THE OFFENSE-DEFENSE BALANCE, INTERDEPENDENCE, AND WAR

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OFFENSE-DEFENSE theory predicts that defensive military advantage, by increasing the cost of winning wars, promotes peace. Because economic interdependence also increases the cost of war, the theory of commercial liberalism claims that it too is a cause of peace. When defense dominance and economic interdependence coincide, however, the results are much less rosy than the theories separately would suggest.

This is, ironically, because conventional (that is, nonnuclear) defense dominance lengthens war and any accompanying embargoes and blockades. It thus heightens the vulnerability to economic warfare of trade-dependent states. Expecting protracted attrition warfare with severed trade links gives trade-dependent states powerful security incentives to seize resource-rich territory. Thus offense-defense theory and commercial liberalism each suffer from a common Catch-22. While defense dominance makes conquest more difficult, it also can make it more desirable as a means to economic self-sufficiency, or autarky. And while interdependence makes war more costly, it also heightens incentives to shore up economic vulnerabilities through expansion.

Several international conditions heighten the strategic economic incentives for expansion, by this logic: a state's economic dependence on trade, the vulnerability of its trade links to embargo or blockade, the expected likelihood, duration, and intensity of conventional war among great power rivals, the cumulativeness of conquered economic resources, and the military weakness of smaller economic prizes. Theoretically, trade-dependent states in a nonnuclear, defense-dominant world could find war-risking expansion a rational security policy. National misperceptions exaggerating the above conditions, however, often substitute for, or exacerbate, their actual presence. Militarization—that is, the political ascendance of military organizations or actors sharing their bi-

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ases—leads states to exaggerate the likelihood of war and the need to bolster their strategic position. Also, leaders tend to pay too much heed to the "lessons" of the recent past, and expect coming wars to repeat what they themselves have experienced.

These hypotheses help explain why Germany and Japan’s perceptions of global defense dominance failed to dampen their interwar appetite for conquest. As the empirical part of this paper will show, Germany and Japan were only moderately expansionist prior to the First World War, when conquest was thought to be relatively easy. After this long and intense attrition war, however, leaders in both states concluded that future wars with other great powers would be similar, and thus would require autarky. This might have deterred war, but militaristic leaders expecting renewed great power gained power in both nations in the 1930s. As a result, the perceived ascendancy of defense, at a global if not local level, did not stop—and in fact may have stimulated—aggressive German and Japanese expansionism.

The idea that trade dependence gives states incentives to forcibly seize markets and resources, particularly when access is threatened, is an old one.1 On the eve of the Second World War, for example, E. H. Carr observed a link between the lessons of the First World War and the autarky quests of the "have-not" powers. He wrote that the impulse that the First World War "gave to the pursuit of autarky was immediate and powerful. Blockade, and the diversion of a large part of the world’s shipping to the transport of troops and munitions, imposed more or less stringent measures of autarky on both belligerents and neutrals." More recently, Ann Uchitel has elaborated how economic dependence and expectations of long wars led Germany and Japan in the 1930s to adopt expansionist aims and offensive military doctrines.3

Yet the links between the offense-defense balance, interdependence, and war have not been fully analyzed. The literature on the offense-defense balance has completely ignored how it might affect economic incentives for conquest.4

The literature on interdependence and war has, for the most part, overlooked the variety of threats to economic dependence.5 Uchitel’s discussion of attrition and economic warfare is one exception, but neglects to draw implications for offense-defense theory.6 Another exception is Dale Copeland’s recent argument that pessimism about peacetime trade barriers is the root economic cause of aggression.7 As I will argue, however, there are good theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that fears of wartime barriers are much more malign.

While twentieth-century German and Japanese expansionism was well-trodden ground for testing international relations theory, it illuminates clearly the Catch-22’s of commercial liberalism and offense-defense theory. Heightened German and Japanese expansionism after the First World War defies the conventional predictions of offense-defense theory, because offence was thought easier before that war than after. Process tracing the perceptions and calculations of German and Japanese leaders provides further evidence for my argument. Wartime autarky concerns took root in the 1920s, and dominated official policy once militarist actors gained power in the 1930s. Conquest was explicitly advocated as a means to provide for self-sufficiency in future long wars. Misperceptions played an important role, but were somewhat predictable in their sources—militarism and the lessons of the past—and consequences.


Process tracing also helps differentiate the impact of embargo and blockade fears, on the one hand, from that of ordinary commercial pessimism, on the other. Examining only the congruence and timing of cause and effect in these cases would suggest that pessimism about peacetime trade prospects could have been an equal or greater cause of autarky-seeking in 1930s Germany and Japan. After all, both states became markedly more aggressive after the collapse of world trade following the 1929 slump. Yet while some important political actors in both states responded to the Depression by demanding various forms of empire, German and Japanese leaders were fixated on the problem of waging total war in the face of economic blockade and embargo. The Depression’s main effect was to help imperialists gain power, and not by showcasing the economic merits of their empire-building plans, but by broadly delegitimizing the moderate preceding regimes.

Recent historical research also justifies reconsideration of these questions. Michael Barnhart has elaborated the importance of total war planning in Japan’s quest for autarky. R. J. Overy has done the same for Germany, revising the longstanding notion that Hitler and his generals expected war to consist entirely of short, blitzkrieg battles. Yet while offense may have been easy against Germany’s neighbors in central and western Europe, Hitler expected it to be difficult against Britain, Russia, and the United States. I also draw on recent studies of Wilhelmine foreign policy and Japanese business attitudes in the 1930s for evidence against the hypothesis that peacetime trade pessimism causes aggression.8

This article proceeds as follows. The next section analyzes the conditions that intensify the economic incentives for conquest, including the domestic biases inflating them, and explains how these ought to qualify the offense-defense and interdependence theories of war. The following section re-examines German and Japanese expansionism prior to both world wars to demonstrate the impact of economic incentives, whether leaders were impelled by fears of wartime or peacetime trade barriers, and what domestic factors biased their perceptions. The final section concludes by summarizing my findings, and discussing their implications for theory and policy.


THE CAUSES OF AUTARKY-SEEKING

States have two distinct but related reasons to seek economic self-sufficiency, or autarky. Trade disruption reduces a nation’s access to resources that contribute to prosperity and growth in peacetime, and military-industrial mobilization in wartime. Theoretically, other threats of wartime blockade and threats of peacetime barriers could provoke states to seek autarky by conquering valuable territories. Only the former kind threats, however—whether real or misperceived—are frightening enough to lead a state to risk a major war in order to expand.

Thus the offense-defense balance and economic interdependence affect the likelihood of war in a way that conventional theories treating these variables separately have generally overlooked. By examining the strategic economic dictates of protracted warfare, it is possible to specify more precisely the conditions that promote aggressive autarky-seeking. In addition, it is worth considering common national misperceptions of these conditions, which have analogous effects on strategic calculations. Militarism and recent experience with long attrition wars influence national perceptions of the likelihood and nature of warfare, and foster interest in autarky and aggression.

THE OFFENSE-DEFENSE BALANCE, INTERDEPENDENCE, AND ECONOMIC WARFARE

Economic self-sufficiency can be an important asset for waging long and intense wars of attrition. Long attrition wars, like the First and Second World Wars, require a protracted and intensive mobilization of economic resources. A state’s competitiveness in such conflicts depends to a great extent on its total amount of resources and a complementary balance among them; shortages of key strategic materials, parts, or equipment can cause crippling bottlenecks in a war economy. States can often rely on trade with allies and neutrals, if usually not adversaries, to maintain balance in their economic supplies.9 Even these trade links, however, can be severed by enemy blockades.

Economic isolation is far more dangerous for trade-dependent states during long and intense wars of attrition than during short and decisive wars. If wars are short, states can import and stockpile arms, munitions, strategic materials,

and foodstuffs before military and economic warfare has commenced. Wars that drag on, however, eventually exhaust strategic stockpiles, and trade-dependent and blockaded states will be hard pressed to synthesize or replace critical supplies. Thus, whatever lengthens war puts a premium on having an autarkic economy at the outbreak of war, while factors that shorten war make trade dependence less of a security liability.

The value of autarky depends not only on the duration of war and of trade severance, but also on their likelihood and intensity. Obviously, if war and blockade are improbable, then autarky is not needed for security. The intensity of war, that is, the rate at which arms and munitions are expended, is also important. If fighting is only sporadic, and arms and supplies are expended at a low rate, war can continue for a long time without exhausting stockpiles.\textsuperscript{10} A prolonged blockade, however, even with low levels of attrition and mobilization can still strangle a trade-dependent state.

If the likelihood and severity of military and economic warfare determine the importance of autarky, trade dependence affects the incentives to try to achieve it. Most obviously, trade dependent states are more highly motivated to expand than self-sufficient ones, as are states that are relatively vulnerable to embargo or blockade. This is the point made in the realist critique of commercial liberalism—that interdependence can have dangerous effects among autonomy- or security-seeking states.

The exploitability or “cumulativity” of conquered resources also affects the economic incentives for expansion. States will improve neither their overall economic capabilities nor their self-sufficiency by conquering ungovernable and unexploitable territories. Domestic political attributes of the conqueror matter importantly here, since dictatorial regimes are much better suited than democracies to crushing resistance and to exploiting enslaved nations.\textsuperscript{11}

Finally, variation in the costliness of war among different countries could create opportunities for expansion. Trade-dependent states expecting long struggles with great power adversaries would have strong incentives to gobble up smaller and more vulnerable economic prizes first.

The strategic economic demands of long attrition wars suggest a paradoxical twist to the impact of the offense-defense balance on the security dilemma and war. The offense-defense balance is one of the leading systemic explanations of war. According to the theory, offense dominance—or at least the perception of it—causes war because it heightens incentives for expansion (for either defensive or opportunistic purposes), preemption, brinkmanship, and secrecy.

If the offense is dominant, wars will be short and won most often by attackers, reducing the costs and risks of aggression and increasing them for sitting on the defense. Conversely, defense dominance lengthens wars and makes the resort to conflict less appealing to all potential attackers. The belief in easy offense at the outbreak of the First World War is the paradigmatic example for the theory, even though in fact this belief was a misperception. If the belligerents had anticipated the long attrition stalemate dictated by military technology, it is argued, they would have been less willing to provoke crises and more willing and able to pull back from the brink in July 1914.\textsuperscript{12}

Analyses of the offense-defense balance, however, have overlooked its strategic economic consequences, and how these could affect expansionism and war. Defense dominance, by making victory more difficult, lengthens war and hence increases the security value of autarky. Thus while defense dominance increases the military costs of expansion, it also increases the economic incentives to expand for states that see war and blockade as likely anyway, are dependent on trade, and expect conquered resources to be utilizable. In other words, the strategic economic effects of the offense-defense balance have precisely opposing implications for international stability from the battlefield effects. Defense dominance makes conquering foreign resources harder but more imperative, while offense dominance makes conquest easier but less imperative.

The benefits of defense dominance for international stability thus appear more complex and less promising than advertised by theorists focusing on its battlefield effects. This is not the only possible difficulty in the theory’s logic. James Fearon has pointed out that by making victories more decisive without ensuring that attackers will win, offense dominance makes war a more dangerous gamble for initiators and defenders alike. Offense dominance also quickens alliance balancing, which reduces the attacker’s advantage.\textsuperscript{13} The economic consequences of the offense-defense balance, however, may provide another reason why some scholars have found a weak historical correlation between the balance and the frequency of war.\textsuperscript{14}

This paradox does not arise for the nuclear brand of defense dominance, or “deterrence dominance.” According to offense-defense theory, nuclear deter-

\textsuperscript{10} I thank Ed Mansfield for pointing this out.


\textsuperscript{12} See the sources cited in n. 4. For opposing views on this interpretation of the First World War, see Van Evera, “Cult of the Offensive”; and Marc Trachtenberg, _History and Strategy_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), chap. 2.

\textsuperscript{13} James D. Fearon, “The Offense-Defense Balance and War Since 1648” (unpub. manuscript, University of Chicago, April 1997).

\textsuperscript{14} The most systematic study, Van Evera’s “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” finds a strong relationship, but little correlation is found by Levy, “Offensive/Defensive Balance”; and Fearon, “Offense-Defense Balance and War.”
rence strongly enhances the defense, because it is so difficult to disarm a state's nuclear retaliatory capability. Unlike conventional defense dominance, however, nuclear deterrence (or nuclear war) requires no wartime economic mobilization, and embargos or blockades cannot erode a nuclear-armed state's capability to destroy any attacker. So this paradoxical consequence of the offense-defense balance is confined to relations among nonnuclear states, or where the nuclear balance is so stable that nuclear escalation is unlikely.

A mitigating factor in this offense-defense paradox stems from the fact that the value of autarky depends not only on the type of war states are likely to encounter, but also on its likelihood. If defense dominance makes war so costly as to be unthinkable, then states have less need to worry about how to wage war, militarily or economically. Conversely, the greater frequency of war caused by offense dominance may lead states to worry more about the (smaller) economic problems of fighting. If the frequency of war is not governed so dramatically by the offense-defense balance, however, then this effect does not apply, and defense dominance is more likely to generate autarky concerns.

Geographic variation in the offense-defense balance (and in the balance of power) has strong effects on the temptations of autarky and expansion. The offense-defense balance is often treated as a property of the entire international system, because it derives in large measure from the state of military technology, which in turn diffuses rapidly among competitive great powers. In fact, however, the offense-defense balance varies according to geography, force-to-space ratios, and cumulativeness of resources. If the offense-defense balance favors the defense globally, but not locally (or if local defensive advantages are overwhelmed by power disparities), incentives for the seizure of local economic prizes will be heightened.

In addition to creating problems for offense-defense theory, the economic exigencies of modern attrition war also throw a monkey wrench into the theory of commercial liberalism. Going back to Richard Cobden and Norman Angell, commercial liberals have argued that economic interdependence causes peace, and the greater the interdependence, the stronger the bulwark against war. As realists are quick to point out, however, states are extremely jealous of their security and autonomy. Thus at the same time that it heightens the cost of war, economic interdependence also spurs states to take steps to reduce their vulnerability should war occur. The greater the independence, the more frightened states will become of trade severance, and the greater their incentives for autarky-seeking expansion.

**EXPECTATION OF PEACETIME TRADE BARRIERS**

Of course, war is not the only source of trade disruption worrisome to states. Peacetime trade barriers are an obstacle to prosperity that states could theoretically try to remove by conquest. Thus, Copeland has recently argued that expectations of reduced trade increase incentives for expansionism and war. Copeland leaves open the specific conditions that cause anxieties about future trade as well as the types of reduced trade that states are likely to find most alarming. His empirical case studies and illustrations, however, refer to perceptions of increasing peacetime trade barriers. His case studies of Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany provide evidence of German economic dependence and of official worries about peacetime exclusion from essential resources and markets, leading Copeland to conclude that these were major causes of German aggressiveness leading to both world wars.

Do states expand to improve their prosperity or their security? This distinction cannot be drawn too sharply, because wealth ultimately translates into power. States have reasons of security to worry about relative economic position, and hence gain. Still, states worry first about security, then prosperity. Threats of prolonged wartime embargo or blockade provoke more aggressive responses than threats to ordinary trade, because only the


18. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War." Copeland's formulation does not explain why states should find the trading status quo acceptable; if the costs of conquest become low, states may expand to increase their trading opportunities even if barriers are constant. Some prospect theory assumptions about framing could help motivate the hypothesis.


former confront states with a concrete and immediate risk of military defeat.

Most kinds of peacetime trade concerns, disputes, and policies have a relatively indirect and moderate impact on security compared to military security issues. Typical peacetime trade barriers are far less severe than a blockade or embargo, and are apt to erode a state’s wealth only gradually. Unless there is reason to expect that the barriers will become permanent, the damage done is usually temporary and reversible. In addition, the drag on economic growth is shared by both trading partners, and losses are likely to be mutual, with an ambiguous effects on relative power. While war-risking expansion might conceivably be a cost-effective policy for coping with future wartime embargos or blockades, it is too dangerous and costly a means just to knock down ordinary trade barriers.

Domestic economic interest groups are also likely to be divided on the spoils of empire. While exporters facing high tariff barriers may see virtue in capturing secure markets for their goods, this incentive will be tempered by fears that conquest will cause other states to close their markets even more. Firms producing for the domestic market under tariff protection will also oppose expansion, when it results in the annexation of—and unprotected competition from—rival producers. And because war generally entails high costs and government controls for producers, they will often prefer more peaceful means to gain access to markets and resources. Thus even a severe closing of foreign markets will not lead to a stampede of all economic interests lobbying for conquest.

NATIONAL MISPERCEPTIONS

While actual conditions in the international system can provide powerful incentives for autarky and aggression, warped perceptions of these conditions can create or intensify beliefs about the need for expansion. Two national attributes have a predictable impact on such perceptions, the “lessons” of the past and militarization. In pointing out the role of these domestic factors, I am not attempting to provide a general unit-level theory of irrational expansion, like Jack Snyder’s theory that cartellized political systems generate myths about the cumulativeness of losses and gains, offensive military advantage, and the ef-

fectiveness of threats.22 I am also not denying that other national factors, such as hypernationalism or raw greed, can be powerful causes of aggression. I simply want to show that common misperceptions of the nature and likelihood of future war can affect the perceived incentives for autarky-seeking expansionism.

Formative experiences, particularly the last major war, tend to have a disproportionate impact on perceptions of the present. Memory of the rapid and decisive Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars, for example, was an important cause of the illusion “cult of the offensive” in Europe prior to 1914. Memories of the protracted struggle of attrition that followed led to the exaggerated beliefs in defense dominance during the interwar period.23

States in which militaries have a disproportionate influence on foreign policy, or that are led by civilians with strong militaristic biases, are likely to exaggerate the advantages of autarky. Militaries’ organizational interests dictate inflating the probability of war and the resources required to wage it.24 If warfare is expected to be long and intense, this predisposition to exaggerate the likelihood of war adds a critical ingredient to the recipe for autarky seeking. Militaries tend to be less concerned about issues of peacetime trade and prosperity, issues that fall outside of their domain of professional expertise and responsibility. This makes militarized states even less likely than others to consider war as a means to protect or expand peacetime commerce.

Might not militarized states also misperceive the offense defense balance in ways that diminish autarky seeking? One reason to expect this is that militaries also prefer offensive doctrines, which serve organizational interests in reducing uncertainty, enhancing autonomy, and justifying increased budgets.25 This strategic preference can lead militaries to exaggerate the ease of offense, an important explanation for pre-1914 Europe’s cult of the offensive, which if anything dampened Germany’s prewar concerns about economic self-sufficiency and blockade.26 Militaries, however, do not always have such a strong vested interest in exaggerating the ease of offense. Militaries in eco-


nomically dependent states can also justify offensive doctrines by arguing that expansion—particularly against vulnerable economic prizes—is essential for achieving autarky for later attrition wars. Because of its strong bias toward seeing a high likelihood of war, and its conditional bias about the offense-defense balance, militarization overall exacerbates the expansionist impulse.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies examine and compare the economic sources of German and Japanese expansionism prior to both world wars. Both powers were only cautiously expansionist prior to the First World War. War was believed to be short and decisive, so trade dependence did not create worrisome vulnerabilities. During and after the war, however, influential actors in Germany and Japan concluded that future wars were likely to be total and would require economic self-sufficiency. Both nations were particularly dependent on trade and vulnerable to wartime blockade and embargo. In the 1930s, moreover, their foreign policies were controlled increasingly by leaders fixated on the inevitability of major war. In Japan, this was due to the heightened influence of the Army and Navy over security policy. The German military shared these biases as well, but was under the control of Adolf Hitler, a still more fanatical believer in the inescapability of war.

Intensifying German and Japanese expansionism coincided with a deepened pessimism about peacetime trade prospects. World trade had collapsed in 1930–31, and this triggered talk about autarky and expansion. Concern about wartime trade disruptions, however, was a more important cause of expansion. The international environment did not provide clear indications of indefinitely high peacetime trade barriers. Even if it had, the economic interest groups most affected by protectionism were not particularly influential in foreign-policy making. Neither the Japanese military nor the Nazis were very concerned about peacetime trade, and neither allowed median economic interests to influence foreign policy. Ironically, the collapse of world trade and the ensuing Depression made expansionism more likely not by increasing economic incentives for expansion, but by undermining political systems that were less fatalistic about the inevitability of war.

The case studies do not attempt to provide a complete explanation for variation in German and Japanese expansionism. Naked greed and lust for power may have played a more important role than perceived insecurity, particularly in Hitler’s Germany. Comparisons over time for each nation, however, at a minimum raise difficulties for standard offense-defense balance predictions that perceived offense dominance increases expansionism and defense dominance restrains it. Process tracing the perceptions and decision making in each nation also provides evidence for the hypothesized causal link between total war expectations and expansion. One need not conclude that these were the only or even the main causes of expansionism to observe the paradoxical effects of the offense-defense balance and interdependence.

WILHELMINE GERMANY

German expansionism was much more moderate in the Wilhelmine than in the Nazi periods. An historical school led by Fritz Fischer has argued that Germany was a greedy expansionist power with a premeditated plan, dating back at least to 1912, to launch a war of conquest in Europe.27 It is doubtful that German officials had a premeditated plan of conquest, but they did recklessly risk war in July 1914 by encouraging Austria to deal harshly with Serbia.28 Yet the case that German belligerence was motivated by greed for economic prizes on the continent and overseas is based on circumstantial evidence, and has fallen into disfavor in current German historiography. Among the motivations of German leaders, the strongest seems to be perceptions of German relative military decline. Autarky was not an important concern, because war in Europe was expected—however wrongly—to be short and decisive. Even if autarky had been desired, German leaders’ doubts about the cumulativity of resources meant that it would appear hard to achieve by expansion.

Autarky for the next war? German officials’ interest in autarky, and hence expansionism, was dampened by their assumption that the next European war would be short. In fact, historical memory of the quick and decisive wars of German unification, as well as a strong organizational preference for offensive doctrines, had given rise to a “cult of the offensive” throughout Europe.29 As a result, the German civil service, War Ministry, and General Staff assumed that if war came it would last no more than nine months. Chief of Staff Helmuth Von Moltke worried to some extent about the possibility that war could last as long as two years, and conducted some studies on wartime food and raw materials requirements. He also assumed, however, that a British blockade could be circumvented by trade through the Netherlands; his decision to respect Dutch

neutrality was motivated partly to preserve a commercial "windpipe." The German Foreign Office did not show much concern over vulnerability to the British blockade either. Reflecting these premises, as well as a preference to concentrate scarce resources on the Schlieffen Plan, Germany's economic preparations for the long war contingency were minimal. Since German officials did not fear having to fight a long war under economic blockade, though this is what ultimately befall them, they did not worry about German economic vulnerability or how to overcome it. In the end, ironically, the German war economy did suffer considerably—if not catastrophically—from the Allied blockade.

Recognition that governing and exploiting politically hostile foreigners would be difficult, that is, that resources were not very cumulative, also put a damper on German expansionism. Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow told the Kaiser in 1908 that "there would be nothing for us to gain in the conquest of any fresh Slav or French territory. If we annex small countries to the Empire we shall only strengthen those centrifugal elements which, alas, are never wanting in Germany." His successor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg agreed, apparently sharing the view of his trusted adviser, Kurt Riezler, that "wars between great powers [would] no longer be started because of the rewards to be gained from them, but only from necessity." The Reich's experience in governing the Alsace-Lorrainers, who despite Germanic linguistic and cultural traits had complained interminably since 1871 about their lack of representation in the Reichstag, may have had a role here; even during the war, after German annexationism had grown markedly, Kaiser Wilhelm objected to Baltic annexations to avoid "a second Alsace-Lorraine." The strongest German motive for backing Austria-Hungary in the July crisis was a fear of the Central Powers' relative decline. Russia appeared to be gaining in economic strength, was building railroads in Poland, and in 1914 had embarked on a "Great Program" of military expansion.

Germany's main ally, on the other hand, seemed besieged from within the empire, a problem exacerbated by the Serbian victory and expansion in the Second Balkan War of 1913. Belief that the offense was dominant bolstered both fears of the Russian build-up and hopes that the Schlieffen Plan could deliver a quick and cheap solution. Victory by the Central Powers would stabilize Austria-Hungary by giving her complete domination over the Balkans, and would at the same time smash Russian power, perhaps permanently by carving out Poland, the Baltics, and the Ukraine as independent buffer states.

The German General Staff played a crucial role, during the summer of 1914, in convincing the Kaiser and his civilian advisers that Russia's military build-up would soon leave Germany at its mercy. Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow reported von Moltke's thinking in May 1914 as follows: "Russia will have completed her armaments in two or three years. The military superiority of our enemies would be so great that he did not know how we might cope with them. In his view there was no alternative to waging a preventive war in order to defeat the enemy as long as we could still more or less pass the test." Jagow seems to have been convinced, for he wrote to his ambassador in London that "according to all competent observation, Russia will be prepared to fight in a few years. Then she will crush us..." So was Bethmann Hollweg, as Riezler's diary shows: "The secret intelligence gives a shattering picture...Austria is becoming increasingly weaker and more and more immobile. The subversion [of the Dual Monarchy] from the north and the south-east [has] progressed very far...The military might of Russia is growing fast." During the war, Bethmann Hollweg recalled that "in a sense it was a preventive war. But the war was hanging over us anyway, two years later it would have come even more dangerously and unavoidably."

33. The German economy suffered much more from the dislocations of war mobilization. See Hardach, First World War, 11–36; Hoffer, First World War, 21–78.
38. Berghahn, Germany and the Approach to War, 141.
42. Quoted in Berghahn, Germany and the Approach to War, 191.
43. Quoted in Fischer, War of Illusions, 468.
Antarktik for prosperity? This is not to argue that there were no expansionist sentiments in Wilhelmine Germany. The government was clearly interested in overseas colonies, the end purpose of a massive naval build-up and of gunboat diplomacy contesting French control over Morocco. Some industrialists, a few with official ties, worried about being shut out from foreign markets and called for an enlarged German-dominated customs zone in Europe, or a Mitteleuropa. Once war had broken out, moreover, and victory appeared to be at hand, a whole array of new economic and strategic ambitions swallowed German war aims. On the basis of such evidence, the Fischer school contends that economic ambition drove Germany toward a premeditated war of conquest in 1914. This is also the same kind of evidence used by Copeland to argue that pessimism about world trade opportunities gave German leaders a strong motive for expansion and war.

The case for this interpretation is entirely circumstantial, however. If economic imperialism had been an important reason for Germany’s going to war in 1914, one would expect to find evidence that the top German officials were lusting for conquest before and during the July Crisis. Economic ambitions, however, do not appear to have been among the leading concerns of German leaders in 1914, and the cabinet did not even discuss colonies during the July crisis. The Fischer school has stressed Bethmann Hollweg’s 29 July offer to refrain from annexing Belgian and French soil, though not their colonies, in return for British neutrality. While this could be an implicit admission of expansionist ambition, it also could have been simply a clumsy ploy to dissuade British intervention. Another piece of evidence are the Mitteleuropa plans drawn up by Walter Rathenau, a prominent industrialist and newly appointed war economy official, during July 1914. It is unclear, however, how influential or representative Rathenau’s thinking was during the crisis.

The Fischer school’s main evidence for economic motivations for war date from after the outbreak of war. In September 1914, as German troops advanced on the Marne, Bethmann Hollweg drew up a list of war aims that amounted to continental hegemony and overseas empire for Germany, justified on both strategic military and economic grounds. The “September Pro-

44. Fischer, War of Illusions; Geiss, German Foreign Policy. See also Hardach, First World War, 227–37; Woodruff D. Smith, The Ideological Origins of Navy Imperialism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chaps. 4–7.


47. Geiss, German Foreign Policy, 174–75.

48. Fischer, War of Illusions, 63; this evidence is stressed by Copeland, “Economic Interdependence and War,” 32.

49. Fischer, Germany’s Aims, 103–5.


52. Bethmann Hollweg’s understanding of Weltpolitik was a crude notion that Germany’s world position was vaguely incommensurate with its strength and interests. David Kaiser, Jack Snyder, Charles Kupchan and others have concluded that he had fallen prey to the symbolic Weltpolitik propaganda purveyed by his predecessors for largely domestic political reasons. David E. Kaiser, “Germany and the Origins of the First World War,” Journal of Modern History 55 (September 1983): 442–74; Jack Snyder, Myth of Empire, chap. 3; Charles A. Kupchan, The Vulnerability of Empire (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), chap. 6.

The lack of strong economic motives for war is unsurprising, because German trade prospects were bright during this period. German trade was booming. Between 1900 and 1913, German trade with Britain increased 105 percent, with France 137 percent, and with Russia 121 percent.\textsuperscript{54} The Russian tariff of 1914 was a rare obstacle in Germany’s overall outlook for trade access. Liberal victories in the 1906 and 1910 British elections scuttled Conservative Party campaign proposals for tariff reform and imperial preference that had worried German commercial interests at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{55} Britain’s devotion to free trade in this period was so great, despite having to face substantial German protectionism, that its Foreign Office was not even permitted to engage in active commercial diplomacy or tariff negotiations.\textsuperscript{56} The lack of an economic impulse for expansion is also evident in the attitude of German business, which in general favored peaceful trade expansion and opposed war, particularly with Britain. It was professors, school teachers, and clergymen who pushed hardest for colonial gains, not businessmen.\textsuperscript{57} While some economic sectors may have favored imperialism for economic reasons, as well as domestic political ones, they did not push for war in 1914. In fact, few businessmen were consulted during Germany’s July 1914 deliberations, and among that few, shipping magnate Albert Ballin and banker Max Warburg both argued against war.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus recent historiography has given little weight to economic ambition in explaining German policy. Neither greed nor wartime autarky were influential. “German militarists were not much concerned with economics,” a recent review essay notes, and “acknowledgements that German military capability was in fact dependent on economic factors were remarkably rare.”\textsuperscript{59} Historian James Joll agrees that throughout Europe “economic considerations were not much to the fore in the minds of the politicians taking decisions in July 1914; and when they were...they underlined the disastrous effects of war.”\textsuperscript{60}


\textsuperscript{58} Alfred Hugenberg was an unrepresentative exception, according to Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins,” 730, 735.

\textsuperscript{59} Ferguson, “Germany and the Origins,” 741–42.


\textbf{NAZI GERMANY}

Nazi imperialism was far more aggressive than the Wilhelminian variety. The First World War had been a long drawn out struggle that had required total economic mobilization and had been won by the economically superior side. Were Germany required to wage another long war of attrition, and compelled by blockade to rely entirely on its own economic strength, size and self-sufficiency would be essential to German survival. In fact, Hitler’s conquests in Europe contributed immensely to the German war economy during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{61} Hitler’s thinking, however, was hardly a model of economic or strategic rationality, and he drew mistaken lessons from the First World War. Hitler seemed to think that self-sufficiency could be attained by colonizing Lebensraum (living space) more than by extracting its strategic resources. Nevertheless, the expectation of future total wars, on the part of Hitler as well as the German military, gave a strong impetus to German conquest.

\textit{Autarky for the next war.} German aggression resulting in the Second World War was conceived, orchestrated, and commanded by Adolf Hitler.\textsuperscript{62} Hence, the first place to look for evidence of economic motivations is in Hitler’s own plans and reasons for conquest, which remained remarkably constant from the mid-1920s. Hitler believed that Germandom was pitted against other races in mortal struggles for survival. War was not only inevitable, it would also be long and demanding. To prevail, Germany needed to carve Lebensraum out of Soviet territory, and doing this required seizing small but economically valuable lands in central and eastern Europe, the defeat of France, and the defeat or intimidation of Britain.

Hitler’s grand strategy was built upon a number of bizarre and dangerous convictions. His belief in the inevitability of war was based on a muddled confection of Social Darwinism, Malthusianism, and racism. His obsession with Lebensraum stemmed from an ideological romanticization of the German peasant as the foundation of Germandom, as well as from the memory of the role of food shortages in Germany’s collapse in 1918. Despite the industrialization of modern war, he believed that the power of a race depended primarily on the size of its population, the extent of its territory, and the abundance of its farmland. Only by conquering and colonizing depopulated farmland did Hitler

\textsuperscript{61} Liberman, \textit{Does Conquest Pay?}, chap. 3.

\textsuperscript{62} This is not to say that Hitler started the war single handedly. His autonomy and authorship of Nazi foreign policy, however, was considerable. For a recent review of the debate on this issue, see Ian Kershaw, \textit{The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation}, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), chaps. 4 and 6.
think that Germandom could grow enough to survive future struggles with larger nations.\textsuperscript{63}

Despite this anachronistic agrarian focus, Hitler also had a crude understanding of geopolitics and the importance of industry and raw materials to military power. During the rearmament of the 1930s he became increasingly worried about German industry’s dependence on imported raw materials. He seized Austria, the Sudetenland, and the rest of Czechoslovakia with at least one eye on their iron ore, steel, coal, engineering, arms plants, and financial reserves that would help shift the balance of power in Europe in Germany’s favor.\textsuperscript{64} In March 1939, for example, Hitler told German leaders that “German dominion over Poland is necessary, in order to guarantee the supply of agricultural products and coal for Germany.”\textsuperscript{65}

Hitler’s thirst for expansion was reinforced by his belief that future wars would be long, and would have to mobilize “the whole strength of the people.”\textsuperscript{66} This is often overlooked because of the successful Blitzkrieg doctrine that devastated France in a six week campaign. Germany’s initially low arms output has also been attributed to a deliberate plan to wage quick Blitzkrieg-type wars.\textsuperscript{67} Well before the advent of the Blitzkrieg, however, in May 1939, Hitler told his generals that:

> Everybody’s Armed Forces and Government must strive for a short war. But the government must, however, also prepare for a war of from ten to fifteen years’ duration. History shows that wars were always expected to be short. In 1914 it was still believed that long wars could not be financed. Even today this idea buzzes in a lot of heads. Every state, however, will hold out as long as it can...The idea of getting out cheaply is dangerous; there is no such possibility.\textsuperscript{68}

Historian R. J. Overy has demonstrated persuasively that Hitler expected a long, total war and accordingly sought to mobilize the German economy earlier and more completely than has been recognized. Low output prior to 1942 was due to inefficiency and massive investment in raw material self-sufficiency projects, themselves indications of Hitler’s expectation of a long war.\textsuperscript{69} Hitler thought that Czechoslovakia and Poland would be easy pickings, and even that offense might even be easy against the French. Beyond that, however, he expected to have to wage long wars under conditions of economic blockade. “The struggle for predominance in the world will be decided in favor of Europe by the possession of the Russian space,” Hitler said in September 1941. “Thus Europe will be an impregnable fortress, impregnable from all threat of blockade...The essential thing, for the moment, is to conquer.”\textsuperscript{70}

This blockade fear was due in large part to the experience of the First World War, which provided fertile ground in Germany for Hitler’s emphasis on autarky and Lebensraum. “We Germans,” Hitler said in October 1939, “have learnt much from our experiences in the First World War and are fully prepared, both militarily and economically for a long war.”\textsuperscript{71} As historian Woodruff Smith points out, “extreme autarkic versions of economic imperialism that had gained only limited currency before the war seemed more plausible under circumstances of blockade, shortages, and rationing.”\textsuperscript{72} German wartime propaganda hammered home the national need for territorial expansion, as a means of motivating popular sacrifice for the war effort. After the war was over, popular expectations of renewed conflict were sustained by the continued Allied blockade, the Ruhr occupation and reparations demands, the territorial losses imposed by Versailles, and widespread belief in German innocence of war guilt.\textsuperscript{73}

The German military, however pleased by Hitler’s emphasis on rearmament and overturning the Versailles settlement, generally lacked Hitler’s fixation on inevitable struggles to the finish, and hence the same determination to conquer the necessary resources.\textsuperscript{74} Their agreement that future wars would be total,
however, along with Hitler's domination and manipulation of military decision making, may help explain the military's acquiescence to Nazi expansionism. General Groener, defense minister during 1928–33 and a war-economy officer during the First World War, argued in 1928 that the nature of modern war makes "it is necessary to organize the entire strength of the people for fighting and working." This notion was given further authority by the publication of Erich Ludendorff's Der Totale Krieg (1935). Colonel Georg Thomas, who headed the Army's Economics Staff and later the Military Economy Office of the High Command, agreed that "modern war is no longer a clash of armies, but a struggle for the existence of the peoples involved. All resources of the nation must be made to serve the war." Hitler's Air Force chief, Hermann Göring, an ardent Nazi and advocate of Lebensraum, also expected that war would be protracted. He warned upon the outbreak of war in September 1939, that "today's war is a total war, whose end no one can approximately foretell." Hitler appointed Göring to direct the Four Year Plan, a powerful agency established to promote the goal, in Göring's words, "of preparing the German economy for total war." 

Nazi racism and ruthlessness also help explain a crucial difference between Hitlerian and Wilhelmine expansionism. Bethmann and other German leaders of his era recognized that the nationalism of neighboring European peoples placed some limits on the political and economic feasibility of at least continental expansion. Wilhelmine-era Mitteleuropa concepts were accordingly more voluntaristic than their Nazi successors. Hitler, on the other hand, believed that resources were cumulative, though for twisted reasons. He had no qualms about expelling or exterminating the inferior races that inhabited coveted territory; he sought land for German farmers rather than dominate over non-Aryans. In the end, however, total war required the systematic mobilization of defeated European peoples, who under compulsion contributed greatly to the Nazi war effort, unlike the unsuccessful Nazi colonization schemes. 

'autarky for prosperity?' The onset of the Great Depression, accompanied and prolonged by the collapse of world trade and advancing protectionism, also heightened German interest in autarky. This was not much of a factor in the calculations of Nazi ideologues, however, least of all Hitler, who seemed to disdain trade even more than barriers to it. Well before the collapse of world trade and the Depression, Hitler had derided "the chatter about the peaceful conquest of the world by commercial means" as being "the most completely nonsensical stuff ever raised to the dignity of a guiding principle in the policy of a state." Hitler condemned the notion of Germany as a trading state in part on the grounds that German industrial exports could not compete in the long run with those from larger powers like the United States. Hitler's understanding of economics, however, was primitive and strongly colored by his Social Darwinism; he instinctively detested trade as a morally corrupting influence, one that led to "dissolve pacifism." More important to Hitler's thinking was his belief that trade trade failed to provide a state with sufficient autonomy and military invulnerability, as did overseas colonies, which were vulnerable to blockade and hence an unsuitable basis for German power.

Nevertheless, the steep decline in German trade in the early 1930s increased receptivity in Germany to autarkic proposals. Economic nationalists resurrected the idea of a peacefully constructed Grofsraumwirtschaft, or large-area economy, that would allow for protected and unobstructed trade in Europe, particularly between Germany and central and southeast Europe, and the Nazis soon made this a centerpiece of their economic platform. Depression led industrialists to look more favorably the idea of exclusive trading zones or even conquest, partly because it offered a larger, guaranteed, and protected market, but more importantly because such policy proposals displaced social blame for unemployment away from themselves.

Business, however, remained ambivalent about the need for autarky, particularly as prospects for a revival of trade improved from 1936. "Autarky cannot possibly be an ideal," argued Reichsbank head and Nazi economics minister Hjalmar Schacht in early 1937, as he unsuccessfully sought to expand trade in the face of increasing restrictions imposed by Göring. Albert Vögler, the head of Germany's largest steel combine, contended that "exports should be ranked above the requirements of the armed forces." Gustav Krupp remained a firm believer in trade throughout, and publicly attacked autarky poli-

75. Quoted in Overly, War and Economy, 177–78; See also Deir, The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament, chap. 1, esp. 7–8, 17. According to Deir (p. 26), General Werner von Blomberg, Groener's successor, agreed that an effective national defense required "all its material and human resources, to meet the needs of the military...in accordance with what were generally perceived as the lessons of the First World War."
77. Quoted in Carroll, Design for Total War, 40; on Thomas's views, see chaps. 2–3.
78. Quoted in Overly, Goering, 78.
79. Quoted in Overly, War and Economy, 189.
80. Liberman, Does Conquest Pay?, chap. 3.
83. Carr, Arms, Autarky, and Aggression, 16–19.
86. Quoted in Overly, War and Economy, 95; cf. 32, 101, 216.
87. Quoted in Overly, War and Economy, 14.
cies in mid-1935.88 Ruhr industrial leaders opposed Göring’s expansion of domestic iron-ore production in 1937 as wasteful and threatening to increased trade.89 Many firms, like I.G. Farben, became partisans of autarky only after Nazi policies made it politic and profitable to do so.90

At this point business views were moot, because by the mid-1930s they had little influence on Nazi foreign or economic policy.91 Their opposition to Nazi autarkic schemes, however, along with evidence about Hitler’s own thinking, casts doubt on the thesis that German aggression was even partly a rational response to declining opportunities for peacetime trade. If the Depression tilted Germany toward expansion, then, it was more as a result of its disastrous effect on the legitimacy of Weimar democracy and the political opportunity this created for a dictator obsessed with total war.

JAPAN

Japanese imperialism was cautious and little motivated by economic concerns before the Second World War and during the 1920s. Once the military took the reins of Japanese foreign policy in the mid-1930s, however, Japan embarked on an aggressive quest for autarky. The Japanese military had deduced from the European experience in the First World War that future wars would be long attrition struggles. Japanese policy was not a purely rational response to defense dominance and economic independence, and rested on major blunders and miscalculations, but these factors played an important role. Concerns about peacetime trade, though increased by the Depression, had a relatively slight impact. As in Germany, its main effect on foreign policy was to enable total war fanatics to assume control of foreign policy.

Autarky for the next war. The Meiji oligarchs who governed Japan in the late nineteenth century understood the importance of industrial might to military power. With the slogan of “rich country, strong army,” they embarked on a crash modernization effort that over time made the resource-poor nation increasingly dependent on imported iron, steel, oil, and other raw materials essential for prosperity and for warfare. Before the First World War, though, little thought was given to the problem of assuring the supply of these resources. Nineteenth century wars, in Asia as well as in Europe, had been relatively short, had been readily financed and supplied with the help of neutral powers, and hence did not require full mobilization or autarky.92

Japanese imperialism during this period, as a consequence, lacked the economic impulse of later years.93 Japanese designs on Taiwan and Korea, annexed in 1894 and 1910 respectively, were primarily to exclude other powers from acquiring military bases there. At the time of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, Taiwan had little economic allure, and the Japanese prime minister thought that “we may have to spend on the lands more than we can reap from them.”94 When Japan again attacked Russia over Korea a decade later, its motives were still chiefly territorial. Japanese leaders considered Korea a “dagger pointed at the heart of Japan,” and Russian troops and railways had begun to penetrate neighboring Manchuria. Japan also aimed to keep protectionist Russia from closing Korea and Manchuria to Japanese exports, but this was a secondary concern.95

This outlook changed once Japanese war planners had studied the military-economic lessons of the First World War. As early as 1915, responding to reports from Japanese officers posted in Europe of stalemated trench warfare and total military-economic mobilization, the Army began to examine the problem of Japanese resource vulnerability. Germany’s slow strangulation by blockade and internal collapse in 1918 seemed to hold dire implications for resource-poor Japan. Unless Japan expanded, the Army concluded, it would have no chance in a prolonged war against Russia or the United States, both of whom were seen as likely enemies.96

A growing clique of “total war officers” in the Army, many of whom had studied or served in Germany after the First World War, proceeded to lobby for imperial expansion and economic development. As a result, subsequent

88. Overy, War and Economy, chap. 4, esp. 126, 136.
89. Overy, War and Economy, 96.
92. Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War, 22.
military planning placed increasing weight on the premise that Japan needed to prepare for a protracted war and embargo. The Army established a Cabinet Resources Bureau in 1927, which then embarked on a detailed study of the economic requirements for a two-year attrition war. A 1936 cabinet-level assessment of grand strategy assumed that “the thing to be most feared is that future wars will be prolonged,” and new major studies were pursued on how to cope with this contingency. By the mid-1930s, the “majority of staff officers heading the various divisions and sections within the War Ministry and the General Staff were convinced that the events of 1914–18 had shown that the crucial element in twentieth century wars of attrition was the massive integration of military and industrial planning on a long-range basis.”

Paradoxically, the expectation that future wars would be intense and prolonged contests of attrition did not make war appear less likely. On the contrary, the total war officers assumed that war with either the United States or the Soviet Union was inevitable, a view that was widely shared in the Japanese military. In 1927 Ishiwara predicted a final struggle against American expansionism would occur within thirty years. While the Navy continued to stress the threat posed by the United States, Army officers in the mid-1930s agreed that war with the USSR was inevitable and engaged in heated debate over the exact timing of future Soviet attack.

These expectations of prolonged war and its economic demands led to greater national investment in industrial expansion, centralized control over elements of the economy, and territorial expansion aimed at acquiring and developing raw materials critical to total warfare. The autarky advocates did not have their way on all issues. They still had to accommodate demands in the Army and Navy for increasing military spending, which slowed investment in industrial expansion. Other military factions, however, generally supported the total war officers’ imperialist objectives, if only to gain territorial bulwarks to protect the empire. Thus when several total war officers in the Kwantung Army seized Manchuria in 1931, after having lobbied hard for “Japan-Manchuria self-sufficiency,” they successfully pulled the rest of the Army along.

Iron- and coal-rich north China was the next target of Japan’s autarkic quest, and the Army increased its political, economic, and military penetration there quite easily between 1935 and 1937. Developing its economic potential in a cooperative partnership with Chinese political leaders, however, left Japan’s economic war plans vulnerable to a souring of Sino-Japanese relations. After a rebellion by north Chinese troops in July 1937, Japan resolved to crush Chiang Kai-shek, and proceeded to occupy northern and central China’s principal cities and towns. Prosecuting the war, however, only increased Japan’s trade-dependence. Already by 1937, Japan was importing 84 percent of its iron ore and 55 percent of its scrap iron, not to mention coal, oil, tin, bauxite, and a host of ferro-alloys. The war in China required more foreign iron, oil, and machinery, while Japan’s trading partners, themselves engaged in rearmament and war, were reducing their exports to Japan. The China War also alienated the British and the Americans, whose concerns about Japan slamming shut the “Open Door” in China prompted them to supply Chiang via Burma and French Indochina and impose minor embargos.

Japanese military leaders saw the German victories of 1940 as an opportunity to drive the Western powers out of Southeast Asia and finally create an autarkic Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. They expected to obtain 30 million barrels of Indonesian crude oil (out of a total demand of 35 million) by 1943; the new conquests would also provide rubber, bauxite, tin, nickel, and copper. With the United States threatening to cut off its oil supplies unless Japan retreated from China, and while the French and Dutch were prostrate and the British under siege from Germany, Japan launched its attack on Pearl Harbor. The chief goal was to exploit newly conquered domains to “establish the foundation for a long war.” Thus, as historian Michael Barnhart concludes, “the essential element that led to war was Japan’s terrible economic

98. Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, 219; Barnhart, Japan Prepar For Total War, 25–26.
99. Barnhart, Japan Prepar For Total War, 44–45.
100. Peattie, Ishiwara Kenji, 186.
103. Peattie, Ishiwara Kenji, 186; Beasley, Japanese Imperialism, 182.
104. Barnhart, Japan Prepar For Total War, 39.
105. Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, 82–121; Peattie, Ishiwara Kenji, 87–181; Barnhart, Japan Prepar For Total War, 31–33.
107. Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, chap. 6; Peattie, Ishiwara Kenji, chap. 8; Barnhart, Japan Prepar For Total War, chap. 4.
110. Cohen, Japan’s Economy in War, 135.
111. Naval Chief of Staff Admiral Nagano, October 1941, quoted in Crowley, “Military Policies,” 97.
vulnerability and its decision, in light of the lessons of the First World War, to
do something about it.”

This is not to say that Japan’s strategy was rational. By attacking the
United States, Japan took on a much more powerful adversary in order to gain
access to resources that would still be vulnerable to blockade through the in-
terdiction of Japanese shipping. Only if war with the United States or Russia
was inevitable, even if Japan withdrew from China, did this gamble make any
sense. Whether organizational or psychological in origin, the Japanese mil-
itary’s commitments to the inevitability of total war or to avoiding defeat in
China were thus necessary causes of the war. Irrational decisionmaking is evi-
dent from the fact that officials or officers who pointed out that autarky was
unattainable were ignored or cashiered.

A key assumption in Japanese expansionism was the assumption that re-
sources were cumulative, that “war can maintain war,” as the Army slogan put
it. The Japanese did not expect nationalistic resistance in any of their con-
quests to be strong enough to disrupt economic mobilization. This was due in
part to a racist view of other Asians as so backward and impressionable that
they could be gradually assimilated after many years of paternalistic Japanese
domination and education. The Japanese were also willing to engage in ruthless
police measures to ensure pacification and exploitation, and had a successful
track record in Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria. In invading China, however,
Japan bit off more than it could chew. Some recognized this, including one of
the original total war officers and Manchuria conspirators, Ishiwhara Kanji.
Ishiwhara argued that invading China would be “like what Spain was for Napo-
leon, an easy bog,” but his warnings went unheeded.

Army and Navy domination of Japanese foreign policy during the 1930s
meant that their views about the inevitability of total war would carry the day.
Increasing military influence in the Japanese state was due to several factors.
As in Germany, the Depression delegitimized mainstream political parties
and flegding democratic institutions. At the same time, military elites—radicalized
by the suffering of its agrarian social base—sanctioned violent efforts to in-
timidate or eliminate opponents of increased military spending and imperial
expansion. Radical junior officers assassinated several influential moderates,
including Prime Minister Hamaguchi Yuko in 1930, Finance Minister Inoue
Junnosuke and Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi in 1932, and—in the course of
a failed coup—former prime minister Saito Makoto and Finance Minister
Takahashi Korekiyo in 1936. The Army also used its constitutional authority
to topple cabinets (by refusing to appoint ministers) in 1937 and 1940 to influ-
ence the selection of prime ministers, in the latter instance using a coup threat.
Finally, when Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro resigned in the face of stiff
Army pressure to authorize Pearl Harbor, the emperor’s representative felt
compelled to appoint the hawkish Tojo out of fear of an army revolt.

Autarky for prosperity? Japanese fear of being excluded from world markets
and resources in peacetime, and the resulting impact on Japanese prosperity,
provided a weaker incentive for Japanese imperialism. In a 1918 article Konoe,
who was later to become prime minister during 1937–38, demanded “equal
access to the markets and natural resources of the colonial areas” from the
British and Americans, or Japan would be forced “to destroy the status quo for
the sake of self-preservation, just like Germany.” Two developments height-
ened Japanese pessimism about foreign trade by the early 1930s. First, Chiang
Kai-shek’s consolidation of power in south and central China and rising
Chinese nationalism posed a potential indigenous threat to the “Open Door” in
China. Second, the collapse of international trade following the 1929 Wall
Street crash made Japanese access to world markets and resources seem sud-
denly more precarious. Trade with the colonies held up better than extra-
imperial trade during the ensuing depression. Foreign trade barriers and cur-
rency devaluations led many in Japan’s political and economic elite to conclude
that a large economic trading bloc was needed to protect their country from

112. Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War, 267.
114. In 1940, the head of the Planning Board, which since 1937 had been the cabinet’s
primary war economy agency, was fired after issuing a “defeatist” report on the impossibility
of achieving self-sufficiency. Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War, 171.
117. Quoted in Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War, 89.
118. Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, 79, 179–80; Gordon Mark Berger, Parites out of
Power in Japan, 1931–1941 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Barnhart, Japan
Prepares for Total War, 268–69. Barnhart (p. 67) describes the alliance between reform bureau-
crats and autarky officers precipitated by the Depression, which led to greater centralized
planning of the Japanese economy.
119. Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War, 250–54; Snyder, Myths of Empire, 141–42.
120. Quoted in Beverley, Japan’s Imperialism, 179.
Boycotts in China, 1919–1928,” in Duus, Myers, and Peattie, The Japanese Imperialist Empire in
Western and Chinese "economic warfare." The idea of peacetime economic security is also suggested by the Japanese propaganda slogan of "co-prosperity," which was applied to China long before Southeast Asia.

Two facts suggest, however, that concerns about peacetime trade had a relatively limited effect on Japanese imperialism. First, as in Nazi Germany, in the mid-1930s Japanese business was generally unenthusiastic about the government's quest for autarky and empire. Business generally opposed increased military spending, centralized control of economy, and the material shortages resulting from empire-building. According to historian William Fletcher, "While willing to exploit opportunities in China, the business community did not display much enthusiasm toward autarky. The growth of the nation's industries mandated trade with the West. Moreover, a larger empire might lead to unwanted competition for domestic producers. The business community adjusted to the government's foreign policy rather than act forcefully to affect it." The lack of enthusiasm for conquest on the part of domestic actors highly dependent upon peacetime trade demonstrates that Japan's commercial trade outlook did not provide a strong incentive for conquest.

Second, the military dominated Japanese foreign policy, as pointed out above, and was more interested in autarky for waging war than for prosperity. The Japanese military had little expertise on commercial issues and was at constant loggerheads with Japan's financial interests. To the extent that military officers were sensitive to business, moreover, they were disproportionately sympathetic to the colonial banks and enterprises to which they were exposed during lengthy postings in Taiwan, Korea, or Manchuria. Colonial businesses had a much greater stake in imperial trade and autarky than Japanese business as a whole, and an economic strategy based on their interests cannot be seen as a logical response to Japan's commercial opportunities.

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**Implications for Theory and Policy**

Expansionist impulses in pre–First World War Germany and Japan, in an era when wars were believed to be short and decisive, were relatively moderate. After the war, leaders in both states concluded that future wars were likely to be total, and that autarky was essential in total war. They also expected to face such wars sooner or later, leading to expansionist strategies and the Second World War. Defense dominance may not have increased the likelihood of war, but for these reasons it did not have the peace-causing effect offense-defense theory predicts.

Interdependence and defense dominance were not sufficient causes for Japanese and German expansionism, at least to the point of starting great power wars. Japan's and Germany's policies were premised on numerous misperceptions and miscalculations, many of which were due to the political ascendancy of militaristic actors. Exaggerated perceptions of the inevitability of war were critical, because defense dominance and the costliness of war would otherwise have more ambiguous implications for autarky requirements. If states are predisposed to believe that war is highly likely regardless of the costs, though, defense dominance's Catch-22 arises in full force.

In the absence of this misperception, Germany and Japan probably still would have expanded in the 1930s, particularly to vulnerable nearby territories. They would have been less desperate, however, and hence less bold in risking war with other great powers. Hitler's abject craving for world dominion cannot be overemphasized as a cause of the war. Even in his warped thinking, however, and in public and bureaucratic support for his ambitions, it is possible to observe the paradoxical consequences of the offense-defense balance and economic vulnerability.

Thus, although German and Japanese reasoning in the 1930s mirrored in many respects the logic linking defense dominance to autarky-seeking, these do not represent critical case studies for testing the hypothesis. It would be useful to examine other cases as well. It is worth briefly pointing out, though, that the status quo policies of the other great powers in the 1930s are not counterexamples to the hypothesis. Despite their perception that warfare strongly favored the defense, these states still had less to fear from economic isolation in war. Russia and the United States had vast internal resources and markets. Britain and France were more dependent on trade, but their colonial empires and alliances reduced their vulnerability to embargos by hostile
powers. They remained vulnerable to blockade, but naval power gave them alternative means to protect trade.\(^{127}\)

What lessons can be drawn about theories of the causes of war? First, this study lends support to one version of the realist critique of the theory of commercial liberalism. Interdependence may increase the costs of war, but it also engenders vulnerability to trade severance, providing incentives to use force to control foreign resources and markets. Fears of blockade or embargo in future wars, particularly if war is expected to be protracted, are powerful reasons for risking war in the present. To the extent that defense dominance lengthens war, without a concomitant reduction in its likelihood or intensity, it represents an important intervening variable in a well-specified theory of interdependence and war. This study provides little support, however, for the other realist critique of commercial liberalism, that is, that concerns about peacetime trade cause expansionism. In the cases, the prospect of peacetime trade barriers did not have a direct impact on German or Japanese expansionism, probably because these are rarely harmful enough to justify major war.

Offense-defense theory should also be qualified to take account of the opposing incentives arising from the economic and military consequences of the offense-defense balance. If defense dominance heightens the expectation that wars will be long, without diminishing expectations about their probability and intensity, it will increase concerns about autarky. States that expect to be involved in long wars of attrition accompanied by severe trade disruptions are more likely to expand to increase both their self-sufficiency and their aggregate economic capability. Especially where defense dominance among great powers does not shield regional territories, states will be more eager to seize economically valuable prizes. Defense dominance is thus not the unqualified boon for peace that some theorists suggest, which may help explain why some scholars have found a low historical correlation between offensive advantage and war.

This qualification of offense-defense theory, however, applies only to conventional military systems. Survivable nuclear forces render nuclear offensives futile and suicidal, and even conventional offensives breathtakingly risky. It only takes a small number of relatively inexpensive nuclear weapons, requiring neither economic mobilization nor self-sufficiency, to cause unspeakable levels of destruction. Mutual nuclear deterrence thus provides neither battlefield nor economic incentives for expansion, so nuclear "deterrence dominance" does not have the same economic Catch-22 as conventional defense dominance.

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127. For a brief discussion of British interwar responses, see Uchitel, "Interdependence and Instability," 253-58.