and Gillian Gryz. For research support, Jack Levy thanks the Executive Dean of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University and John Vasquez thanks the Mackie Research Fund at the University of Illinois.

We are particularly grateful to the people at Cambridge University Press for their work on the publication of this volume. We especially want to thank John Haslam, our editor, who offered much encouragement for the project, and who provided exceptional guidance throughout the process. We are grateful to Carrie Parkinson for providing excellent assistance and

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978-1-107-04245-2 - The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics,  
and Decision-Making

Edited by Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xviii Preface

for ensuring that the project moved forward in a timely fashion. We also want to thank Joanna Breeze, our production editor; Phyllis van Reenen, who prepared the index; Lyn Flight, who did a superb job of copy-editing; and the rest of the team at Cambridge.

Lastly, Jack Levy dedicates the volume to his sister, Caroline Jonas, and John Vasquez dedicates the volume to his nephews and niece, Rick, Brian, Michael, Scott, and Cristina.