

WALTER A. MCDOUGALL

France's Rhineland Policy, 1914-1924

*The Last Bid for a Balance of Power
in Europe*



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France's
Rhineland Diplomacy,
1914-1924

*“France follows a policy of suicide. . . .
For the guarantor powers the treaty is
a piece of paper; for us it is an instru-
ment of servitude. . . . C’était bien la
paix boche!”*

—Camille Barrère, 1919

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Walter A. McDougall

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To Beth

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The map was drawn by Adrienne Morgan, Geography Department, University of California/Berkeley. The illustrations, from H. P. Gassier and J. Sennep, *Histoire de France, 1918-1938* (Paris: Éditions Mana, 1938), are reproduced under the copyright of S.P.A.D.E.M.

PREFACE

Few would claim any longer that reports of the death of the "old diplomatic history" are exaggerated. Yet in the half-century since Eckart Kehr challenged the basic assumptions of the historiography of international relations, no two historians seem to have agreed on the nature of the "new" diplomatic history. Instead, "functional-structuralists," "Kehrites," "socio-Marxists," "New Leftists," and "consensus" historians (which seems only to mean "none of the above") exchange harpoons barbed with accusations about the identity of ideology with methodology and the incompatibility of "critical theory" with the shibboleth of objectivity. Despite or because of this anomie, diplomatic history has never been so imaginative as in the last decade—precisely when demands for its abolition or banishment to political science have been most strident.

This monograph was originally conceived as an investigation of French involvement in the Rhenish separatist episodes after World War I. While I recognized the centrality of the reparations problem and social strife in the politics and subsequent historiography of the period, I hoped to isolate the power political and security aspects of France's German policy. The weight of the evidence, not any theoretical assumptions about the determinants of foreign policy in industrial society, led me quickly to abandon this isolated approach. Even as I understood more clearly the complex interaction of all military, political, and economic issues affecting postwar Europe, I also concluded that no approach stressing the primacy of any one factor yielded a satisfactory approximation of French policy-making and the pattern of international relations. Yet all approaches offered insights: nationalist foreign policy was in part a means of avoiding social conflict and reform at home; structural problems in industry and commerce were an important influence on political strategy; theoretical conceptions of French economic and military security and the requirements of the balance of power did emerge in part independently of domestic pressures; personality and the incoherence of bureaucratic planning did limit and direct policy formation. In short, the course of international history in this period depended as much on policy as on process.

There is not now and ought never to be a "new diplomatic history." To seal the study of international relations within a programmatic methodological or interpretive cell would restore the limitations im-

posed by the purveyors of the primacy of foreign policy and many of their critics alike. The history of international relations ought to suggest a finite realm of subject matter, but not of evidence or approach. For the subject of diplomatic history—the formulation and execution of foreign policy over time—is singularly resistant to inflexible modes of explanation. Whatever his predilections, the diplomatic historian searches in practice for the restraints and imperatives operating on policy-makers. In so doing, he is in the best position to perceive that the statesman exists in an interface between two systems—the international polity and the domestic polity, each with its own patterns of development and response, each with its social, economic, and technical imperatives. When foreign policy and its effects are viewed as the product of this interface, the assertion of a “primacy”—foreign, domestic, economic, or ideological—is revealed as artificial. Why is it necessary to deny the existence of an autonomous international balance of power system in order to acknowledge the importance—occasionally primary—of socio-economic structure and conflict, whether revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, in the formation of foreign policy in a given state at a given time? To understand the domestic roots of foreign policy *and* the role of the international political and economic system in transmitting the effects of that policy; to ask not only why the statesman chose one policy over another, but why other options were closed to him—this is how I came to view my task as I confronted the complexities of European stabilization after 1918, in which foreign and domestic politics and economics were inextricably linked.

A dissertation and first book probably constitute the most valuable learning experience of an aspiring historian. More than in any classroom or other project, it is here that the novice confronts the technical, interpretive, and stylistic problems of historical writing. It is with this deep sense of personal enrichment that I record my acknowledgments. My thanks go first to my mentors at the University of Chicago: F. Gregory Campbell, who as patient teacher and friend encouraged my pursuit of the history of international relations, and William H. McNeill, whose breadth of interpretive insight and stylistic guidance cannot be praised enough. Despite his vast responsibilities, he always makes time—hours and hours of it—for students. To have worked under Professor McNeill is a great privilege.

The most welcome help is often help unlooked-for. In the course of my research I was greatly aided by M. Jean Laloy, Directeur des Archives et de la Documentation, M. Maurice Degros, Conservateur en Chef, and the archival staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris; P.

H. Desneux and the archival staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Exterior Commerce in Brussels; the staffs of the Service historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes, the Archives of the Senate and National Assembly, the Archives Nationales, and Institut de France, Paris, the Public Record Office, London, and the Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels. I am also indebted to Agnes Peterson and the staff of the Hoover Institution, Stanford. Mme. Renée Duval-Deschanel kindly permitted me to view the Paul Deschanel papers, M. André Lorion the André Tardieu papers, and M. Stanislas Mangin the Charles Mangin papers.

Special gratitude is due to those friends and colleagues who were generous with advice, ideas, and encouragement. I thank Denise Artaud of the University of Paris and Jacques Bariéty of the University of Strasbourg, whose suggestions for research and lines of inquiry were invaluable. I also thank my contemporaries in the floating community of scholars in Paris: Peter Berger, Edward D. Keeton, David K. Miller, and Joel Blatt, all of whom directed my attention to materials that contributed to the final text. Charles S. Maier, Duke University, deserves mention for his friendly oral criticism and his own exemplary research in this period.

I am greatly indebted to Jon Jacobson, University of California/Irvine, and Gerhard L. Weinberg, University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill, for their careful reading of the manuscript and expert criticism. Gerald D. Feldman, University of California/Berkeley, offered valuable advice regarding revision and the innumerable details of the publishing process. I thank Émile Karafiol of the University of Chicago and Thomas C. Childers, University of Pennsylvania, for moral support beyond the call of duty, and John G. Gagliardo, Boston University, whose teaching and friendship over a decade have been my assurance that history is a worthwhile pursuit.

M. Jacques Pennès, Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, graciously approved the use of the "Sennep et Gassier" cartoons as illustrations. Adrienne Morgan drew the map and Peter Stern helped in preparing the index. Grace O'Connell expertly typed the final manuscript. I also thank the Committee on Research of the University of California/Berkeley for providing funds to support preparations of the manuscript. To all the above I owe the contributions of this work; errors of fact or interpretation are my own.

*Berkeley, California
April 1978*

ABBREVIATIONS

A.A.	Auswärtiges Amt (German Foreign Office)
A.F.R.	Armée Française du Rhin
A.G.R.	Archives Générales du Royaume (Royal Archives, Brussels)
A.N.	Archives Nationales (Paris)
A.O.B.	Armée d'Occupation Belge
B.G.	Besetzte Gebiete (<i>occupied territories</i>)
B.N.	Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris)
B.R.	Büro des Reichsministers
B.SS.	Büro des Staatssekretärs
CAB	Cabinet Minutes (British)
CdR	Commission des Réparations
Corr.	Correspondence (collection)
C.S.D.N.	Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale
C.S.G.	Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre
D.B.F.P.	Documents on British Foreign Policy
Des.	Despatch
Dos.	Dossier
E.M.	État-Major
E.M.A.	État-Major de l'Armée
E.M.G.	État-Major Général
F.O.	Foreign Office (British)
F.R.U.S.	Foreign Relations of the United States
G.Q.G.	Grand Quartier Général
H.C.F.	Haut-Commissariat Français
H.C.I.T.R.	Haut-Commission Interalliée des Territoires Rhénans
I.F.	Institut de France (Paris)
Let.	Letter
M.A.E.	Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (French Foreign Ministry)
M.A.E. Bel.	Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Belgian Foreign Ministry)
M.G.	Ministère de Guerre (French War Ministry)
M.I.C.U.M.	Mission Interalliée du Contrôle des Usines et Mines
Pap.	Papiers (collection)
PdC	Président du Conseil (French Premier)
Pers. Let.	Personal letter
P.R.O.	Public Records Office (London)
P.-V.	Procès-Verbal (-aux), minutes of proceedings
Rive Gauche	Left Bank of the Rhine
Tel.	Telegram

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1914-1924

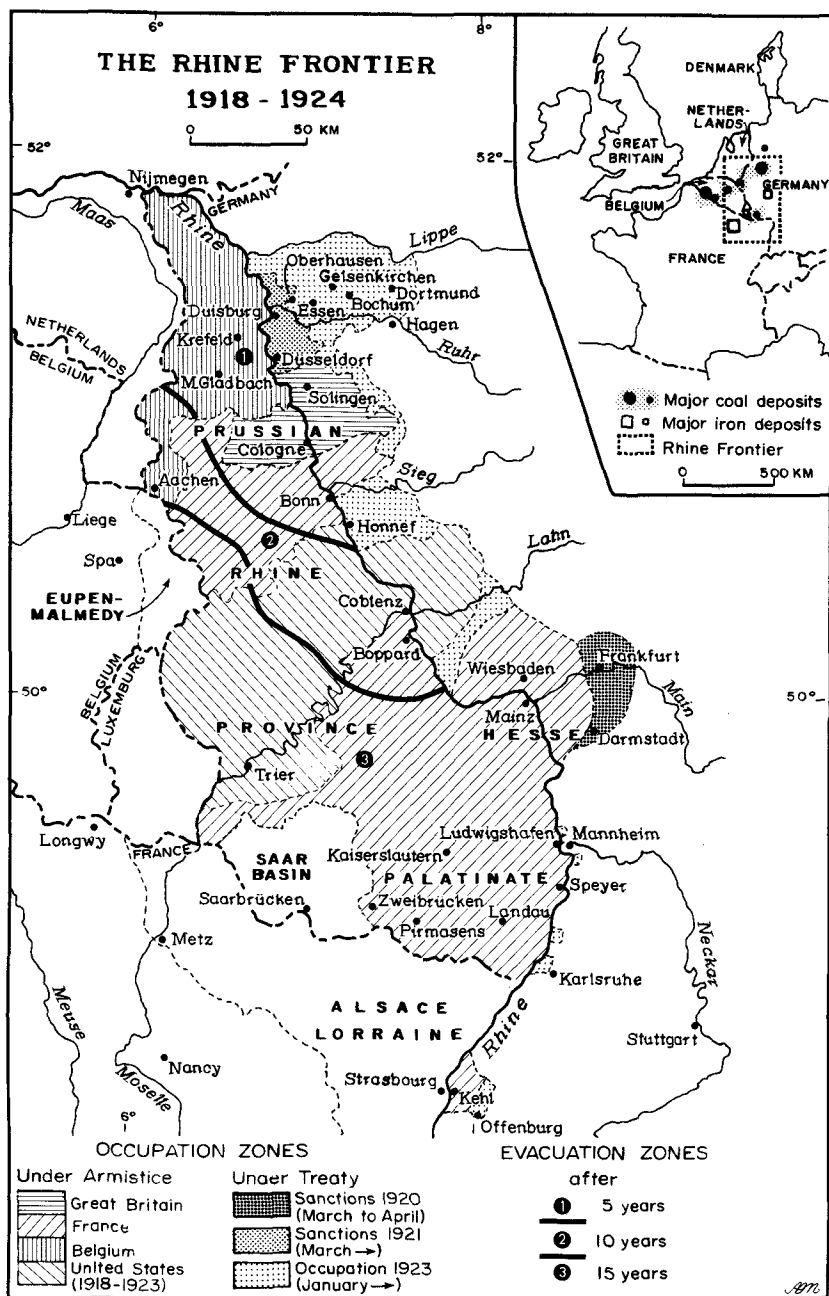


FIGURE 1. The Rhine Frontier, 1918-1924.

INTRODUCTION

"It was in 1915 the old world ended," observed D. H. Lawrence. Surely it was the casualty lists of Ypres, Champagne, and Loos, confirming the awful suspicion that the opening slaughters of the Great War were not aberrations but would be repeated again and again in hideous hyperbole, that shocked the European consciousness out of past illusion. A sense of Europe's agony, and of the victors' determination that such a war must never recur, provides the starting point for an understanding of the interwar years. As in the Atomic Age of the 1950s, the technology of destruction seemed to have outdistanced man's power for social organization, for control of his own behavior. The toys of war had become too dangerous for men to remain immature enough to use them. The leaders of the Paris Peace Conference were united in their desire to fashion a sophisticated peace, designed not to gird their states for future conflicts but to prevent them.¹

Given the common intent of the victorious coalition, why did the Paris Peace Conference fail to restore political stability to the European continent? In part, it was because the Treaty of Versailles was not designed to be a European peace. Both Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George represented extra-continental empires with worldwide interests. The eclipse of Europe itself was manifested in Wilson's dream of a world system. Europe would merge into the world to be governed, not by principles derived from its own experience, but by universal intuitive principles—the Open Door, national self-determination, and collective security. The balance of power itself—and not its breakdown under the force of nationalism—was deemed responsible for the war. Frustration, not indulgence, of nationalism was the sin to avoid. Only reluctantly did the Anglo-Saxon powers commit themselves to the future defense of France—less willing yet were they to guarantee a European balance. The purpose of the German peace

¹ The concept of "hyperbolic war" is developed in Raymond Aron, *The Century of Total War* (Garden City, N.Y., 1954), pp. 19-22. These general remarks on the agency of the First World War and the role of the Paris Peace Conference in the transition from a "European" to a "world" political system are inspired in part by the judgments of Pierre Renouvin, *Le Traité de Versailles* (Paris, 1969); Helmut Rössler, *Ideologie und Machtpolitik, 1919: Plan und Werk der Pariser Friedenskonferenz* (Göttingen, 1966); Hajo Holborn, *The Political Collapse of Europe* (New York, 1951); Ludwig Dehio, *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1967), and *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle* (New York, 1962), in addition to the works cited below.

was to liquidate the war as a prelude to a new world order, not a European one.²

Had European politics *per se* been transcended? To be sure, from the vantage point of the second postwar era, the great tragedy of Versailles seemed to be the defection of America, which threw Europe back on its own resources and permitted the renaissance of German power. But the American political defection need not have been so damaging. Just as the European balance of the nineteenth century had rested on division and balance within Germany, so the world's repose depended on balance within Europe. Yet French pleas at the Peace Conference for a weakening of Germany as a *prelude* to supranational organization were incomprehensible to the Anglo-American leaders. They suspected France of seeking hegemony, or at least believed French continental preoccupations to be antithetical to the requirements of world order. But by renouncing the balance of power, they granted Germany's preliminary war aim. The Reich had sought to escape the bounds of the continent by consolidating it, to form the basis for *Weltpolitik*. France was a power in full retreat. Throughout the interwar years, she sought, not to project continental power onto the world stage, but to focus what world power she could—colonial armies and Anglo-American alliances—onto a narrow stage, to restore balance on the Rhine. The Anglo-Americans' resistance to France's European policy, as well as the vacuity of their own world policies, determined the fragility of European stabilization in the interwar years.

Another great misunderstanding among the well-intentioned peacemakers concerned the requirements of postwar social and economic stability. Why did the Peace Conference not lay the foundations for economic reconstruction on which a political settlement could rest? Why did the Big Three fail to reconcile their own economic interests, to regulate the interallied debts to free investment capital, to stabilize

² For the American conceptions of the task of the Peace Conference, see above all Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven, 1959), and *The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking, 1918-1919* (New York, 1967); also N. Gordon Levin, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York, 1968); Klaus Schwabe, *Deutsche Revolution und Wilsonfrieden* (Düsseldorf, 1971), and the standard works on the American delegation in Paris: Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement*, 3 vols. (Garden City, 1922-1923); Edward M. House and Charles Seymour, eds., *What Really Happened at Paris, 1918-1919* (New York, 1921); Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist* (Baltimore, 1957); Seth P. Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Princeton, 1961).

The phrase "Anglo-Saxon powers" was used constantly by the French themselves to refer to Britain and the United States. I have retained it in the text in order to convey French sensitivity to the waxing power and cultural impact of the English-speaking nations.

exchange rates torn loose from the gold standard, to reintegrate Germany into the European economy without threatening the security and prosperity of the beleaguered victors? John Maynard Keynes accused the Allied delegations of having no interest in or understanding of the requirements of economic recovery. Without a reforging of prewar economic ties, Keynes held, attempts at political stabilization were chimerical. The Big Three, led in this respect by Wilson, did not agree with Keynes's priorities. They did not disinterest themselves in economic questions, but they subordinated them to political ones. Economic aid and investment would be premature unless Europe first made an end to revolution and international strife.³

In fact, both Keynes and Wilson failed to understand the degree to which politics and economics were intertwined in such questions as the Allied war debts, German reparations, or industrial raw materials distribution. The Big Three elected to put off economic decisions for months or years, but the terms of the financial settlement with Germany, and among the victors themselves, would determine power relationships in postwar Europe as much as the boundary settlement. Finally, the victors and vanquished alike, pressured by public opinion anxious for "business as usual," hastened to dismantle the command economies forged during the war. But the World War had clearly shown national economic strength to be the business of governments, responsible for national security and prosperity, and not of capitalists alone. At the very moment when diplomacy assumed the task of postwar economic stabilization, governments relinquished much of their power to act in this sphere.⁴

Failing to account for the degree of politicization in economic relations, the Big Three failed to agree at Paris on a strategy for the preservation of the peace they craved. Wilson envisioned a world of peaceful evolution based on international law and self-determination, backed by collective security. In combination with his Open Door economic program, this necessitated the rapid reintegration of an economically un-

³ See Denise Artaud, *La reconstruction de l'Europe, 1919-1929*, Clio Series (Paris, 1973), pp. 9-17.

⁴ The problem of economic demobilization is now beginning to attract scholarly interest. See Gerald D. Feldman, "Economic and Social Problems of the German Demobilization, 1918-1919," *Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 1 (March 1975), with comments. On the political problems and economic pressures for decontrol in France, Germany, and Britain, see the older works by Maurice Baumont, *La grosse industrie allemande et le charbon* (Paris, 1928); M. Olivier, *La politique du charbon, 1914-1921* (Paris, 1922); and Étienne Clémentel, *La France et la politique économique interalliée* (Paris, 1931). More recent treatments include R. H. Tawney, "The Abolition of Economic Controls, 1918-1921," *Economic History Review* 13, no. 1 (1943); and Susan Armitage, *The Politics of Decontrol of Industry: Britain and the United States* (London, 1969).

fettered German national state into the councils of the victors. But the American government itself refused to extend the financial aid that could have stabilized the world economy without new European sacrifices and concomitant social unrest. Instead, Wilson endorsed a punitive peace—not permanently to weaken Germany, but to serve as an example for would-be aggressors. The ambiguity of the President's public utterances led all parties in France to see in Wilson an advocate of what they considered a "just peace."⁵

Within the British delegation, Keynes and others argued for a mild peace with Germany, coupled with a general annulment of debts to promote world recovery. They represented the youthful and brilliant generation of economists in Europe and America who placed their faith in economic expertise as the technology of world peace. In their view political conflicts were trivial and ought not to interfere with the demands of "the economy"; right-thinking economists could synthesize the antidotes to war—prosperity and trade—if the poisons of political rivalry were driven or bled from the body of nations. "Expert" considerations, however, always seemed to dictate advantage for Germany and sacrifice for the bloodied victors. Why had the war been fought if German economic domination on the continent was now seen as natural and unavoidable? In the coming years, French governments fearful of, but resigned to, German recovery demanded prior political guarantees. But at the same time industrial and financial sectors in all countries invoked their importance to "the economy" to avoid the sacrifices required for European political detente.

Contrary to the Keynesian trend in the British delegation was the attitude expressed by Sir Eric Geddes, First Lord of the Admiralty: "We must squeeze the German lemon until the pips squeak." The slogan was appealing to the electorate and the policy was calculated to compensate Britain for the loss of her financial and maritime supremacy to the United States. Reacting to the echo of its own wartime propaganda, the British delegation at Paris contributed some of the harsher clauses of the treaty, particularly in reparations. But the resultant treaty was all the more problematical for the insincerity of the British contribution. After 1919 the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade sought to revive their German trading partner quickly and neutralize the French policy of "guarantees."⁶

⁵ The confusion in France over the true Wilsonian attitude toward the peace with Germany is analyzed in depth by Pierre Miquel, *La paix de Versailles et l'opinion publique française* (Paris, 1972).

⁶ Major works on British policy at the peace conference include Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations*; Harold I. Nelson, *Land and Power: British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-1919* (London, 1963); David Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, 2 vols. (London, 1938).

To the French survivors there was no doubt that France's contribution to the war effort had been the greatest. She had provided the battleground, a generation of men, her national treasure. The pillars of her prewar foreign policy—a disproportionately large and excellent army, the alliance with Russia offsetting Germany's demographic superiority, and the financial power that had always been the basis of French influence in a number of strategic areas—had all been swept away. French casualties were the highest per capita of any belligerent, which, given her feeble natality, increased the disparity with a "Germany of seventy millions." A shrewd, large-scale foreign investor in 1914, France now owed 22 billion gold francs to her allies. Finally, a wide swath of northern France was devastated, including important mining and industrial areas. In a war decided in a "storm of steel," underdeveloped and crippled France became largely dependent on foreign economic contributions. The French army, largest in Europe in 1919, was under pressure from public demands for a sharp cut in the term of service, from Allied accusations of militarism and calls for disarmament, and from the critical deficit in the French budget. But military force would be needed to oblige Germany to pay reparations, lest the whole cost of repairing the devastation fall to the French treasury. Peace would bring no financial respite.

Who had foreseen a war in which victory proved more terrible than all the defeats of the past? If France had regained the Lost Provinces, the war nevertheless had evolved into a desperate fight for survival. If Germany had been thrown back in the end, peace only spawned in France a consciousness of increased peril, for it had failed to destroy the aggregation of demographic and industrial power that had upset the prewar balance. Instead, a war justified by the need to preserve France's Great Power position within the European system ended with the collapse of the system itself. The price of victory was the self-sufficiency the war had been fought to preserve.

Georges Clemenceau accordingly presented a peace program narrowly European in spirit. If he sought above all to preserve the war-time alliance, it was to focus Anglo-American power on the Rhine, to maintain the balance struck in 1918. But the opposition shown by Wilson and Lloyd George to the French proposals for security, reparations, and industrial relations meant that the French program was also contradictory. Fear and recognition of France's depleted resources dictated the necessity of transforming the Western alliance into a permanent anti-German instrument. To the extent that the Allies resisted such an interpretation of the alliance, France's adherence to their liberal program was irrelevant to her security and recovery. French ambitions, drawn from an unwillingness to accept that France had fallen

from the ranks of the Great Powers, demanded the deliverance of France from the trammels placed on her by the Western alliance. Given Anglo-American protection of a united Germany, France must seek alliances in Eastern Europe, use force to prevent a full revival of German strength, and resurrect a local balance of power.⁷

The Treaty of Versailles, therefore, was a product of conflicts among the victor nations and within their governments. It was a compromise among strategies for political stabilization and it charted no path at all for economic stabilization. If Clemenceau prevented immediate reintegration of the Reich at full economic capacity, he failed to win permanent material guarantees. Disarmament, reparations, economic constrictions, a fifteen-year occupation of the Rhineland—the safeguards were temporary and conditional. Above all, the treaty was self-consciously an interallied creation, dependent for its execution on continued Allied unity of purpose. As one statesman remarked, "The peace imposes Napoleonic conditions and seeks to execute them with Wilsonian methods."⁸

Since the treaty created no accepted "system" for postwar Europe, the Entente powers did not agree on an interpretation of its goals, or on the responsibility of the signatories for its execution. Allied unity did not survive the treaty's ratification. The moral strength of the political settlement depended on American association with it; all hopes for rapid economic recovery relied on American participation. With American failure to ratify, the treaty, which had already been condemned as insufficient by a wide spectrum of French opinion, became virtually *caduc*. In the wake of America's withdrawal, Britain, too, opposed reparations and hoped for political stabilization through promotion of Weimar democracy.

Given the disaffection in France with the Treaty of Versailles, and its rupture through the falling off of her allies, it would be surprising indeed if the shorthand description of postwar French policy, "integral

⁷ See Renouvin, *Le Traité de Versailles*; *idem*, *Histoire des relations internationales*, Vols. 7-8: *Les crises du XX^e siècle* (Paris, 1958); Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La politique extérieure de la France de 1914 à 1945* (Paris, 1965); *idem*, *Les relations franco-allemandes de 1914 à 1950* (Paris, 1967); Arnold Wolfers, *Britain and France between Two Wars* (New York, 1940); W. N. Jordan, *Great Britain, France, and the German Problem, 1919-1939* (London, 1943); Piotr Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies, 1919-1925* (Minneapolis, 1962); Kalervo Hovi, *Cordon Sanitaire or Barrière de l'Est? 1917-1919* (Turku, Finland, 1975); Georges Berlia, *Les problèmes internationaux de la sécurité de la France* (Paris, 1967); Maurice Baumont, *Les questions européennes en 1919* (Paris, 1956); Jay L. Kaplan, "France's Road to Genoa, 1921-1922" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1974); K. Paul Jones, "Stresemann and the Diplomacy of the Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970).

⁸ Pierre van Zuylen, *Les mains libres: La Politique extérieure de la Belgique, 1914-1940* (Brussels, 1950). The statesman was an unidentified Balkan delegate.

implementation of the treaty," accurately reflected reality. The treaty was mutilated; it held no magic for the rightist French parliament elected in November 1919. The only benefit to be salvaged from the wreck of Versailles was the right to act forcibly against Germany in case of default. Under growing pressure to exact reparations from Germany, to secure political guarantees of French security, to ensure the flow of raw materials, particularly coal and coke, needed to sustain French economic recovery, French governments grasped at their rights to sanctions, to force treaty execution, or to force a new settlement altogether.

As early as January 1920, French counsel wavered between a policy of treaty fulfillment and one of revisionism—French revisionism. The governments of the *Chambre bleu-horizon* rebelled against a treaty that left them dependent for the fulfillment of their most vital national interests on the whim of foreign powers. They struck out, tentatively at first, then with determination after the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, to rectify the nonsettlement of Versailles. They sought to replace the security system aborted by the Allies with a material system of territorial and economic alterations within Germany. They sought to replace the clumsy and unenforceable economic regime with one that would permit French metallurgy to recover as a partner and not a satellite of German industry. They sought to force the Anglo-Americans, through economic pressure on Germany, to grant the financial settlement denied in 1919. But the goal of the various and uncoordinated policies that made up French revisionism was not hegemony, but security, and the resort to ultimate force in the occupation of the Ruhr came only after years of bluffing, pleading, and cajoling with Germany and the Allies, in an effort to secure what public and official opinion in France considered minimum guarantees. Integral implementation of the treaty was only one tactic tried, discarded, and tried again during the frustrating years of European stabilization. It was the perceived needs of the postwar French state, not the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, that formed the basis of French foreign policy between 1918 and 1924.

Policy in the occupied Rhineland provides the most convenient focus for viewing the development of French revisionism and the interplay of revisionist policies with that of strict execution. For it was the presence of French military force on the Rhine by virtue of the Armistice and treaty that afforded French governments the opportunity to exert force against Germany. Still more crucial is the fact that the political and economic statute of the Rhineland formed the primary target for French revisionist policies. It was through political separation of the Left Bank of the Rhine that French peacemakers first sought

permanent security against Germany, and that means was never fully abandoned. In France's struggle to collect reparations and to achieve a secure *modus vivendi* between French and German metallurgies, the occupied Rhineland and Ruhr provided the ideal zone for interference with German economic life. But the interdependency of the Western Allies, increased significantly by the costs of war, meant that all questions bearing on European stabilization were linked. Just as the political benefits to be sought through control of the Left Bank of the Rhine affected French policy in reparations, so did the debacle of French finances and the need for Anglo-American financial support limit French pretensions on the Rhine. Finally, faced with unanimous resistance to their demands and domestic lobbying for a Rhenish policy, French governments flirted with security through subterfuge, again in the Rhineland. Running almost silently through the years after 1919, only to burst forth in 1923 and spill onto the lofty plateau of power politics, was the undercurrent of Rhenish separatism. The abiding hope for German dismemberment best exemplifies the schizophrenic policy of France after World War I: the policy of fear and ambition.

If the Treaty of Versailles failed to supply the French with a blueprint for stabilization, neither did it charm the statesmen of the other interested powers. The British, Germans, and Americans, as well as the Belgians and the Little Entente on occasion, opposed French initiatives with their own familiar brand of revisionism: progressive liberation of Germany from the strictures of the treaty that left her vulnerable to French pressure. The process of stabilization became a struggle between strategies for revision of Versailles, not between simple execution and revision. But the French effort to achieve economic as well as political goals on the international stage through the application of state power conjured up the opposition of indigenous economic elites and sharpened domestic conflict—in France, Germany, and elsewhere—concerning the prerogatives of the state in dictating national economic policy. The heightened conflict between state and interest groups after the experience of war economies and demobilization contributed to the paralysis of postwar diplomacy.

Thus the focus of French Rhineland policy projects onto a larger screen revealing the diplomatic and social instability of the *après-guerre*. Until recently, the years after 1919 attracted little attention from historians. The war guilt question fascinated the diplomatic historians of the interwar decades; the rise of Hitler, the origins of World War II, and the Cold War dominated the historiography of the 1950s and 1960s. To understand the 1920s it was enough to demonstrate the clash of views at the Peace Conference. English-language writers sympathetic to Wilsonianism and receptive to "expert" denunciations of

the peace condemned France's "harsh" German policy as destructive of efforts to fashion a "new diplomacy" and injurious to German democracy. Within the context of the Hitler and World War II debates, the 1920s were often dismissed as a kind of Indian summer of politics as usual before the Depression and the Nazi onslaught of the 1930s. They were a false truce or an era of illusions—a hiatus, rather than a comprehensible stage in the transition to a world political and economic order.⁹ Only in the last five years has a new generation of historians begun the task of reëxamination of what is now revealed as a crucial turning point in European history.

Several contemporaneous developments demand a reëvaluation of the early 1920s. The first is the maturation of approaches to international relations gauging the interplay of foreign and domestic policy and of social and economic pressures in the formulation of foreign policy. One need not deny the role of personality, power politics, and the autonomous bureaucracy in foreign policy formation in order to assert the role of structural economic and domestic political forces in defining the parameters of state action. French postwar strategy cannot be understood without reference to those domestic constraints in France and Germany that precluded a German policy of fulfillment and gave France little alternative to one of coercion. A second circumstance permitting a new view of the first postwar period is the perspective offered by the European experience in the second postwar period. Not only is the observer struck by the similarity of the problems of industrial integration and security after the two wars; he is also obliged to recognize the subordination of economic interest to political preconditions in the search for secure Franco-German economic unity. The third and indispensable circumstance permitting a fresh look at this period is the availability at long last of the French diplomatic documents released by the Quai d'Orsay in 1972. For the first time we are able to examine French policy from French sources rather than filtered through those of the other powers. It is this conjunction of new approaches, perspective, and documentation that provides the opportunity and justification for this book.

The recent interest in the early 1920s began with the appearance of Ludwig Zimmermann's *Frankreichs Ruhrpolitik* in 1971.¹⁰ Written

⁹ Characterization of the 1920s as an era of "illusion" seemed especially appropriate to historians writing from the French perspective. See Jacques Chastenet, *L'histoire de la Troisième République*, Vol. 5: *Les années d'illusion, 1918-1931* (Paris, 1960); Pierre Renouvin, *Histoire des relations internationales*, Vol. 7 (Paris, 1957); J.-B. Duroselle, *Histoire des relations internationales de 1919 à nos jours* (Paris, 1953); René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, 1973).

¹⁰ Ludwig Zimmermann, *Frankreichs Ruhrpolitik von Versailles bis zum Dawesplan* (Göttingen and Frankfurt, 1971).

from documents captured during the Second World War, Zimmermann's monograph was composed under a *Kriegsmentalität* that renders its interpretation, a one-sided condemnation of French "imperialism," untenable. Stephen Schuker's recent intense examination of the French financial crisis of 1924 and the origin of the Dawes Plan not only corrects Zimmermann's view, but provides a valuable insight into the confused and incoherent process of French decision-making. Above all, Schuker's work indicates that, just as the diplomacy of reparations must be seen within the overall context of the postwar political settlement, balance of power politics were subordinated in the 1920s to the perceived needs of the international monetary system and the politics of international finance, an interpretation suggested by Karl Polanyi over thirty years ago.¹¹

The role of international finance—and financiers—in determining the political as well as economic shape of postwar Europe suggests a new look at the socio-economic origins of Germany's hyperinflation and German budgetary and foreign policy in the 1920s.¹² Ernst Laubach, Hermann Rupieper, and Gerald Feldman, among others, have demonstrated the agency of economic interest groups and the government itself in prolonging the postwar inflation that stymied both execution of the Treaty of Versailles and significant social reforms.¹³ Rather than reparations undermining the German currency and social stability, therefore, German fiscal irresponsibility can be seen as sabotaging a moderate and fulfillable reparations bill. Marc Trachtenberg has demonstrated the moderation of French reparations policy at the Paris Peace Conference and hypothesized why Anglo-American historians have been blind to the evidence for so long.¹⁴

¹¹ Stephen A. Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe* (Chapel Hill, 1976). Cf. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, 1944), especially Chapter 2.

¹² On the question of continuity in German foreign policy, 1871-1945, and its domestic origins, see Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of The Third Reich* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970), who digests the contributions of V. R. Berghahn, Fritz Fischer, Andreas Hillgruber, H.-J. Jacobsen, Bernd Martin, Hans Rosenberg, Theodor Schieder, Michael Stürmer, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and others.

¹³ Ernst Laubach, *Die Politik der Kabinette Wirth 1921/22* (Lübeck, 1968); Hermann Rupieper, "Politics and Economics: The Cuno Government and Reparations 1922-1923" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1974); Gerald D. Feldman, *Iron and Steel in the German Inflation, 1916-1923* (Princeton, 1977). See also Jean-Claude Favez, *Le Reich devant l'occupation franco-belge de la Ruhr en 1923* (Geneva, 1969); Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Adenauer in der Rheinlandpolitik nach dem ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1966); the numerous seminal articles in Hans Mommsen, Dietmar Petzina, and Bernd Weisbrod, eds., *Industrielles System und Politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1974).

¹⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, "French Reparations Policy, 1918-1921" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1974). The emerging new consensus on the modera-

Balancing and in some ways transcending all these works is Charles S. Maier's comprehensive analysis of domestic stabilization in Western Europe after the war.¹⁵ Maier seeks the response patterns of bourgeois Europe to the postwar threat of reform and revolution, and traces the transformation in the relation between state executive power, parliamentary parties, and competing domestic pressure groups. He argues for a drift away from democratic pluralism toward corporatist solutions and reveals French and German foreign policies as expressions in part of domestic conflict. The common thrust of these recent works is toward a new synthesis of this complex period of restructuring. Everyone recognized that one barrier to a stable order in Europe was the German Problem—the threat to the security and economic autonomy of the lesser states of Europe posed by the military and economic potential of united Germany. How could it be solved? A firm commitment of American power to the maintenance of continental stability was not forthcoming;¹⁶ the “pacification” of Germany through the democratic redistribution of power in society (assuming such a linkage is justified at all) was blocked by the leverage of conservative corporatist groups. One is left with the much maligned policy of permanent restrictions on the sovereignty of the German national state—the French solution. Such coercive denial of national self-determination was anathema to historians writing in the Wilsonian tradition, yet since World War II such limitation of sovereignty as prelude to international cooperation has permitted the substantial integration of European states and helped to give the old continent its longest period of peace since 1914.

This is not the place to speculate on the wisdom or folly of past counsels, or indeed whether interwar Europe—like Humpty-Dumpty—was beyond repair. But reassessment of the century's first postwar period is nonetheless overdue. What is still lacking is an analysis of French policy toward Germany that encompasses the entire period of peacemaking through the occupation of the Ruhr; that integrates poli-

tion of the reparations bill and self-conscious German sabotaging of its fulfillment became evident through two American Historical Association conferences in Washington, D.C., December 1976: “Reparations Reconsidered” and “Problems of European Integration, 1919-1929.”

¹⁵ Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe* (Princeton, 1975).

¹⁶ New studies of American policy toward Germany and Europe after 1918 have interred the myth of American “isolationism” but left open questions about the motives for American investment in Europe in the 1920s. Cf. Schwabe, *Deutsche Revolution*; Werner Link, *Amerikanische Stabilisierungspolitik in Deutschland, 1921-1932* (Düsseldorf, 1970); Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920-1933* (Boston, 1971). The forthcoming doctoral thesis by Denise Artaud promises a thorough examination of American war debt and financial policy toward Europe in the 1920s.

tics, economics, and finance; and that seeks to describe French policy in its own terms. This study helps alleviate that need with a first synthesis seen from the standpoint of the power that had the most vital interest and took the first initiatives in the search for a solution to the German Problem.

BEYOND ALSACE-LORRAINE: FRENCH WAR AIMS ON THE EASTERN FRONTIER, 1914-1918

France entered the war with an offensive military doctrine but a defensive purpose. The expansionist French war aims revealed in 1919 evolved from the nature and course of the conflict itself.¹ For the strategic and economic problems that French war aims were to counter in 1918-1919 did not exist in 1914. First, the revelation of the true extent of Germany's power and intentions, next the sacrifices demanded by an unforeseen war of attrition and materiel, then the irreversible dependence on foreign economic and financial power, and finally the collapse of the dynasties in Eastern Europe and the continental order—these factors, developing gradually or only gradually perceived in the course of the war, obliged French governments to endorse war aims beyond the mere recovery of the Lost Provinces, Alsace-Lorraine. Indeed, all the needs of postwar France seemed to point to the efficacy and even dire necessity of extension of French power into Western Germany itself. There Germany's strength could be tapped and transused into the "anemic victim of her aggression."

The French Rhenish war aims, a compendium of "traditional" desires for annexations, protectorates, and commercial strictures, were unaffected by the dissemination of Wilsonian ideals in 1917.² French

¹ As yet there is no study of French war aims to compare even remotely with the exhaustive research on German aims in Fritz Fischer's *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967), the translation of *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf, 1961). Pierre Renouvin made a first examination of the problem and laid down the grand lines for future research in "Les buts de guerre du gouvernement français, 1914-1918," *Revue historique* 235, no. 477 (1966). See also Nelson, *Land and Power*; A.J.P. Taylor, "The War Aims of the Allies in the First World War," in *Politics in Wartime and Other Essays* (London, 1964); Douglas Johnson, "French War Aims and the Crisis of the Third Republic," in *War Aims and Strategic Policy in the Great War*, Barry Hunt and Adrian Preston, eds. (London, 1977).

² Discussion in this chapter is limited to official (i.e., governmental) war aims, and does not treat the announced programs of opposition groups such as the S.F.I.O. To be sure, the governments of Alexandre Ribot and Paul Painlevé in 1917-1918 were obliged to pay heed to the nonannexionist sentiment prevalent on the Left in the Chamber. See Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy*, pp. 157-177, 199-214. Evidence concerning the extent and nature of war aims formulation during this period is unfortunately scanty, the bulk of the diplomatic archives having been destroyed during the Second World War. My argument for the essential continuity of French war aims is based, therefore, on the unaltered recognition of the need for extensive "guarantees" against German resurgence after the war. What form those guarantees were to take for Ribot or Painlevé is unclear, although the difference between the war aims of these cabinets and those of Briand and later of Clemenceau seems to be one of degree rather than kind.

governments tactfully concealed the extent of their claims against Germany or cloaked them in Wilsonian rhetoric until 1919. But the advent of Wilsonianism did encourage the formulation of another body of French war aims, directed not against Germany but at France's own allies. Each new loan approved or ton of coal imported to support a total war on French soil revealed to the official consciousness with growing clarity the likely condition of postwar France. Victory might be won, Germany might even be rendered harmless, but what would become of France, mangled and destitute? Demands on Germany must be matched by demands on the Allies—"war aims" of an entirely new ilk. France must be assured continued unity of purpose, financial and economic solidarity with the Anglo-Saxon powers, if she were to survive the peace. In this context, Wilson's apparent internationalism was not entirely unwelcome.

By 1918 the government of Clemenceau had developed two sets of war aims—traditional aims to be extracted from its enemy, and transcendent aims to be begged from its friends. The old requirements of peace demanded the first if European stability were to endure; the new requirements of war demanded the second if recovery were to be achieved at all. His failure to achieve either set of war aims—German disruption or Allied unity—earned Clemenceau the vitriol of his allies and his countrymen alike. But the scope and duality of French war aims were only a measure of the enormity of France's sacrifice and the sudden inadequacy of her own resources to perpetuate her status as a Great Power.

THE RHENISH QUESTION

The essential war aim, supported by the entire spectrum of French opinion, was the restitution of Alsace-Lorraine. It was a justification of the war and a rallying cry for the embattled nation. But the course of the opening battles convinced French observers that war aims had to be based on containment of Germany, whatever it might require. After the stabilization of the Western front in early 1915, the emerging "war aims bloc" in Parliament, confident of ultimate victory, argued the need for further claims against Germany. In a series of articles, nationalist deputy and *littérateur* Maurice Barrès opened the campaign for French war aims on the Left Bank of the Rhine. Postwar France would need a buffer against German aggression. The separation of the Rhineland would provide it, as well as reduce the Reich's economic and demographic strength to that of her neighbors.

Such strategic arguments quickly produced echos. But Barrès' per-

sonal contribution to the French "Rhine" literature was his justification of annexation or "organization" of the Left Bank by France on racial and cultural grounds.³ The cis-rhenian provinces, Franco-German battleground for a thousand years, fell under Prussian control at the Congress of Vienna and had remained unquestionably German for a century. But Barrès revived the myth that the Rhineland was an unwilling captive of Berlin. The Rhenish population, being of Celtic origin, Catholic faith, and Latin culture, was antagonistic to Germanic, Protestant, and authoritarian Prussia. If given the opportunity to choose, Barrès believed, the Rhineland would opt for republican France as in Revolutionary times. In the atmosphere of war, respected French historians hastened to elaborate the myth of Franco-Rhenish affinity. Ernest Lavisse, Alphonse Aulard, and Édouard Driault were among the most distinguished who lent academic blessing to Barrès' thesis.⁴ Capturing the imagination of the French Right, the military, and friends of the Church, the Rhenish myth awakened dreams of French expansion to the Rhine.

The government resisted the early calls for an enunciation of French war aims. Premier René Viviani instructed the war censor in February and April 1915 to forbid all published discussion of the subject. Articles concerning the peace conditions, he warned, could create an annoying movement of opinion.⁵ The government certainly feared circulation of ideas that could foment agitation for a separate peace. But the opposite could also be dangerous. Propagation of ambitious ideas would invite foreign and domestic accusations of French imperialism, or lead the public to expect a peace that might prove unattainable. Silence was the only reasonable counsel.

The government extended this policy to the alliance as a whole. In October 1914 Russian Ambassador Alexander Izvolski requested an exchange of views on war aims, but French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé insisted it was "too early to sell the bearskin." Nevertheless, Izvolski was convinced that while French territorial ambitions did not extend beyond Alsace-Lorraine, France's essential goal was the destruction of the German Empire and the greatest possible weakening

³ Barrès' major writings on the Rhine can be found in Maurice Barrès, *L'appel du Rhin: La France dans les pays rhénans* (Paris, 1919), and *Les grands problèmes du Rhin* (Paris, 1930).

⁴ French wartime and post-armistice literature advocating the separation of the Rhineland from the Reich or the destruction of German unity appears in the bibliography. One instructive feature of the propaganda, whose authors ranged from Sorbonne professors to nationalist crackpots, is the absence of *la gloire* and national expansion as justifications. Liberation of the Rhine and restoration of European balance through prevention of German hegemony are the common themes.

⁵ Pierre Renouvin, "Les buts de guerre," p. 7.

of Prussia.⁶ The French ambassador in Petrograd, Maurice Paléologue, suggested informally that *France might seek to extend her influence beyond Alsace-Lorraine into the Rhineland*. In March 1915 the Tsar gave his blessing: "Take Mainz, take Coblenz, go farther if you judge it useful."⁷ But when an interallied conference was suggested, French President Raymond Poincaré wrote Paléologue personally that "war aims ought not to be discussed. There will be a general *règlement* at the end." The ambassador responded bitterly: "When [Russian Foreign Minister Sergei] Sazonov asks me what impression the imperial confidences produce in the French government, I am forced to answer 'Je l'ignore absolument!'"⁸ Paris was concerned with keeping Russia in the war while resisting her ambitious war aims. But silence served France poorly. The Gallipoli expedition obliged Russia to demand assurances that yielded an Anglo-French promise of Constantinople to the Tsar, Turkish gains for Britain, and nothing for France.⁹

The year 1915 fixed the pattern of the war of attrition. To French generals and politicians who had looked for *élan* to prove decisive, the real elements of modern war revealed themselves: manpower, steel and the iron and coal to produce it, and above all, money. French industry was particularly ill-suited to support the war effort. Before 1914 it was dwarfed by the metallurgies of Germany and Britain. Critics even accused French steel men of "economic Malthusianism," of seeking to limit production for private benefit. But France was sorely lacking in coal, and its richest iron regions were now in the hands of the enemy. During the war, deficiencies could be made good through interallied cooperation, and 1915 and 1916 brought unprecedented experiments in military and economic coordination. Nascent command economies gradually replaced the free market in Britain and France; the two nations pooled their resources and, in the end, fueled their war machine with the financial power of a third, the United States. But peace would come eventually, with France left more dependent than ever on foreign powers for raw materials and investment capital. How could she recoup her loss of economic autonomy?

⁶ Tel. 497 Izvolski to Sazonov, 13 Oct. 1914: *Un livre noir: Diplomatie d'avant-guerre et de guerre d'après les documents des archives russes (1910-1917)* (Paris, n.d.), vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 20-21.

⁷ Tel. Paléologue to Delcassé, 4 Mar. 1915: France, Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères-Paris (hereafter cited as MAE), series Paix (hereafter cited as Paix), vol. 164, no. 18.

⁸ Let. Poincaré to Paléologue, 9 Mar. 1915; Let. Paléologue to Poincaré, 16 Apr. 1915: Stephen Pichon, unpublished private papers, Institut de France-Paris (hereafter cited as IF Corr. Pichon), vol. 4397, nos. 245-246.

⁹ France's war aims in the Near East were eventually recognized by her major allies in a tripartite accord of April 1916, in the bilateral Sykes-Picot Accord of 9 May 1916, and in the Ribot government's St. Jean de Maurienne agreement with Italy of April 1917.

The powerful combine of French iron and steel interests, the *Comité des Forges*, was preoccupied by the coal shortage. The recovery of the Lost Provinces with the rich Lorraine iron deposits would only aggravate matters. In a postwar struggle for markets, the high price French industry must pay for coal would cripple French firms at a time when they must be seeking ever wider markets for their expanded capacity. On 28 October 1915 Secretary-General Robert Pinot testified to French industrial needs before the Senate Committee of Economic Expansion. The return of Lorraine would increase French coal and coke deficits to thirty and seven million tons per year, respectively, leaving France gravely dependent on foreign combustibles for an industry basic to national power. If, on the other hand, France found a secure source of coal, the return of Lorraine could double her steel capacity and make her the equal of Germany. He urged that annexation of Alsace-Lorraine be matched by annexation of the Saar with its rich coal deposits.¹⁰ But Saar coal was unsuitable for coking and of little use to French metallurgy. In July 1916 the *Comité des Forges* adopted a formal resolution: "Any extension of French territory beyond Alsace-Lorraine and beyond the Saar could only simplify the problems that recovery of Lorraine would create for France by providing combustibles, new markets, and the transport facilities of the Rhine."¹¹ The failure to solve French coal problems, Pinot warned, would make France a second-rate power.¹²

The enhanced dependence of France revealed by modern war produced a reaction expressed in terms of power political war aims. The Rhineland now assumed economic as well as strategic importance. But the potentialities of the remarkable Allied cooperation also suggested themselves, and it was in 1916, before American belligerency, that French officials first considered a second approach to the problem of peace. Planning for postwar financial and economic problems fell almost by default to the French minister of commerce, Étienne Clémentel. While wartime premiers and their ministers of armaments and finance were preoccupied with the management of a total war, only Clémentel was free—at this early stage—to consider France's postwar requirements. His long tenure in office, from October 1915 to November 1919, lent continuity to French economic planning. He presciently expected little in the way of an indemnity once Germany

¹⁰ Robert Pinot, *Le Comité des Forges au service de la nation* (Paris, 1919), pp. 206-235.

¹¹ Renouvin, "Les buts de guerre," p. 10 (my italics). See also Ferdinand Friedensburg, *Kohle und Eisen im Weltkriege und in den Friedensschlüssen* (Munich and Berlin, 1934), pp. 34-39.

¹² Pinot, *Le Comité des Forges*, pp. 230-235.

was beaten, and based his hopes for French recovery on the preservation of Allied economic unity. Encouraged by the success of Allied wartime cooperation in raw materials distribution, price and marketing controls, as well as mutual exchange supports, Clémentel dreamed of making these permanent features of the world economy. Although he had developed a theoretical dislike for "the anarchy of the marketplace," his plans for postwar cooperation were founded on precise judgments of French interest. The German economy must be restrained, even as her military expansion was contained; the French economy must be subsidized by her great allies if it were not to collapse upon the shock of peace.¹³ These considerations led Clémentel to sponsor the Paris Economic Conference of June 1916, where the "second set" of French war aims was revealed. There the European Allies pledged to continue economic solidarity past an armistice, to act jointly against German economic resurgence and for their own reconstruction. To the extent that France must remain dependent, at least she might guarantee that her dependence would not be used against her by the enemy or by allies reverting to economic particularism.

French war aims policy shifted under the leadership of Aristide Briand, premier since October 1915. In his ministerial address, Briand confined his war aims to restitution of Alsace-Lorraine and Belgian independence, but he reversed this reticent policy in 1916. Under relaxed censorship, not only rightist papers but the *grands journaux* of Paris publicized war aims of wider scope. *L'Echo de Paris* and *Le Petit Journal* demanded annexation of the Saar. *Journal des Débats* proposed neutralization of the Rhineland, and in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, ex-Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux insisted on the dissolution of the German Reich. The idea found support in *Le Matin*, *Figaro*, and other mass circulation papers. A flood of new pamphlets appeared, going beyond those of the previous year in advocating Rhenish separation or the smashing of German unity. In the other direction, none questioned the government's program of Allied unity in peace as well as in war.¹⁴ Allied solidarity in reconstruction—meaning cheap coal, financial relief, and restrictions on German competition—was becoming a French war aim.

Military opinion developed in accordance with the journalists'

¹³ See Clémentel, *La France et la politique économique interalliée*. Clémentel's planning for the postwar period is described and analyzed in Trachtenberg, "French Reparations Policy," pp. 4-35.

¹⁴ A member of the Senate Foreign Affairs Commission, d'Estournelles de Constant, deplored the outpouring of "imperialist" sentiment and later accused the government of having subsidized the press campaign. Note, de Constant to M. de Selves (president of the commission), 27 June 1918: MAE Paix, vol. 165, nos. 2-17.

new ambitions. In August 1916 Poincaré asked Marshal Joseph Joffre to study conditions for an armistice. He returned instead a peace program: Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar to France, three or four independent states on the Left Bank of the Rhine, the breakup of Prussia within rump Germany.¹⁵ In October, the cabinet, military, and parliamentary leaders all gathered at the Elysée to consider French interests on the Rhine. No firm policy emerged, but whatever the solution adopted, Briand declared, France must have the major voice in its determination. But could this be achieved in the context of a grand coalition? The Belgian government-in-exile at Le Havre reacted first to the change in French policy. Baron Gaiffier d'Hestroy, ambassador in Paris, reported that Briand and the Quai d'Orsay under Director of Political Affairs Philippe Berthelot, had taken up the policy of Louis XIV. Domination of the Rhineland by France alone, he felt, meant encirclement for Belgium. Belgian interests were more in tune with the thoughts of veteran French diplomat Jules Cambon, who favored an independent Rhenish republic guaranteed by the Western alliance as a whole.¹⁶

The decision to air France's new ambitions and to seek Allied approval seems to have been dictated by a concatenation of pressures at the beginning of 1917. The German peace note, Wilson's request for definition of war aims, and fears about the reliability of the Russian war effort all suggested the need to press French claims. By 1917, the Allies had not even recognized Alsace-Lorraine as an Allied war aim, much less French interests on the Rhine. On 12 January 1917 Briand summarized the French view on "the general directions of future accords." Alsace-Lorraine was not the only question; without guarantees the recovery of those provinces would be in vain. But England, he wrote, must recognize that French goals in the Rhineland were not dreams of conquest. "The organization of these territories, their neutrality, their provisional occupation are to be envisioned," Briand insisted, "and it is important that France, being most directly concerned, have a preponderant voice in the solution of this grave question."¹⁷ The Rhenish question had become a diplomatic reality.

¹⁵ Joseph Joffre, *Mémoires du maréchal Joffre*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1932), II, 253.

¹⁶ Minute #6266, 4 Apr. 1915; Tel. #7676/2703 Gaiffier (Paris) to Beyens (Le Havre), 25 Sept. 1916; Tel. #7714/3050 Gaiffier to Beyens, 21 Oct. 1916; Tel. #7656/3020 Gaiffier to Beyens, 18 Oct. 1916; Belgium, Ministère belge des Affaires Étrangères-Brussels (hereafter cited as MAE Bel.), Classement B (hereafter cited as CLB) 348, dos. Sort de la Rhénanie, 1914-1919.

¹⁷ Des. Briand to P. Cambon, "Projet," 12 Jan. 1917: Stephen Pichon, unpublished private papers, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères-Paris (hereafter cited as MAE Pap. Pichon), vol. 4, nos. 101-108.

The occasion for an exchange of views with Russia arose during the Allied military conference in Petrograd in early 1917. French Minister of Colonies Gaston Doumergue carried instructions that looked beyond wartime strategy. Tsar Nicholas received him on 3 February and agreed that France needed firm guarantees against Germany, given the “phony humanitarianism” of Woodrow Wilson, which he likened to that of Theodore Roosevelt at the time of the Russo-Japanese war. Doumergue responded with the French plan: Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar to France, the Left Bank of the Rhine made into independent states temporarily occupied by France. The Tsar approved and Paléologue wired Paris for authorization to conclude a written accord. Philippe Berthelot saw “only advantage in consecrating by a written accord the conversations of Doumergue with the Tsar,” and he began drafting a project. It would refer in general terms to the support France and Russia would lend each other “to secure all military and industrial guarantees necessary to the security and economic development of the two nations.”¹⁸ But this was not the agreement signed at Petrograd.

Believing they had the Quai d’Orsay’s approval to proceed *in situ*, Paléologue and Doumergue plunged ahead with a draft of their own that detailed precisely the French program in Western Germany. When news of the pact reached the West, there was consternation. Camille Barrère, ambassador in Rome, and Paul Cambon protested the specification of French aims, and Cambon also feared the impact the note would have in London. To make matters worse, the Russian ambassador in Paris called at the Quai d’Orsay on 16 February with instructions to negotiate a similar formula for Russia’s western boundaries. The French considered their Rhineland agreement the *quid pro quo* for the 1915 Constantinople pact. Now Russia asked further concessions that posed an obstacle to an independent Poland. Paléologue insisted that he and Doumergue had promised no such exchange, but Briand and Izvolski took up the vague Paris draft promising mutual support and letters were exchanged on 10 March.¹⁹

Ten days later Briand fell from power. It was several months before the facts of the Doumergue mission were made known before a parlia-

¹⁸ Tel. Paléologue to Briand, 1 and 4 Feb. 1917; Tel. Berthelot to Paléologue, 9 Feb. 1917: MAE Paix, vol. 164, nos. 63-70, 81. See also Tel. 507 Petrograd to Izvolsky, 12 Feb. 1917; Foreign Ministry Note #26 to Paléologue, 14 Feb. 1917: Friedrich Stieve, ed., *Izvol’ski im Weltkriege, 1914-1917* (Berlin, 1925), pp. 211-213.

¹⁹ Note Pokrowski (Russian Foreign Minister) to Paléologue, 14 Feb. 1917; Des. P. Cambon to MAE, 17 Feb. 1917; Tel. Paléologue to Berthelot, 27 Feb. 1917: MAE Paix, vol. 164, nos. 98, 100, 119. Tel. 97-98, 101, Izvolsky to Petrograd, 10-11 Mar. 1917: *Livre noir*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 172-174, 186-187.

mentary inquest.²⁰ But by then an event of far greater impact had swallowed the war aims convention—the first Russian Revolution had ousted the Tsarist government. The provisional government's Foreign Minister Paul Miliukov labeled the exchange of letters "a mistake."²¹ The French government, now headed by Alexandre Ribot, could only agree.

The French war aims initiative fared no better in London. The first French agitation for a Rhenish policy in the spring of 1915 had produced a series of worried despatches from British Ambassador Lord Bertie that prepared the British government for the eventual French demarche. By December 1916, when Asquith was replaced as prime minister by Lloyd George, British peace plans for Europe hinged on the best means of restoring a balance of power.²² The return of Alsace-Lorraine, and some recognition of French interests in the Saar, could serve this purpose, but Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour and Lloyd George both saw French Rhineland ambitions as a destabilizing element. Balfour preferred to restore continental balance through commitment of British power in the form of a permanent Western alliance. The entry of the United States seemed to remove the need for this unpopular step. Envisioning a European peace based on nationalism and democracy, Lloyd George counted on American power to preclude future German mischief, while French Rhine schemes became all the more dangerous.²³ Paul Cambon waited until July 1917 to recite the Briand program of January, but Balfour balked at the reference to the Left Bank of the Rhine, and showed no inclination to discuss war aims.²⁴

The fall of Briand and the entrance of America into the war produced a further shift in French diplomatic strategy, but the war aims themselves continued to evolve along the lines laid down by French conceptions of their own postwar needs. On 5 June 1917 the Chamber of Deputies and Senate passed "peace resolutions." They demanded the return of Alsace-Lorraine and reparations, no more. But they were accompanied by an "omnibus clause" subject to varying interpretations. There must be "durable guarantees for peace and independence for peoples great and small. . . ." The Chamber text expected these to be

²⁰ The parliamentary inquest and debate concerning the Briand government's "war aims treaty" with the Tsar are summarized in Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy*, pp. 209-214.

²¹ Tel. Paléologue (for Albert Thomas) to MAE, 3 May 1917: MAE Paix, vol. 164, no. 126.

²² See Nelson, *Land and Power*, pp. 3-26.

²³ Ibid., pp. 27-52.

²⁴ Des. P. Cambon to Ribot, 10 July 1917: MAE Pap. Pichon, vol. 4, nos. 122-125.

achieved through a league of nations. The Senate text did not. Publicly, Ribot and his successors Paul Painlevé and Georges Clemenceau retreated from Briand's policy and sought to assure only the restoration of the Lost Provinces "with reparations and the necessary guarantees." In his ministerial address Ribot deplored any *esprit de conquête*. In September 1917 Painlevé claimed only Alsace-Lorraine and reparations. In January 1918 Clemenceau's foreign minister, Stephen Pichon, outlining war aims in a departmental note, made no allusion to the Left Bank of the Rhine or the Saar.²⁵ Had official French war aims been altered under Wilsonian inspiration and domestic anti-expansionism, or was the retreat a tactical one? In fact, there were many circumstances suggesting a low profile on war aims, of which the miscarriages with Russia and Britain were only one. American belligerency in April, the desperate campaign to keep revolutionary Russia in the war, and the French army mutinies after May 1917 all required that no further ammunition be given to those who might accuse France of imperialism.

Until the deliberations for the Armistice began, the *Union Sacrée* governments of 1917 and 1918 restricted their diplomatic initiatives to securing Allied recognition of French rights to annex Alsace-Lorraine without plebiscite. The inclusion of this aim in Wilson's Fourteen Points of January 1918 sufficed. But beneath the opaque rhetoric, French war aims continued to evolve in accordance with European political and economic upheavals. In February and June of 1917, officials of the *Comité des Forges* elaborated the dangers of postwar German economic hegemony if France's raw material needs were not met. The financial crippling of the French government, borrowing unprecedented sums at home and abroad to support the war, demanded an aggressive policy of reparations on the one hand, and an ever closer cooperation among the Allies on the other, if the French currency and standard of living were not to plummet, rendering battlefield victories illusory. France might have to look to Germany not only for annexations but for coal and capital. If references to occupation or "organization" of the Left Bank of the Rhine were dropped from French official war aims, some limitation of German sovereignty was implicit in Ribot's call for "necessary guarantees" retained in his ministerial address at the behest of Poincaré.²⁶ The *Manchester Guardian*, reporting Painlevé's ministerial address, lauded the abandonment of "the am-

²⁵ Note Pichon, 27 Jan. 1918: MAE Pap. Pichon, vol. 4, nos. 238-243. Cf. Taylor, "War Aims of the Allies," pp. 93-122.

²⁶ Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France, neuf années de souvenirs*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1926-33), IX, 78-79.

bitious program of the chauvinists relative to the Left Bank of the Rhine," but followed by reporting that Painlevé "asks that the treaty include effective guarantees to protect the society of nations against aggression."²⁷

It remained until the Armistice negotiations for France's allies to discover that the "guarantees" sought by Clemenceau did not differ from those demanded by Briand. In fact, they had increased. In October 1917 the Quai d'Orsay circulated a memorandum entitled "Preliminary Note on the Reorganization of Germany." In this project the dual nature of French war aims emerged. To ensure French security, the Left Bank of the Rhine must be neutralized and the Rhenish railroads placed under international administration. To prevent postwar German economic expansion at the expense of the exhausted Allies, the German Zollverein must be shattered and the Reich restructured into a loose federal state. To achieve both of these goals, France and Britain must conclude a permanent military alliance matched by a permanent economic alliance with France's creditors, Britain and the United States.²⁸ The advent of Woodrow Wilson and the "changed nature of the war" did not temper French war aims, for they could not change French perceptions of their postwar requirements. The return of Alsace-Lorraine would not suffice.

ARMISTICE

The hopes engendered by America's entry into the war did not fail to affect French opinion.²⁹ But formulation of war aims rested with the cabinet, which in turn depended on a Chamber whose "sacred union" had become increasingly difficult to sustain. By late 1917, the convoluted process of party politics had limited Poincaré's choices for premier to Joseph Caillaux, "defeatist" advocate of negotiated peace, and Georges Clemenceau. If neither represented the war aims bloc, the

²⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 Sept. 1917.

²⁸ MAE Memo, "Note préliminaire sur la réorganisation de l'Allemagne," 27 Oct. 1917; MAE Paix, vol. 67, nos. 3-6.

²⁹ See Ebba Dahlin, *French and German Public Opinion on Declared War Aims* (Stanford, 1933); Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy*; and Miquel, *La paix de Versailles*. The problem of evaluating the impact of Wilsonian rhetoric on public opinion is complicated by the effectiveness of French governmental censorship during the war. Official silence on war aims deepened under the Clemenceau cabinet, whose formation preceded Wilson's Fourteen Points speech (8 Jan. 1918) by seven weeks. Dahlin argues that enthusiasm for Wilsonian idealism forced Briand's successors to retreat from his war aims initiatives. In fact there is no evidence that popular pressure affected official evaluation of France's postwar requirements. When Clemenceau revealed French demands at the peace conference, it was nationalist public opinion that he had to contend with, not Wilsonianism.

Tiger was the only man capable of uniting the embattled nation. For all Poincaré's personal distaste for his old rival, Clemenceau at least could be counted on to pursue the war *jusqu'au bout*. His performance justified expectations. Clemenceau stifled internal dissent, persecuted "defeatists," marshaled all the resources of the nation to the business of survival. Among the requisites of a policy of unity was strictly enforced silence on war aims. As his prestige and power increased with the battlefield victories of the summer of 1918, Clemenceau's secretive and authoritarian rule aggravated not only President Poincaré but the French military and political establishments as well. The most crucial point of debate as victory approached became the strategy for containment of Germany to be consecrated in the peace.

Europe was in total flux, but the epochal events of 1918 permitted Clemenceau to glimpse the shape of postwar Europe. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk eliminated France's Russian alliance. But recent conventions with the Polish and Czechoslovak national councils committed France to a policy of collaboration with Germany's new eastern neighbors.³⁰ In the West, French officials all agreed on the necessity of preserving the wartime alliances with Britain, Italy, and, if possible, the United States. Prewar Europe was in dissolution, but the eradication of German military power could permit the foundation of a new balance. Clemenceau determined not to betray the soldiers' victory; but could he prepare for satisfaction of France's demands against Germany in the armistice convention while preserving Allied unity?

When Prince Max of Baden requested an armistice from President Wilson on the basis of the Fourteen Points, Wilson at first left his European allies in the dark. But the Allied general staffs had reported to their governments that the end of the German army was in sight. Accordingly, on 7 October 1918 Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Italian Premier Orlando met secretly to discuss the basis for a cessation of

³⁰ To the extent that Clemenceau had the leisure to consider peacemaking during the final battles of 1918, the degeneration of Russia could only have increased the importance of a postwar French presence on the Rhine. Yet the Russian alliance did not disappear from French planning and Paris did not greet the new Bolshevik regime with undiluted scorn. Rather, Clemenceau ignored Lenin's politics in a fervent effort to encourage continued Russian resistance to Germany, even offering vast new arms shipments. After Brest-Litovsk, French policy did turn anti-Bolshevik, but even then it aimed at preserving a "large Russia" to balance Germany in the future. The Civil War forced France to rely solely on the successor states in the end, and the means to exert direct pressure on Germany in the West became vital. See Hovi, *Cordon sanitaire or Barrière de l'Est*, and the excellent, most recent analysis by Michael Jabara Carly, "The Origins of the French Intervention in the Russian Civil War, January-May 1918: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 3 (Sept., 1976), pp. 413-439.

hostilities. The Fourteen Points had been a useful banner under which to rally their peoples to a last effort, but they could not be permitted to interfere with fundamental national interests. Lloyd George denounced Wilson's call for freedom of the seas in war and peace, and Clemenceau grimaced at the postwar implications of Wilson's "removal of economic barriers," and "reduction of armaments." But the most direct challenge to French security aims was contained in Wilson's Four Principles and Five Particulars addresses of 11 February and 27 September 1918. How could Germany be rendered innocuous if "peoples and provinces must not be bartered about from sovereignty to sovereignty"? How could Allied cooperation be maintained if there were to be "no alliances within the League of Nations" or any "economic combinations between League members"? The armistice presented an opportunity to attack these questions.

The armistice terms were a military problem. Germany must be placed in a position from which her army would be incapable of resuming hostilities. But the military terms had a political goal: to ensure that Germany would be forced to accept whatever peace terms the Allies might impose. Most important, the armistice would play an important role in the determination of those peace terms. This meant that the Allied armies must gain through the armistice a *de facto* geographical and legal position that would make it difficult for the Anglo-Americans to refuse France's peace proposals. Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Orlando unanimously agreed that the armistice terms were best left, in the first instance, to the military experts. They wired Wilson accordingly.³¹

French leaders themselves were not unanimous in their desire for an armistice. Poincaré saw German peace feelers as a trap to divide the Allies. German forces were in full retreat; the next push would carry French troops onto German soil. Anything short of total victory could jeopardize French war aims. On 7 October the President outlined his arguments to Clemenceau and Pichon. "An armistice that will sap the élan of our troops and not place us in a position to negotiate as conquerors would be a great peril," he warned. Failure to occupy Alsace-Lorraine could lead to ideas of autonomy there instead of union with France. Failure to occupy portions of Germany would give France no guarantees of German compliance with the armistice. Finally, Poin-

³¹ Cf. Pierre Renouvin, *L'Armistice de Rethondes* (Paris, 1968), pp. 195-220; Keith L. Nelson, *Victors Divided: America and the Allies in Germany, 1918-1923* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), p. 91; Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*, pp. 53-89, describes the failure of socialist and labor minorities to force public acceptance of the Fourteen Points on their governments.